



## Poppin' Tags: How Consumers Communicate Uniqueness with Vintage Clothing

Kathryn Reiley and Kristy A. Janigo, University of Minnesota, USA

Keywords: uniqueness, vintage, clothing, communication

**Introduction.** Aesthetics in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has been marked by the coexistence of many styles, with consumers often in charge of creating their own sense of personal style (Postrel, 2003). However, convergence of global trends has led to similarity across brands and price points, which makes it difficult to create an individualized appearance when shopping solely at new clothing stores. Some consumers have sought alternative sources, including thrift shops, vintage stores, clothing swaps, garage sales, do-it-yourself projects, and professionally redesigned clothing (Janigo, 2011; Reiley, 2008). The purpose of this research was to explore how consumers communicate uniqueness to others with their clothing.

**Significance.** In previous research, two groups of female consumers similar in age were studied through in-depth qualitative interviews, including both vintage and new clothing wearers, for their means of creating a unique appearance (Reiley, 2008). The study yielded rich descriptions of the aesthetics of these consumers and how they incorporated different sources of clothing. The Desire for Unique Consumer Products (DUCP) scale developed by Lynn and Harris (1997) was used to gauge individuals' interest in presenting a unique appearance. However, due to a limited size and relatively homogeneous sample of the prior study, it was necessary to further explore these phenomena with a larger, more heterogeneous sample.

**Methods and Sample.** College students often spend discretionary income on clothing, and an art focused school was thought to be a prime setting for unique individuals to thrive. Questionnaires were administered in class meetings at a small Midwestern private art college. Students age 18 to 55 were recruited through convenience sampling. A total of 132 students (85 female and 47 male, mean age of 22.6 years) from 13 different applied art majors responded. Based on the literature, individuals with a high DUCP score should be more likely to buy and wear clothing from sources such as used clothing and vintage stores. Additionally, students in fashion-related majors should have a higher DUCP score than students in other majors. The instrument included closed-ended questions about stores at which they normally shop, reasons for selecting those stores, definitions of unique clothing items, percentage of vintage clothing (25 years or older) in their wardrobes, and how often they wore vintage. The survey also included the eight-item five-point Likert type (one as strongly disagree and five as strongly agree) Desire for Unique Consumer Products (DUCP) scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha > 0.78$ ) to determine whether or not participants perceived a unique appearance as important in their daily lives. Descriptive statistics and a series of ANOVA tests were used to analyze results through IBM SPSS Statistics 22.

**Results.** Following Lynn and Harris (1997), we created summated scores by adding the eight DUCP items together into a total DUCP score for each individual. ANOVA was used to compare the DUCP scores of fashion majors ( $n = 36$ , mean DUCP score 30.08) to non-fashion majors ( $n = 96$ , mean DUCP score 25.77). The difference in DUCP scores between fashion

majors and non-fashion majors was highly significant ( $F_{1, 130} = 15.22, p < 0.001$ ). However, there was no significant difference in DUCP scores by gender or age, which was consistent with Lynn and Harris's findings (1997).

Participants indicated the percentage of vintage clothing (defined as 25 years or older) they owned on a five-point Likert scale (1 = 100% new or no vintage; 2 = 75% new / 25% vintage; 3 = 50% new / 50% vintage; 4 = 25% new / 75% vintage; and 5 = 100% vintage). Some participants owned all new clothing ( $n = 49, 37.1%$ , mean DUCP of 25.04), but the rest owned at least 25% or more vintage clothing ( $n = 83, 62.9%$ , mean DUCP of 28.07). Vintage owners had significantly higher mean DUCP scores than non-vintage wearers ( $F_{1, 130} = 8.434, p < 0.01$ ). In terms of frequency for wearing vintage items, participants were asked to rate how often they wore them (0 = never, 1 = once every six months, 2 = once every three months, 3 = once a month, 4 = once a week, and 5 = every day). Some individuals never wore vintage clothing ( $n = 51, 39.8%$ , mean DUCP of 25.10). Vintage wearers (those who wore vintage at least once every six months or more,  $n = 77, 60.2%$ , mean DUCP of 27.87), had significantly higher mean DUCP scores than non-vintage wearers ( $F_{1, 126} = 7.149, p < 0.01$ ).

The questionnaire included a section where participants were asked to indicate (with a check mark) whether 10 different types of clothing were unique, for example, family heirlooms, one-of-a-kind clothing, custom-made garments, and several others. Only one-of-a-kind clothing was identified as unique by the majority of participants ( $n = 92, 69.7%$ ). The other nine items were not considered as unique by the majority, as 50% or less checked the items. Interestingly, the results were evenly divided on custom-made clothing (50% checked the item, and 50% did not). A new variable was created where the marked definitions of unique clothing types were added up to yield a total score, which indicated the number of clothing sources participants used to curate a unique appearance. There was a significant difference in DUCP score among groups of participants who selected different types and sources of clothing ( $F_{10, 121} = 2.940, p < 0.01$ ).

**Conclusions/Future Research.** Our research provided additional insight into how consumers communicated uniqueness to others with their clothing. Although uniqueness was important for many participants, perhaps it was still possible to portray individuality with new clothing, or by owning a few key vintage items worn on a regular basis. Future research could incorporate a larger sample size and employ robust multivariate analysis such as structural equation modeling to further generalize these findings.

#### References

- Janigo, K. (2011). *Collaborative redesign of used clothes as a sustainable fashion solution: Exploring consumer interest and experience* (Master's thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest LLC. (No. 1505631).
- Lynn, M. and Harris, J. (1997). The desire for unique consumer products: A new individual differences scale. *Psychology & Marketing, 14*(6), 601-616.
- Postrel, V. 2003. *The Substance of Style*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Reiley, K. (2008). *Definitions of uniqueness in terms of individual appearance: Exploring vintage clothing and new clothing wearers* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest LLC. (No. 3343553).