



Exploring Chinese Consumer Traits of Using Clothing Subscription Rental Service

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Keywords: subscription service, renting, Chinese consumers, Theory of Planned Behavior

Introduction & Purpose. It is undeniable that renting goods has become a dramatic growth in this modern society. According to the global online clothing rental marketing report, the clothing rental business could grow to \$2,817.8 million at the end of 2027 (Dublin, 2019). Although renting goods (e.g., clothes) was never popular in China, recently, Chinese people have begun accepting it (Xi, 2018). Among various apparel renting businesses, clothing subscription rental service has emerged as a rapidly developing trend in China's clothing industry (Liang & Xu, 2018). According to the report of Shijia (2018) in the China Daily, renting clothes from subscription rental service is essential for wearing expensive garments without investing a lot of money in buying, having more than one elegant dress in women's wardrobes, following the latest fashion trend, and reducing identical dresses. Leading subscription service companies in China include MsParis, Y-Closet, and US-based Le Tote. Although clothing subscription rental service has become a trendy business in China, the research regarding the apparel subscription rental service in China is still in its infancy and in the apparel retail literature. More research on this topic is needed. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the impacts of Chinese consumers' traits (fashion leadership, quality consciousness, price consciousness, consumer environmental knowledge, and social media usage) as external factors on consumer behavior toward using clothing subscription rental service. Specifically, there are three objectives: first, to identify the importance of external factors influencing the acceptance of Chinese consumer clothing subscription rental service; second, to investigate the relationship between the external factors and consumers' attitude toward using clothing subscription rental service; third, to explore how the attitude toward using clothing subscription rental service, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence the intention to use clothing subscription rental service.

Conceptual Model. A conceptual model was developed by expanding the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991) with the inclusion of additional factors such as fashion leadership, quality consciousness, price consciousness, consumer environmental knowledge, and social media usage. The study identifies whether these additional factors predict Chinese consumer attitude and subjective norms which in turn, impact the intention to use clothing subscription rental service. Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual model. *Fashion leadership* plays an important factor in apparel consumption as well as it plays a pioneer role in accepting and spreading of new fashion (Goldsmith et al., 1993). Renting clothes from the subscription services is a convenient way to have the latest looks (Douglas, 2019). *Quality consciousness* refers to a person's perception of the quality of a product (Lang et al., 2013). Subscription service provides consumers high quality products in a monthly box (Lee et al., 2019). *Price consciousness* refers

to an individual's sensitivity to price when purchasing products (Lang & Armstrong, 2016), and it also implies that consumers are not willing to pay a higher price (Lichtenstein et al., 1993). As subscription-box service is a simple online business model, it provides new items of apparel brands with a lower price (Lee et al., 2019). *Consumer environmental knowledge* refers to "factual information that individuals have about the environment, the ecology of the planet, and the influence of human actions on the environment" (Arcury & Johnson, 1987, p. 32). Increased environmental knowledge leads to a greater environmental concern (Bamberg & Moser, 2007). Renting is a valuable consumption behavior for consumers who have a very high environmental concern (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). *Social media usage* provides people with various forms of electronic communication such as sharing ideas, information, creating and distributing the user generated content, and getting influenced by others (Steenkamp & Hyde-Clarke, 2014). Furthermore, attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control of TPB positively impact behavioral intention of renting clothes (Tu, & Hu, 2018). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed: **H1, 2, 3, 4, & 5:** Fashion leadership, quality consciousness, price consciousness, consumer environmental knowledge, and social media usage have a positive relationship with attitude towards using clothing subscription rental service. **H6:** Social media usage has a positive relationship with subjective norm. **H7, 8, & 9:** Attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control have a positive relationship with the intention to use clothing subscription rental service.

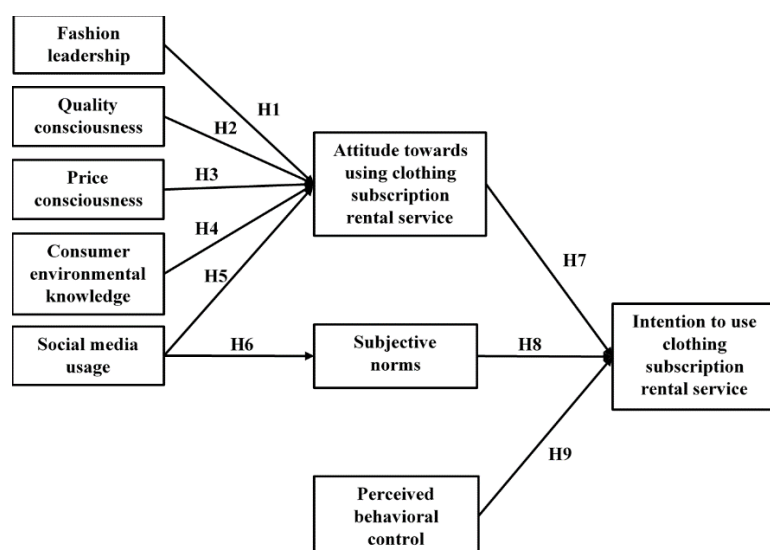


Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model

Discussion. This study provides theoretical contributions and practical implications. First, this study has developed a proposed conceptual model by adding five additional factors into TPB as external variables. Second, the results of this study would contribute to the apparel consumer and retail literature with evidence that what consumers' traits influence the intention to use subscription rental services among Chinese consumers.

Methodology. Measurements of the constructs were adapted from previous studies and evaluated on a 5-point Likert-scale. The questionnaire was first developed in English and then translated into Chinese by two researchers of this study. Online data collection with college students in universities located in Hangzhou, China is in progress. Before the actual survey, the pre-tested survey was conducted with the eight Chinese students to refine the questionnaire.

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