Loath to Luxury, Love to Fast-fashion: Comparing Customer Shopping Experiences through Online Reviews

Introduction Customer reviews have become a pivotal source of information for fashion brands' impression management, with 93% of consumers influenced by online feedback in their purchasing decisions (Joseph, 2023). Online reviews can boost conversions by 25% for every 30 reviews, underscoring the effectiveness of digital word-of-mouth (Joseph, 2023). Consumers not only consume reviews made by other customers but also contribute their own by sharing experiences that range from positive, and neutral, to negative reflections. Perhaps surprisingly, however, we know little about customer brand experiences communicated via online customer reviews. Moreover, as consumer expectations can vary by brand type (e.g., luxury vs. fast fashion), customer reviews of shopping experiences may be different by the brand. For luxury brands, customers hold high expectations tied to brand reputation and cost and thus, they may easily be disillusioned and willing to make negative reviews sound more powerful in response to minor disappointments (Ko et al., 2019). Contrarily, when shopping fast fashion, customer expectations are low, and their reviews may be generous even when outcomes fail to meet the expectations. This prediction seems rather intuitive drawn from the conventional service literature but remains unknown in the context of online customer reviews. What do customers talk about their shopping experiences online? What are the similarities and differences in their online reviews of shopping experiences between luxury and fast fashion brands? Based on expectation-disconfirmation theory, this study aims to answer these questions by analyzing online reviews using a structural topic modeling method.

Literature Review Expectation-disconfirmation theory (EDT) posits that consumer satisfaction hinges on the alignment between anticipated and actual product performance (Oliver, 1977). EDT delineates three outcomes: confirmation occurs when expectations match reality, positive disconfirmation arises when actual performance surpasses expectations, enhancing satisfaction, and negative disconfirmation occurs when performance falls short, leading to dissatisfaction. In apparel contexts, the interplay between expected and actual product quality is crucial for consumer satisfaction (Chen-Yu et al., 1999). In addition, the balance between price and perceived value is pivotal in purchasing decisions for both mass and luxury goods, although consumers anticipate greater value, such as enhanced social status, from luxury purchases (Lee et al., 2011; Ko et al., 2019). Conversely, fast fashion brands like Shein and Zara enable access to diverse products at lower costs, setting a different expectation baseline. Here, consumers may primarily expect confirmation of quality rather than disconfirmation. But exceeding these quality expectations can also lead to positive disconfirmation and further satisfaction.

Method and Results To collect the data, we scraped customer reviews from Trustpilot which is a well-known customer review website. A total of 12,123 customer reviews were collected with textual reviews, dates, and ratings. Using R studio, data pre-processing (corpus tokenization, lower case, punctuation, stop words, sparse terms, and document frequency matrix) was employed. The main analysis applied structural topic modeling, which allows to introduce how document-level factors affect the parameter of topical prevalence within the framework of a

generalized linear model setting a covariate as star ratings. our results identified 10 topics for each luxury and fast-fashion retailer's data (Table 1).

The results reveal that luxury brand consumers frequently experience negative disconfirmation, manifesting as purchase regret and concerns regarding product quality (Topics 1, 3, and 4). This seems to be attributed to the high expectations consumers hold towards the brand, characterized by strong anticipation for product satisfaction and the fulfillment of initial product expectations (Topics 4 and 9). Conversely, for fast fashion brands, expectation confirmation and positive disconfirmations are dominant in aspects such as product quality, delivery speed, sizing accuracy, product variety, and pricing (Topics 2, 3, and 6). These findings suggest distinct experiential disparities between luxury and fast fashion consumer segments.

Table 1. STM results of customer shopping experiences by brand type

Luxury brands		Fast fashion brands	
Topic (proportion %)	Top words	Topic (proportion %)	Top words
Topic 1: Purchase Regret & Brand Responsiveness (11.68%)	never, company, ever, date, buy, still, even	Topic1: Fashionable Finds and Affordability (17.13%)	great, pop, store, amazing, shop, prices, clothing
Topic 2: Customer Service & Communication (8.84%)	customer, date, email, still, item, even, online	Topic 2: Customer Service & Delivery Experience (3.78%)	service, customer, delivery, shopping, shipping, like, great
Topic 3: Product Delivery & Quality Concerns (3.61%)	bag, got, days, buy, said, weeks, told	Topic 3: Love for Variety & Pricing (15.33%)	love, everything, shopping, clothing, prices, price, clothes
Topic 4: Quality Expectations vs. Reality (7.98%)	one, even, quality, got, date, time, buy	Topic 4: Order Satisfaction & Size Accuracy (9.48%)	order, ordered, just, size, fit, everything, like
Topic 5: Shipping & Delivery Timeliness (11.18%)	time, ordered, delivery, date, day, online, days	Topic 5: Product Quality & Fast Shipping (13.56%)	quality, prices, shipping, products, delivery, price, fast
Topic 6: Store Experience & Online Interaction (8.48%)	store, told, purchase, online, called, said, time	Topic 6: Value for Money & Product Satisfaction (8.32%)	good, really, like, quality, price, delivery, size
Topic 7: Value & Brand Perception (7.94%)	like, brand, money, buy, time, never, date	Topic 7: Shopping Experience & Item Availability (9.05%)	items, get, clothing, never, one, shop, shopping
Topic 8: Returns & Refunds (13.78%)	back, bought, sent, return, said, weeks, got	Topic 8: Consistent Shopping Satisfaction (4.55%)	always, time, everything, delivery, shopping, quality, fit
Topic 9: Order Fulfillment & Customer Expectations (16.63%)	order, received, item, days, email, still, refund	Topic 9: Cost-Effective Fashion Choices (8.41%)	date, prices, great, clothing, price, shopping, everything
Topic 10: Customer Support & Post-Purchase Service (9.83%)	service, weeks, item, still, called, email, time	Topic 10: Cute & Affordable Fashion Staples (10.33%)	clothes, cute, affordable, prices, price, clothing, great

Discussion This study expands the applicability of the expectation-disconfirmation theory (EDT) to consumer brand experiences through online customer reviews while offering insights into how

varying expectations emerge between luxury and fast fashion brand segments. Practically, the insights can aid both luxury and fast fashion retailers to better understand and leverage the complementary aspects of consumer expectations and experiences into their own brand and customer relationship management.

References

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