Understanding Chinese Young Consumers' Acceptance of Clothing Subscription Rental Services

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Introduction and Purpose. Apparel industry is infamous for having a negative impact on the environment due to water use and pollution emission in production. Rather than buying new ones, clothing rental provides an opportunity to reuse fashion products multiple times and great environmental benefits (Lang et al., 2020). Clothing subscription rental services becoming popular and grow rapidly, with China's clothing subscription rental market could grow to $2.5 billion by 2023 (Chan, 2020). Although a few recent studies (i.e., Lang et al., 2019) examined consumer's fashion renting intention, the impacts of consumer traits on attitude toward clothing subscription rental have yet to be examined. Thus, our study aims to fill the literature gap and contributes to the apparel consumption literature on clothing subscription rental service among Chinese consumers. Specifically, the purpose of our study is to identify the impacts of consumer traits on Chinese consumer's intention to use clothing subscription rental service.

Conceptual Framework. A conceptual framework was developed by expanding the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) with the inclusion of consumer traits — fashion leadership, quality consciousness, price consciousness, consumer environmental knowledge, and social media usage. This current study uses key insights from TRA (i.e., attitude & subjective norms) to predict Chinese consumer intention to use clothing subscription rental service. Fashion leadership, quality consciousness, price consciousness, consumer environmental knowledge, and social media usage were hypothesized to impact attitude to use clothing subscription rental service. In addition, social media usage was hypothesized to affect subjective norm. Figure 1 illustrates the research model and the eight hypotheses.

Research Method. Data were collected in a large public university in Southeastern China. A survey instrument in the form of a structured questionnaire was developed using Qualtrics. Thirty-two items which measure the eight constructs in the model were adapted from previous studies (Alford & Biswas, 2002; Chi, 2018; Kim & Hong, 2011; Lang & Armstrong, 2018; Lee & Chow, 2020; Rapp et al., 2013) with slight modification to fit the context of the current study. Demographic questions were also included to study the characteristics of the sample. All research constructs were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Translation and back-translation of the questionnaire were performed by the three researchers in the research team who are bilingual in English and Chinese. Upon IRB

approval of the research, survey invitations with the online survey link were distributed among the university students' WeChat groups. The target respondents included both undergrade and graduate students under the age of 35. A total of 315 responses were collected and 255 are valid for data analysis. Participants include 58 males and 197 females with ages ranging from 18 to 27. Mplus 8.0 was used to perform structural equation modeling (SEM) to evaluate the measurement model and test the structural model.

Results, Discussion, and Conclusions. The two-step approach in SEM was performed to test the hypotheses in the model. Based on the CFA results, the measurement model has satisfactory reliability and validity. The measurement model fit is overall acceptable (χ^2/df = 2.1, RMSEA=0.067, CFI=0.916, TLI=0.904, SRMR=0.055). The analysis results of the structural model support six out of eight hypotheses. As shown in Figure 1, H1, H3, and H5 are supported. Fashion leadership, price consciousness, and social media usage have a positive impact on consumer attitude towards using clothing subscription rental services, which in turn, positively influences consumer's intention to use clothing subscription rental services (H7). Social media usage positively impacts subjective norms (H6), which positively affect consumer's intention in using clothing subscription rental service (H8). However, it is surprising to see that quality consciousness and consumer environmental knowledge do not have a significant impact on consumer attitude towards using clothing subscription rental services. These results are contrary to the extant literature (Connell & Kozar, 2014; Lang et al., 2013). The possible explanation for the unexpected results could be that consumers are yet to learn the benefits associated with clothing subscription rental service due to its relatively new business model.

       This study provides theoretical contributions and practical implications. First, this study is among the first to empirically investigate the factors that influence consumer attitude toward clothing subscription rental service and how consumer attitude and subjective norms affect their intention in using this service. Second, the results indicate that fashion rental service marketers should focus on consumer traits such as fashion leadership, price consciousness, and social media use in their promotional communication of this new business model. Future research may be needed to investigate the insignificant relationships founded in this study.

Figure 1. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing
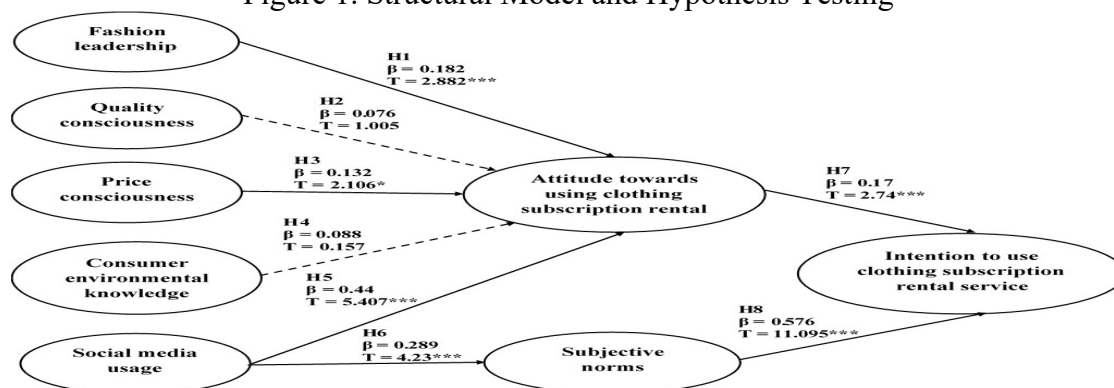
*Notes***:** β = Standardized coefficient; * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** = $p < 0.001$

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