Examining the Pop-up Store Experience in the Omni-Channel Retail Environment: Antecedents and Outcomes of Pop-up Stores and the Hosted Brand

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Introduction. Consumers' desire for exciting and memorable shopping experiences has resulted in increased emphasis on experiential marketing by contemporary retail businesses (Alagöz & Ekici, 2014). Pop-up stores are designed to be open temporarily in order to promote a brand or its product by providing a unique and experiential shopping environment (Kim, Fiore, Niehm, & Jeong, 2010). For the omni-channel retail setting, a better understanding of consumers' demand for the pop-up store as a type of experiential shopping venue is needed. Therefore, this study aimed to identify cognitive factors (i.e., fashion consciousness, perceived brand awareness, and congruence between consumers' self-image and experience) that influence consumers' attitudes toward the fashion pop-up store. In addition, this study sought to explain the relationship between consumers' attitude towards a pop-up store and its brand. This knowledge would allow an omni-channel retailer to achieve favorable outcomes from its pop-up store towards the brand.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses. Based on the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), consumers' personal belief/cognition about themselves as well as the hosted brand would influence the formation of attitude towards the pop-up store. In this present study, fashion consciousness was used as personal-attribute variable and perceived brand awareness was used as brand-attribute variable. Consumers are likely to value products or services that reflect their self-image (Graeff, 1996). Literature on self-congruence has found significant associations between consumers' self-image and brand (Sirgy, 1982; Dwivedi, Johnson, & McDonald, 2015). In this sense, it is plausible to assume that favorable attitudes toward pop-up store are more likely to be formulated when consumers feel the experience provided in the pop-up store matches their self-image. However, minimal research has looked at congruence between consumers' self-image and experience in the context of experiential marketing.

Method. US consumers over the age of 18 who had visited at least one fashion brand pop-up store were recruited through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) – an online platform that provides a marketplace for human intelligence task. Social science researchers widely use MTurk data due to its rapid access to a large and demographically diverse sample of research participants (Rouse, 2015). An online survey was created and a pretest was conducted with seven graduate students in order to assess the clarity of survey instructions. The survey instrument included standard scales adapted from previous research, as well as demographic items.

Respondents were asked to reflect on their latest experience of visiting fashion brand's pop-up store to answer the questionnaire. A total of 210 usable cases were used for statistical analyses (Males = 100, Females = 110).

Results. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to assess the measurement model. The measurement model yielded a fairly good fit: $\chi^2 = 247.90$, $df = 120$ at p-value < 0.001, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.04. Scales for each construct exceeded acceptable level of reliability (> 0.70). Latent structural equation modeling was utilized to test the structural model. The hypothesized research model showed marginal fit: 306.07, $df = 126$ at p-value < 0.001, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.08, SRMR = 0.07. The indirect effects were tested using Bootstrap sampling. All the hypothesized relationships were supported. (see Figure 1).
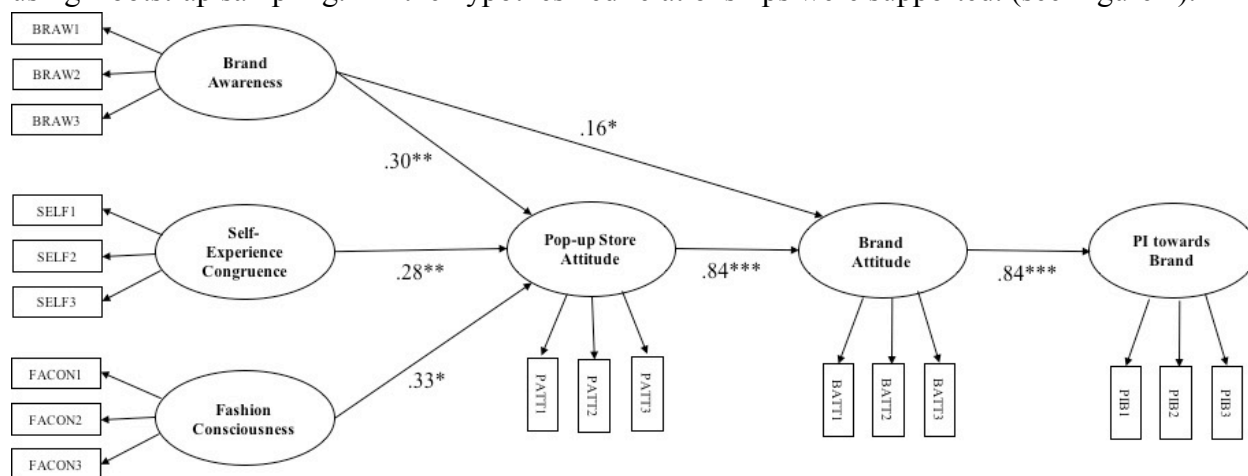

Figure 1. Results of Structural model. * $p <.05$, ** $p <.01$, *** $p <.001$.

Conclusions and Implications. This study provides important insights about consumers' perspectives regarding pop-up stores as a form of experiential marketing. In particular, this study linked the self-congruence concept to the experience brands offer. Based on the results, consumers are likely to form favorable attitude towards pop-up store when they are highly fashion conscious, know more about the hosted brand, and they feel the experience in the pop-up store is congruent with their self-image. The significant effects of brand awareness on attitudes toward both pop-up store and brand indicate that consumers consider the hosted brand attribute when they form the attitude toward its experiential marketing. This finding aids in explaining the concept of omni-channel retailing, where consumers perceive different experiences from various channels as a singular brand experience (Weiners, 2017). Thus, this study adds to the body of knowledge about the cross-effects of brand-attribute and experiential marketing, which consequently formulate overall brand attitude. Future research should address the effects of congruence between experiences from various channels on consumers' evaluation of overall brand experience.

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