

The Evolving Customer Experience: Consumer Response to “Storied” Fashion Products

Ji Young Lee, State University of New York at Oneonta, USA
Kim K. P. Johnson, University of Minnesota, USA

Keyword: Desire for uniqueness, status consumption, storied fashion product

Besides the shift from desiring “mass” to desiring “uniqueness” in products, many consumers like to talk about their unique consumption experiences (Trendwatching.com, 2008). One’s fashion status can be derived not only from being seen by others, but also by sharing one’s unique “stories”. Consumers are increasingly seeking impressive and unique consumption events that can be experienced during the purchase process and later told to others. “Storied” fashion products are offerings that incorporate unique processes into the purchase experience. Several brands offer “storied” products. Examples include Netgranny, a Swiss-based online knitwear store that offers knitted socks made by 15 grannies. Customers can select the photo of their favorite granny and the sock color or opt for a granny’s ‘surprise’ design enabling the customer to create and experience a unique shopping story.

Researchers interested in social status have studied it primarily as related to consumption of luxury fashion products. Several researchers identified antecedents to luxury consumption including need for uniqueness (Jeon & Park, 2005), hedonic purchase motives, materialism, and product conspicuousness (Hudders, 2012). There is limited empirical research investigating consumption of non-physical status markers. Thus, we proposed that consumer attributes also influence attitudes toward and purchase intention relative to “storied” fashion products. Consumer attributes tested were materialism, conspicuous consumption, desire for uniqueness, hedonic shopping orientation, and market mavenism. Materialism is a tendency to consider material possessions as more important than spiritual values. Conspicuous consumption is a tendency to enhance one’s image through consumption of possessions that communicate status to others. Desire for uniqueness is the acquiring and use of products for the purpose of achieving distinctiveness from others. Hedonic shopping orientation is the pursuit of positive emotions during a shopping experience. Market mavenism is demonstrating expertise on multiple aspects of markets.

Our proposed framework emerged from several different conceptualizations linking status to consumption (e.g. conspicuous consumption, need for uniqueness theory). Specific hypotheses tested were:

- H1: Consumer attributes (e.g., materialism (H1a), conspicuous consumption (H1b), desire for uniqueness (H1c), hedonic shopping orientation (H1d), and market mavenism (H1e) affect attitudes toward the “storied” fashion product.
- H2: Attitudes toward the “storied” fashion product affect purchase intention.

Method and Procedures. Data were collected from consumer panels utilizing an online research company ($n= 270$). In the first part of the questionnaire, participants were asked to respond to existing and reliable measures of their personal attributes (i.e., materialism: “I would be happier if I could afford to buy more things;” conspicuous consumption: “I show to others

that I am sophisticated;” desire for uniqueness: “I actively seek to develop my personal uniqueness by buying special products or brands;” hedonic shopping orientation: “When shopping, I am usually looking for entertainment;” and market mavenism: “I like helping people by providing them with information about many kinds of products.”). Next, they were given a description of three “storied” fashion products (i.e., customized knitted socks made by grannies, bath products in which the customer’s DNA was incorporated, and T-shirts that feature a unique shotcode to which the wearer can link his personal website). Participants were asked to indicate their attitude toward these “storied” fashion products using bipolar questions (e.g., bad-good, unfavorable–favorable). Participants also indicated how likely it was they would purchase the products. Participants indicated their responses using 5-point scales for all measures. They also supplied demographic information (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity). Structural equation modeling was used to test hypothesized relationships between variables.

Participant characteristics. The majority of participants were women (85.2%), single (79.8%), and Caucasian (77.5%). They ranged in age from 18 to 35 years ($m = 24.1$). All income categories were represented with a median income category of \$25,000-\$49,999. Slightly more than half (54.3%) indicated that they spent less than \$100 on monthly apparel shopping.

Results. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that the measurements had acceptable construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. All item loadings were higher than 0.50 ($p < .001$), supporting unidimensionality of each construct. Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were higher than 0.70, indicating that the reliabilities were acceptable for all measures.

The structural model exhibited a good fit with the data ($\chi^2/df = 1.66$, CFI = .95, NNFI = .94, IFI = .95, and RMSEA = .050). Regarding H1, conspicuous consumption (H1b, $\beta = .38$, $t = 3.42$), desire for uniqueness (H1c, $\beta = .35$, $t = 4.33$), and market mavenism (H1e, $\beta = .48$, $t = 4.57$) had highly significant positive effects on attitude toward the “storied” fashion product ($p < .001$) followed by the significant influence of hedonic shopping orientation ($\beta = .26$, $t = 2.13$) at $p < .05$. However, materialism (H1a) had no significant impact. For H2, attitude toward the “storied” fashion product had a significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = .80$, $t = 13.51$) at $p < .001$.

Conclusions and Implications. Several consumer attributes tested were significant antecedents to consumer’s attitude toward “storied” fashion products and their purchase intention. This study sheds light on the why’s underlying consumer’s interest and use of “storied” fashion products as method to signal social status. Marketers could consider incorporating relevant aspects to enable customers to share the “story” of their purchase experience (e.g., developing fashion items associated with experiential shopping), in light of a shifting trend in status consumption from “status symbols” to “status stories.”

References

- Status Stories. (2008, April 1). Retrieved from www.trendwatching.com/trend.
- Hudders, L. (2012). Why the devil wears Prada: Consumers’ purchase motives for luxuries. *Journal of Brand Management*, 19(7), 609–622
- Jeon, K. S., & Park, H. J. (2005). The effect of fashion orientation and consumer need for uniqueness on buying intentions for luxury brands. *Journal of the Korean Society of Clothing and Textiles*, 29(2), 231-241.