

The Moderating Effect of Attention to Social Comparison Information on Apparel Product Evaluations

Emine Ercan[†]

Marmara University-Istanbul

Examining the attributes that affect consumers' perceptions of product evaluation has been of pivotal interest in marketing research. The objectives of this study were (1) to identify and classify attributes that play a significant role at time of purchase of apparel, (2) to examine the influences of attention to social comparison information, gender and income on young consumer's apparel product evaluation.

Previous research indicated that consumer may select a product based upon its symbolic (prestige) or functional aspects (Mittal, 1990; Sirgy, 1982). This study was designed, therefore, using symbolic and functional aspects of apparel product descriptions. Respondents were provided with written survey instrument. The instrument the instrument used in the study was adapted from previously developed instruments (Bearden & Rose, 1990; Chung & Pysarchik, 2000; Kim & Pysarchik, 2000).

From the literature review and the focus group interview discussions, two products (a 'basic' clothing item (jeans) and a 'fashion' clothing item (sweater) were selected for investigation.

Self-monitoring; The Attention-to-Social-Comparison-Information (ATSCI) scale, initially developed by Lennox and Wolfe (1984) was used to measure self-monitoring behaviors. The ATSCI scale consists of 13 items. A five point Likert scale was used where 1 indicated "strong disagreement" and 5 indicated "strong agreement". Bearden and Rose (1990) found that persons scoring high in ATSCI were aware of others' reactions to their behavior and were more concerned about the nature of those reactions than persons scoring low in ATSCI. Slama and Celuch (1995) note an important issue is the recognition that self-monitoring is not unidimensional. On this issue of dimensionality, Lennox and Wolfe (1984) suggest that the individual factors (subdimensions) as well as the whole scale be used.

Product evaluation; Apparel product evaluation dimensions can be dichotomized on the basis of their symbolic and functional aspects. Thus, the present paper proposes that consumer perceive and evaluate of apparel product in two ways, functionally and symbolically. Functional

[†] Corresponding author : emineercan62@hotmail.com

aspects are evaluated through the physical features and performance features. When the consumers are evaluating ready-to wear items they may have greater confidence of physical features because physical features impacts the visual appeal of clothing and therefore consumer acceptance of it. Performance features include other than appearance, namely the garment's utility and durability. Consumers easily judge a garment's symbolic aspects at the point of sale just by looking at it. The attractiveness of a garment, or prestigious brand affects consumer emotionally and psychologically; a consumer is likely to purchase a garment that does not meet his or her aesthetic standards. Symbolic features of garment initially attract or repel consumers.

To evaluate the apparel product attributes, subjects were presented with hypothetical buying scenarios for each of the assigned two products, and then asked questions about each product separately. They indicated their perception of the presence of relevant ten intrinsic and extrinsic attributes for each product. Using a five-point Likert scale (1=unimportant to 5=very important).

The data for the study were collected from Western Michigan University students. 145 students were recruited for the study. Respondents were asked about their age, gender, and income. The average age of respondents is 21 years old. Females represented 85.5 percent of the sample. Almost 69 percent of the respondents reported a monthly family household income of \$3,500 or more; approximately 14 percent had a monthly household income of \$1,500 or less; 17 percent had a monthly household income between \$1,500 and \$3,500.

Data reduction was accomplished by conducting separate factor analyses for each of the sets of product attributes. Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were performed for the constructs with multiple indicators for each product. The results showed a good fit of the model of the data for each apparel product (for sweater $\chi^2=92.17$, $df=31$, $p=0.00$, $GFI=0.89$, $AGFI=0.80$, $RMSEA=0.117$, for jeans $\chi^2=49.55$, $df=18$, $p=0.00009$, $GFI=0.92$, $AGFI=0.84$, $RMSEA=0.110$). Thus, this attribute was excluded in this analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis of product evaluation for jeans resulted in three factors; design, performance and image (see Table 1), and for sweaters generated four factors: design, performance, image, and color (see Table 2).

