



Hand-Made, One-of-a-Kind Apparel: Evaluation Based on Personal Vanity

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The recent rise of websites selling handmade apparel such as Etsy, ArtFire and Shopify indicates the increasing demand for handcrafted, one-of-a-kind products. Many fashion designers, fiber and textile artists, and small apparel brands are offering handmade, handcrafted apparel through local boutiques and online. However, since these products usually do not carry any established brands/ designer names which act as cues for product evaluation (Rao & Monroe, 1988), consumers may find it difficult to judge the *value* of offered products. Literature indicates that consumers often use their prior *knowledge* about a product or product category to make product assessments (Rao & Monroe, 1988). For example, if consumers are aware of apparel construction processes, they might appreciate the value of hand-made apparel more. Literature also indicates that a consumer who is more *involved* in apparel products in general, is likely to have the information or the knowledge necessary to make a more confident judgment of product value (O’Cass, 2003). This involvement in apparel is shaped partly by consumers’ *vanity* or the concern about their physical appearance. In this light, physical vanity is defined as a positive concern for (physical concern vanity), and/or a positive and perhaps inflated view (physical view vanity) of one’s physical appearance and may be observed from an individual’s choice of clothing products (Netemeyer, Burton & Lichtenstein, 1995).

In spite of the growth in popularity of hand-made apparel, little is known about the personality traits that may influence the way in which consumers perceive the value of such products. Understanding the process of value judgment is important for business owners of hand-made apparel, since such clothes lack traditional product information cues, such as brand name, and is often more expensive than mass-market products. To fill this gap in literature, the study hypothesized that vanity (physical concern and physical view) influences consumers’ involvement in clothing (H1); involvement in turn influences consumers’ perceived product knowledge (H2); and finally, perceived product knowledge, in turn influences their perceived product value (H3).

A total of 250 adult female participants were recruited using a national research firm, Qualtrics, for an online survey. Females were selected for this study since females consistently score higher in physical concern and physical view vanity than males (Lee & Workman, 2014). Participants indicated their vanity (physical view: 5 items, $\alpha=.92$; physical concern: 5 items, $\alpha=.93$) (Netemeyer, Burton & Lichtenstein, 1995), familiarity (1 item) (O’Cass, 2004), apparel involvement (10 items, $\alpha=.93$) (O’Cass, 2004) and knowledge about apparel construction (7 items, $\alpha=.94$). Then they were exposed to an image of a ‘fully lined custom-printed cotton sateen jacket completely constructed by an individual stitcher for a boutique store’ and asked to indicate their perceived value of the jacket (3 items, $\alpha=.89$) (Grewal, Monroe & Krishnan, 1998). Vanity, familiarity, apparel knowledge and value were measured using 5-point Likert-type scale while involvement was measured using 7-point semantic differential scales.

Participants' age ranged from 20 to 83 years (\bar{x} =49.2, $s.d.$ =13.9). Regression-based conditional process analyses with bootstrap confidence interval were used for the study hypotheses (Hayes, 2013). Separate models were conducted for physical view and physical concern vanity. For physical view, the overall model was significant (R^2 =.13, p <.001). Physical view vanity significantly influenced involvement (unstandardized b =.4, p <.001), supporting H1. Involvement, in turn, influenced knowledge (b =.34, p <.001). Finally, knowledge influenced perceived value (b =.12, p =.05), supporting H3. Additionally, physical view vanity directly influenced knowledge (b =.28, p <.001), and perceived value (b =.21, p =.001) while involvement directly influenced perceived value (b =.32, p <.001). For physical concern vanity, the overall model was significant (R^2 =.20, p <.001). Physical view vanity significantly affected involvement (b =.65, p <.001), supporting H1. Involvement, in turn, influenced knowledge (b =.34, p <.001). Finally, knowledge influenced perceived value (b =.13, p =.02), supporting H3. Additionally, physical concern vanity directly influenced knowledge (b =.19, p =.03), and perceived value (b =.29, p <.001) while involvement directly influenced perceived value (b =.24, p <.001).

The study results indicated that the increased demand for handmade apparel might be attributed to consumers' vanity or their concern/view about physical appearance together with their desire to be different and stand out. Consumers who were more concerned about or had a positive view of their physical appearance, were more involved in apparel to enhance their appearance, which influenced their perceived value of hand-made apparel. Therefore, one way for makers of handmade clothes to enhance the perceived value of their clothes might be to emphasize the vanity-related aspects of their products in their marketing communications. Moreover, consumers' involvement led to their perceived knowledge about apparel which in turn, led them to perceive hand-made clothes as more valuable. Therefore, artisans of hand-made apparel might consider educating the consumer about the construction process of their creations to elicit favorable evaluations of the products. Since handmade apparel is, in most cases, one-of-a-kind, future research involving consumers' need for creativity and uniqueness might be beneficial.

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