



The Power of Others: Using Socially Facilitating Message to Promote Circular Fashion Services

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Keywords: Circular fashion, social facilitation, used clothing, attitude, intention

Introduction: Circular fashion refers to clothing and accessories that are designed and produced with the intention of being used, reused, repaired, repurposed, and recycled for as long as possible before being returned to the environment in a biodegradable manner (Brismar, 2017). Though the environmental impacts of clothing production and consumption has triggered a push towards resale of used clothing, marketing the environmental benefits alone may not be sufficient to form favorable attitudes among consumers, since clothing is not an item of altruistic purchase (Harris, Roby, & Dibb, 2016). Moreover, consumers have a limited awareness of environmental impacts of clothing (Harris et al., 2016), highlighting the challenges that circular fashion services may face in encouraging consumers to purchase used clothing. On the other hand, communicating the existence of other consumers using and benefitting from the same circular fashion service through a socially facilitating message could have a motivating effect, forming favorable attitude and subsequent use of the service (Kong et al., 2016). However, such a notion has not been empirically tested. The purpose of this paper is to experimentally test the effect of the presence of a socially facilitating message on attitude toward and usage intention of a circular fashion service among consumers in the US and Korea.

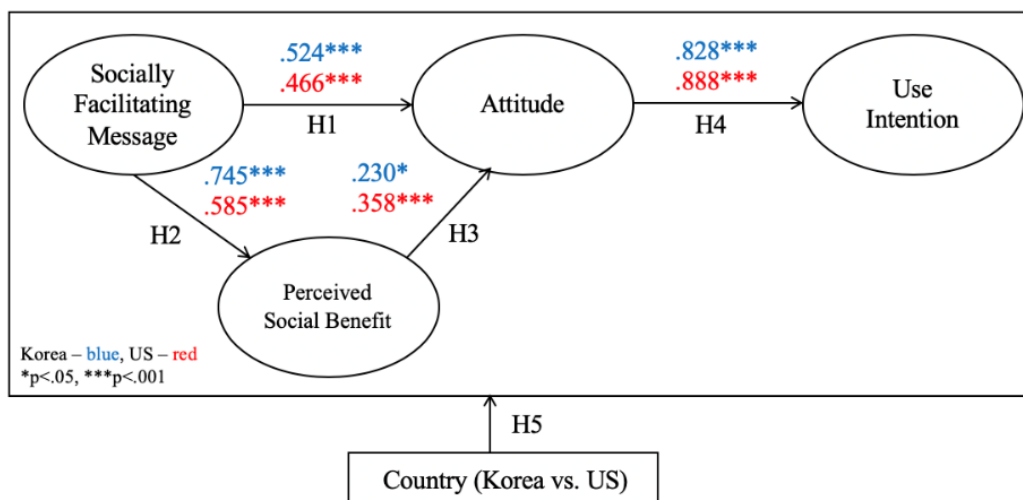
Literature Review & Hypotheses: The role of social influence in attitude formation and sustainable consumption has been well documented (Salazar & van Stroe-Biezen, 2013). Furthermore, research also shows that consumers engage in environmentally responsible clothing purchase behaviors to boost their reputation and gain recognition from others (Vehmas et al., 2018). This means that, though a socially facilitating message can have a strong impact on attitude, this relationship can also be partially mediated by the individual's perception of a social benefit of the behavior, such as improvement of one's image in society. Finally, the formation of favorable attitude towards a retailer or service provider has been widely regarded as a key factor in leading to purchase intentions determining a business' success, especially in alternative modes of consumption, such as used clothing purchase and collaborative consumption (Edbring, Lehner & Mont, 2016). Given that Korean consumers are highly collectivistic with stronger group ties and therefore adhere more strongly to social norms than do US consumers, this study hypothesizes these relationships will be stronger among Korean consumers than US consumers.

Socially facilitating message positively influences consumers' (H1) attitude toward using circular fashion service, and (H2) perceived social benefit of using circular fashion service. (H3) Perceived social benefit and, (H4) consumers' attitude positively, influences their purchase

intentions toward circular fashion service. (H5) The direct and indirect relationships are stronger in Korean consumers than US consumers.

Methods & Findings: A total of 282 data were collected from the US (133) and Korean (149) consumers via a professional online survey firm. Respondents from each country were randomly assigned to a virtual circular fashion service website with either the presence of socially facilitating message (“2,538 others in your community are now participating in this online shopping service! Join others...”) or none, and evaluated perceived social benefit, and their attitude and purchase intentions regarding the service. Psychometric properties of the measures (i.e., reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity) were adequate to test the proposed model. The conceptual framework was analyzed through the partial least squares (PLS) path modeling technique via SmartPLS 2.0. First, as shown in Figure 1, the presence of socially facilitating message (i.e., knowledge of other people participating in the service) had a significant positive impact on the attitude toward using circular fashion service for both Korean ($\beta=.524$, $t=5.114^{***}$) and US ($\beta=.466$, $t=5.132^{***}$) consumers, supporting H1. Second, the findings revealed the presence of a partial mediation effect of perceived social benefit between socially facilitating message and attitude for Korean and the US consumers; thus, H2 and H3 were supported. Third, Korean ($\beta=.828$, $t=21.765^{***}$) and US ($\beta=.888$, $t=40.656^{***}$) consumers’ attitudes were discovered to positively influence their purchase intentions toward circular fashion service, supporting H4. Lastly, a country moderation effect was found only in the direct path between socially facilitating message and attitude ($t=2.002^*$), showing that the influence of socially facilitating message on attitude was greater for Korean consumers than US consumers. The mediation effect of perceived social benefit, however, did not vary across country. Therefore, H5 was partially supported.

Figure 1. Model Summary



Discussion & Implication: This study found that using a socially facilitating message has a stronger influence on attitude toward using the service in Korea than in the US. The findings contribute to the robustness of social influence in international marketing and add that the individuals in a predominantly collectivistic culture could be motivated more strongly by social influence, i.e. a socially facilitating message, than those in a predominantly individualistic culture. Managers and other decision makers of circular fashion services in the US and Korea can effectively incorporate socially facilitating messages in their website to form strong attitudes and usage intentions among consumers.

Acknowledgement: This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2019S1A5A8041031).

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