

Functionality and Design Influence on Fitness Fashion

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Abstract

The growing debate between design and functionality dominates within the sportswear industry. Consumers purchase sportswear indirectly due to personal and social intrinsic attributes. Sportswear should be functional, comfortable and safe, developed in line with the performance needs of a person. Hence this study aims to explore the intrinsic factors of consumers purchase intention towards fitness fashion. The conceptual model which is an integration of Social Cognition and Enclothed Cognition theories was analysed using double mediation and reveals that personal and social factors affect perceived importance on functionality and design. While most research claims extrinsic values as main factors of purchase, other perceptions of consumers could come into play which would be beneficial for sportswear brands to identify with and leverage on. The results of this research can assist companies to gain prominence, leveraging on the growing popularity of active lifestyles by designing clothing that match those perceptions.

Keywords: *Fitness fashion, Sportswear marketing, Double mediation*

Introduction and Research Aim

Growing health awareness and increase female participation in sports has created a huge growth for sport brands such as Lululemon who target females. The National Sporting Goods Association reported that 40 out of 47 of the activities tracked had increased female participation while only 11 activities tracked showed an increase in male participation (Currie 2014). Comparatively, fitness fashion demand grew by 7% in 2013 while general apparel grew only 1% (Weibe 2013). Women was attributed to this growth because fitness fashion can be worn almost anywhere from the gym, as streetwear, work and evening wear. While initially created for sports purposes, the fitness apparel market is now expanding to those who are not necessarily enthusiastic in fitness by creating apparels which are suitable for casual daily wear. Moreover, the industry realised the importance of having appealing and fashionable designs which led to the crossover between function and fashion, hence the term fitness fashion (Kasriel-Alexander 2016) blurring the lines between functionality and design. Hence, companies are capitalising on this trend by collaborating with fashion designers. Extrinsic values such as price and brand are the main factors affecting purchase intentions (Jalilvand, et al. 2011; Mirabi et al. 2015). However, not much research has been done on testing intrinsic values especially for fitness fashion (Pujara & Chaurasia 2010). This research will likely assist sportswear brands to identify and highlight intrinsic attributes thus increasing the perceived value of their product instead of focusing on price and brand name alone to capture the consumer's attention. This will enhance the marketing efforts and make an impactful contribution to the fitness fashion industry. Thus, this research aims to:

Explore the intrinsic values on the purchase intention of fitness fashion

Two research questions is addressed in line with this aim:

RQ1: What intrinsic factors of consumers' affects fitness fashion functionality and design?

RQ2: Does functionality and design mediate the intrinsic factors of consumers and purchase intention of fitness fashion?

Background and/or Conceptual Model

The conceptual model integrates the Social Cognition (Bandura 1978), and Enclothed Cognition (Adam & Galinsky 2012) theories where Social cognitive theory (SCT) explains purchase intention in a three-way dimension of personal factors, environment and behaviour (Sheppard et al. 1988). The influence of friends and brands which reflects confidence (Madahi & Sukati 2012) increases the probability of purchase. The integration of the Enclothed Cognition theory explains how clothing influences a person's identity and behaviour. In the case of fitness fashion industry, functionality is an appeal for exercising purposes (Özdil & Anand 2014) while design of the attire is used as a fashion statement (Forney et al. 2005). Purchase intention of fitness fashion are explained by the normative and control beliefs evidenced by the increasing reception towards a large number of fashionable styles and variations in behaviour (Wang et al. 2004). Both extrinsic and intrinsic values are important to purchase intentions (Fandos & Flavián 2006) as the former provides differentiation from other competitive goods while the latter are the actual composition of a product (functionality and design). In recent years, intrinsic attributes has gained importance and is noted as a better measure of product quality (Fandos & Flavián 2006) which is a more accurate identification of important values perceived by the consumers (Sweeney & Soutar 2001). Personal and environmental (social) factors of Social Cognition theory consecutively explains the symbolic consumption and self-concept derived from the behaviour and attitudes of purchase intention (ul-Hassan et al, 2016).

Methodology

The research instrument, derived from variable items of personal (Ko et al, 2012), functionality (Sung, 2012), social (Chi & Kilduff, 2011), design (Bae & Miller, 2009), and purchase intention (Rajagopal, 2010) were subjected to a pretesting and pilot testing with potential respondent groups and sportswear marketing executives to ensure validity and reliability of the questions. Then, online data collection was conducted through a survey, where respondents who have purchased sportswear clothing in the last 6 months were asked to fill in a consent form for ethical research purposes. A total of 101 usable sample for the study was analyzed after data cleaning. Descriptive statistics was obtained to compare the means and standard deviations of different groups on the variables studied. Next simultaneous double mediation using PROCESS macro (Preacher & Hayes 2008) was used to analyse the data aimed at determining the existence of an overall effect of the path analysis. This was to ensure that simultaneous mediation effects are taken into consideration to reduce the likelihood of a parameter bias from omitted variables, unlike in a simple mediator model (Judd & Kenny 1981). Relative magnitudes of specific indirect effects associated with the mediators were determined within a single analysis.

Results and/or Discussion and Contributions

Preliminary analysis indicates that males (45%) and females (55%) who exercise regularly (40% indicate few times a week) favors functionality over design. Direct effects reveal that social and personal factors are strong indicators for both function and design. Function and design are also important indicators for purchase intention. These results show that conforming to social norms within a community and self-perception are strong indicators for the types of sportswear clothing consumers choose to purchase. It is important then, for companies to introduce a sense of community through their brands to help increase group acceptance and self-confidence which should be embedded in the sportswear's functionality and design. Further double mediation analysis reveals that consumers consider functionality first and then design, showing the mediating path for both social and personal factors to purchase intention. In the creation of new clothing, companies need to place emphasis on functionality as a precursor to design to ensure both important elements cater to the intrinsic influence of consumers, noting that in this results, consumers evaluate functionality before design.

Implications for Theory and Practice

This study contributes to the understanding of importance of intrinsic values of sportswear purchase intention through the inclusion of functionality and design. The integration of different theories within the new framework in this study allows for a stronger understanding behind the consumer behaviour of fitness fashion. Sportswear brands are encouraged to place more importance on the intrinsic values over the extrinsic ones and how these can enhance the consumers' strong connection to the brand at more than a superficial value. This can be achieved by projecting the strength and self-confidence of the values held by the brand ambassadors who are usually professional athletes and fitness celebrities through celebrity endorsements leveraging on the likes of those who made the shift from celebrity to becoming designers themselves (eg. Rita Ora who is a brand ambassador for Adidas Originals). Companies should also leverage on the global social value that these brands can create to influence consumers' purchase intention.

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