<Table 1> Confirmatory Factor analysis of Product Evaluation (Jeans)

Factor title and items	Factor loading	Reliability
Design		
Fit	0.54	0.63
Style	0.30	
Color	0.59	
Performance		
Material	0.61	0.70
Easy to care	1.07	
Manufactured using high technology	0.32	
Quality	0.48	
Image		
Prestigious brand name	0.59	0.87

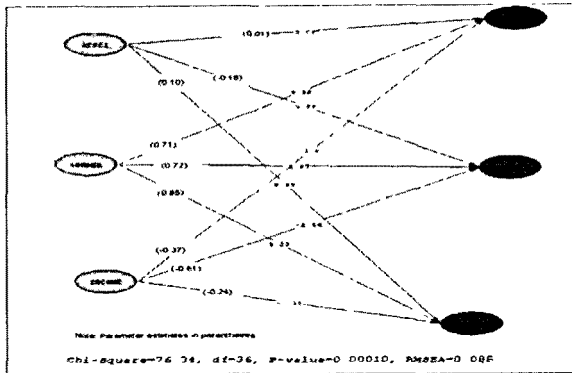
<Table 2> Confirmatory Factor analysis of product evaluation (sweaters)

Factor title and items	Factor loading	Reliability
Design		
Fit	0.64	0.81
Style	0.61	
Comfort	0.52	
Quality	0.50	
Performance		
Easy to care	0.55	0.53
Price	0.47	
Material	0.64	
Image		
Prestigious brand name	1.25	0.69
Manufactured using high technology	0.30	
Color		
Color	0.85	0.93

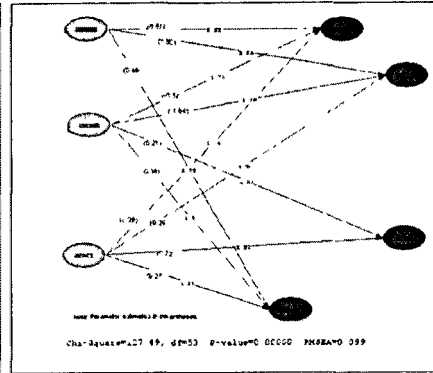
A model incorporating the hypothesis relationship among variables was tested separately for two apparel product categories of jeans and sweater. Data were analyzed by a maximum-likelihood estimation procedure using LISREL VII. The proposed model to the data shows reasonable model-data fit for the two apparel product categories. The value of chi-square for the model for Jeans was 76.34 (df =36; $p=0.0001$) and GFI, AGFI, and standardized RMSEA were 0.91, 0.84, and 0.088 respectively. The chi-square statistic associated with the model for sweaters was 127.49 (df = 53; $p=0.000$), and the GFI, AGFI, and standardized RMSEA were 0.88, 0.79 and 0.099 respectively.

As shown <Fig. 1>, The results of the path coefficients showed that two of the independent variables (i.e., ATSCI) had not significant effects both at 0.05 and 0.10 level on design, performance and image for basic apparel product attributes ($\gamma_{11}= 0.10, t= -0.09$; $\gamma_{12} =0.16, t=0.98$; $\gamma_{13}=0.10, t=0.59$). Gender had significant effects design, performance and image for apparel products both at 0.05 and 0.10 levels. American young female consumers' perceive design, performance and image of jeans more important than young male consumers. Income had significant effect on performance of basic apparel product evaluation ($\gamma_{32}= -0.51, t= -2.34$). Low income respondents tended to perceive performance of basic apparel products more important than high income respondents.

<Fig. 2> presents parameter estimates of the proposal model for Sweaters which is represent fashionable apparel product. The results of the path coefficients showed that the two independent variables (i.e., gender, income) had significant effects on performance of fashionable apparel product ($\gamma_{12}= -1.50, t=2.61$; $\gamma_{22}= -1.64, t=-2.50$). Gender also significantly affect design and color of fashionable apparel product ($\gamma_{11}= 0.51, t=2.62$; $\gamma_{14}= 0.46, t=-2.32$). We expected



<Fig. 1> Proposed model and parameter estimates (Jeans)



<Fig. 2> Proposed model and parameter estimates (Sweater)

that ATSCI would be an important factor to determining consumers' image of fashionable apparel product. As we expected, ATSCI was significantly related to consumers country image of sweater ($\gamma_{33} = 0.72$, $t = 2.93$). According to the results, low income respondents tend to perceive performance of product more important than high income respondents. Color and design and performance of fashionable products are more important for female respondents. Concerning with the impact of ATSCI on product image effect, consumers who has a low self-confidence perceive product image of fashionable apparel product more important. On the other hand, consumers' ATSCI level would not affect to perceive product image of basic apparel product.

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