Cross-cultural Investigation for Slow Fashion Branding Strategies: U.K., Hong Kong and Korea

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Purpose & Literature Review One of the slow cultures, slow fashion, rooted in U.K. practitioners, includes slowing down the fashion cycle from the fast production and consumption loop (Fletcher, 2007). As slow food emerged to protest the proliferation of corporate culture in countries that have traditionally been attached to the origins of food (Slow Food USA, 2013), other slow cultures followed that are locally grounded and promote diversity from showcasing local distinctiveness. In the same vein, slow fashion claims to reduce the distance between producers and consumers by capitalizing on local resources such as local designers, materials, facilities etc. (Clark, 2008). Despite successful global trends, fast fashion is criticized in that the fast cycle runs counter to sustainable trends, and styles are identical and mainly derived from high-end fashion trends, rather than being genuine (Fletcher, 2010). Slow fashion not only lessens the environmental footprint by reducing the distance for transporting products, but local resources also draw upon local distinctiveness and authenticity in creating products. There is a growing interest in slow fashion, yet empirical evidence to support its branding strategies is still lacking. To help slow fashion branding strategies, this study was aimed at better understanding consumers' perspectives. Considering the concept's strong local foundation, how other countries' consumers would perceive slow fashion, first claimed in the U.K., is largely unknown.

Consumer-orientations to slow fashion was found to have five aspects, which include apparel consumers' propensities toward equity (fair working environment, compensation), authenticity (craftsmanship), functionality (longevity, versatility), localism (local resources), and exclusivity (uniqueness) in their apparel buying decisions (Jung & Jin, 2014). This study was designed to answer the following research question: <u>what aspects of slow fashion increase intentions to buy and pay a price premium for slow fashion products in different countries?</u> To answer this question, Hong Kong and Korean consumers along with U.K. consumers were chosen because they are key players in the Asia Pacific region which has the largest scope for the fashion market and the greatest potential for growth (Euromonitor, 2013). Nonetheless, we noticed that well-known brands originating from these countries are scarce, and the few that do exist mainly rely on mass production by large companies. Considering skillful local human resources and infrastructure, as well as proximity to many neighboring countries which could become huge potential markets, Hong Kong and Korea were deemed the right places for slow fashion branding.

Method An online survey company recruited general consumer samples from the U.K., Hong Kong and Korea by a quota sampling method (i.e., age, gender and annual household income). To ensure cross-national comparability (Douglas & Craig, 2005; Mullen, 1995), data were collected from a major city from each country (i.e., London and Seoul). The survey items were first developed in English, translated into Chinese and Korean, and then back translated by professionals to confirm translation equivalence. The survey items for slow fashion orientation, purchase intention and willingness to pay a price premium intention were borrowed from previous studies, and they were measured on a 5-point Likert scale. A total of 951 complete answers were used for analyses (U.K.=311, Hong Kong= 314, Korea= 326), and each sample showed consistent compositions with census data in terms of quotas.

Findings Five orientations of 15-item slow fashion measures were first validated with three samples by Confirmatory Factor Analysis. As a result, five dimensions of slow fashion were constructed to fit U.K. (χ^2= 302.31, *df*= 80, CFI= .91, GFI= .89, RMESEA= .09), Hong Kong (χ^2= 214.47, *df*= 80, CFI= .93, GFI= .92, RMESEA= .07), and Korea data (χ^2= 214.03, *df*= 80, CFI= .91, GFI= .92, RMESEA= .07), respectively. Also, adequate construct reliability as well as discriminant validity were found in each sample. To find the most influential factors to increase intentions to purchase and pay a price premium, Stepwise Regression analyses were conducted in each sample (Table 1). In the U.K., all five orientations were significant determinants to increase purchase intention, in which authenticity was the strongest indicator (β= .30***). For pay a price premium intention, local (β= .34***), authenticity (β= .23***) and equity (β= .19, p< .01) were significant factors. In Hong Kong, local orientation was the most critical factor to increase purchase intention (β= .32***), followed by authenticity (β= .23***) and functionality (β= .20***). Local orientation also increased intention to pay a price premium the most (β=.31***), followed by exclusivity (β= .18**), equity (β= .17**) and functionality (β= .13**). Korean consumers showed different results: increasing purchase intention, local (β= .26***), equity (β= .20**), functionality (β= .19**) and exclusivity (β= .12*) were significant, while equity (β= .27***), authenticity (β= .20***), exclusivity (β= .16**) and local (β= .15**) increased price premium intention.

IV \ DV	U.K.		Hong Kong		Korea	
	PI	PPI	PI	PPI	PI	PPI
Equity	.17**	.19**	-	.17**	.20**	.27***
Authenticity	.30***	.23***	.23***	-	-	.20***
Functionality	.20***	-	.20***	.13**	.19***	-
Localism	.15*	.34***	.32***	.31***	.26***	.15**
Exclusivity	-.14*	-	-	.18**	.12*	.16**

Table 1. Summary of Findings * p< .05, ** p< .01, *** p< .001
Note. All regression models were significant at 0.001 level. Excluded variables were not presented.
PI: Purchase intention, PPI: Pay a price premium intention

Conclusion The empirical findings suggested the distinctive set of attributes that slow fashion brands need to prioritize and emphasize in each country. In all three countries, valuing local resources and the propensity to support local brands were important to increase both purchase intention and price premium intention. Thus, promoting slow fashion as locally grounded branding would be a foremost attribute. Furthermore, to appeal to different consumers, the brand should highlight unique aspects that local consumers desire. For example, to better appeal to U.K. consumers, slow fashion brands should emphasize fairness of slow fashion practices and authentic products. To Hong Kong consumers, marketers should stress the high utility of the product, while to appeal to Korean consumers, exclusive availability of the product would become a key for success together with equitable treatment of workers and suppliers. As the first attempt to examine slow fashion from a branding perspective, the findings clearly suggest implications for the proper positioning of slow fashion brands in each local market based on understanding consumer orientations to apparel buying.

References available upon request