

## Effects of Information Sidedness on Young Consumer Attitudes and Subjective Norms toward Fashion Products Made of Fur, Leather, and Wool

Minjung Lee, Konkuk University, Korea  
Elena Karpova, Iowa State University, USA

Keywords: Animal-based materials, fur, leather, wool, information sidedness

**Introduction.** Animal-based materials such as fur, leather, and wool have been used throughout the human history and continue to be an important part of fashion industry. However, usage of these materials is opposed by animal rights groups, who see it as unacceptable practice (Kandel, 2011). In contrast, fur, leather and wool companies maintain that using these materials is an acceptable and responsible practice due to unparalleled functional and aesthetic properties as well as materials being easily renewable, biodegradable, and often by-products of meat industry. Both sides of the debate tend to present one-sided arguments in an attempt to influence public opinion (Kimmel, 2007). No research has investigated what effects these one-sided arguments might have on consumers. Therefore, the **research purpose** was to examine how information about fashion products made of fur, leather, and wool might influence consumer attitudes and subjective norms toward purchasing these products.

**Theoretical background and hypotheses.** One-sided information presents a single perspective on an issue in question, whereas two-sided information presents proposition arguments as well as opposing arguments (Allen, 1991). A number of studies in advertising, psychology, political science, health (smoking), and other fields reported that exposure to one-sided information tends to change attitudes in the direction of the information presented (Paek & Gunther, 2007). Extant research provides inconsistent conclusions on the effects of two-sided information on people's attitudes (Hastak & Park, 1987). Based on elaboration likelihood model and theory of reasoned action, six hypotheses were proposed to test how attitudes and subjective norms toward purchasing fashion products made of (a) fur, (b) leather, and (c) wool were affected when consumers were exposed to:

- (1) one-sided information against using animal-based materials (Treatment 1)
- (2) one-sided information promoting use of animal-based materials (Treatment 2)
- (3) two-sided information about positive and negatives of using animal-based materials (Treatment 3)
- (4) fashion information irrelevant to animal-based materials (Control group, Treatment 4).

Two additional hypotheses examined how attitudes and subjective norms relate to purchase intentions of fashion products made of fur, leather, and wool.

**Method.** An experiment employing a between-subjects design was conducted. A randomized multi-group design with four levels of treatment was employed. Four text-based stimuli were

developed and reviewed by experts. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four treatment groups and received one of the four stimuli. After reading information, participants completed an online survey which measured their attitudes, subjective norms, and purchase intentions of fashion products made of fur, leather, and wool. A total of 31,001 college students were invited to participate in an online experiment. The final sample size of 1,291 participants was used for data analyses. To test the research hypotheses, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests and multiple regression analyses were conducted.

**Results.** In general, one-sided information *against* using animal-based materials significantly and negatively affected attitudes and subjective norms toward purchasing fashion products made of these materials. In contrast, one-sided information *promoting* use of animal-based materials for fashion products significantly and positively affected attitudes and subjective norms. However, subjective norms toward purchasing *fur* products were not affected by one-sided information *against* using animal-based materials. When consumers perceive low pressure from their reference groups to perform a behavior (subjective norm toward buying fur), negative information is not effective in further lowering subjective norm.

Two-sided information, presenting both positive and negative aspects of using animal-based materials for fashion products, had no impact on consumer attitudes and subjective norms toward purchasing fashion products made of fur and leather. However, two-sided information had a negative effect on consumer attitudes toward purchasing wool products. When consumers have a relatively high attitude toward an issue (purchasing wool products), they might be more sensitive to negative aspects of a balanced, two-sided information about the issue, which results in lower attitudes. Attitudes and subjective norms toward purchasing fashion products made from fur, leather, and wool significantly and positively affected purchase intentions of these products, corroborating theory of reasoned action. Implications for educators and industry are presented based on the research results. Research limitations are discussed.

## References

- Allen, M. (1991). Meta-Analysis comparing the persuasiveness of one-sided and two-sided messages. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 55, 390-404.
- Hastak, M., & Park, J. (1990). Mediators of message effects on cognitive structure for involved and uninvolved audiences. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 17, 329-336.
- Kandel, J. (2011, November 9). West Hollywood endorses first fur ban in United States. Retrieved from <http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/11/10/us-fur-ban-california-idUSTRE7A909T20111110>
- Kimmel, A. J. (2007). *Ethical issues in behavioral research: Basic and applied perspective* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Paek, H-J., & Gunther, A.C. (2007). How peer proximity moderates indirectly influence on adolescent smoking. *Communication Research*, 34(4), 407-432.