



How Do Fashion Leaders Respond to Trade-Offs between Eco-Friendliness and Hedonic/Utilitarian Attributes?

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Consumers of eco-friendly clothing (EFC) often face a trade-off between eco-friendliness (EF) and other product attributes. We investigate how fashion leaders respond to such trade-off situations, and also examine the influence of regulatory focus on their behavior. Our results not only identify the current issue in the EFC industry, but also suggest a possible strategy to mitigate that issue. Previous business literature showed that consumers are more likely to trade-off hedonic attributes for sustainability than to trade-off utilitarian attributes (e.g., Luchs & Kumar, 2017). In a decision-making context of EFCs, we anticipate non-fashion leaders to behave in line with previous studies since hedonic attributes are usually considered a “want”, not a “need”. However, we argue that fashion leaders will behave in a distinct manner. Fashion leaders have been found to value fun, enjoyment, and excitement (Goldsmith et al., 1991); and place more importance on hedonic aspects of apparel compared to non-fashion leaders (Beaudoin et al., 2001). That is, while it may be easier for non-fashion leaders to trade-off hedonic attributes for EF, the same decision may be more difficult for fashion leaders given their characteristics as described above. Thus, we propose that consumers’ choices in trade-off situations will be moderated by their level of fashion leadership such that:

H1: Consumers’ tendency to trade-off hedonic attributes rather than utilitarian attributes for EF will be attenuated (amplified) as their level of fashion leadership increases (decreases).

H1 provides an important implication - that fashion leaders may be less willing to trade-off hedonic attributes for EF. However, this implication cannot resolve one of the major issues that fashion retailers encounter in the EFC market - that it is a challenge to develop EFCs that also bear superior hedonic features (e.g., fashionability). As evidenced by Gam (2011), this issue often obstructs fashion leaders from purchasing EFCs. Therefore, we also investigate whether fashion leaders’ emphasis on hedonic attributes can be attenuated by manipulating their regulatory focus. Building on Chernev’s (2004) finding that prevention-focused individuals tend to underweight hedonic (overweight utilitarian) attributes, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Fashion leaders’ choices in trade-off situations will be moderated by their regulatory focus such that prevention-focused fashion leaders (compared to promotion-focused) will be more likely to trade-off hedonic attributes for EF.

Method

H1 and H2 were tested via two separate between-subject experiments. Across both experiments, participants’ fashion leadership were measured using five 5-point Likert scales adopted from Gutman and Milles (1982). Trade-off situation was simulated by asking the participants to make a selection from two jeans varying in terms of its hedonic (or utilitarian) attribute and EF on a scale ranging from 0 (poor) to 10 (excellent). We developed four different

(two hedonic vs. two utilitarian) trade-off conditions using four jeans attributes (two hedonic – fashionability, design; two utilitarian – quality, workmanship). For Experiment 1, participants were asked to make a choice in one of the four trade-off conditions. For instance, a participant assigned to a hedonic trade-off condition may be asked to choose between jeans A (5 on fashionability and 9 on EF) and jeans B (9 on fashionability and 5 on EF). As for Experiment 2, to manipulate the participants' regulatory focus, two versions of EFC advertisements were developed. One advertisement described EFC in a promotion priming manner and the other, in a prevention priming manner. After reviewing one of the two advertisements, participants were asked to make a choice in one of the four trade-off conditions.

Results and Discussion

Experiment 1. A total of 406 participants were recruited via Amazon MTurk: fashionability ($n = 101$), design ($n = 101$), quality ($n = 101$), and workmanship ($n = 103$). After a statistical confirmation of the invariance in responses, we combined the data collected from two hedonic trade-off conditions and two utilitarian trade-off conditions. In support of H1, results from a logistic regression showed trade-off type to significantly interact with fashion leadership to predict choice ($\beta = -.59$ $p < .01$). For further insight, we split our participants into two groups (leaders, non-leaders) based on a fashion leadership score of 3.16 (value identified via the Johnson-Neyman technique [Hayes, 2017]). No significant difference was found between the two groups in the utilitarian trade-off condition ($\chi^2_{(1)} = .002$, $p = .97$): both groups were not willing to trade-off utilitarian attribute for EF. However, within the hedonic trade-off condition, only fashion leaders were not willing to trade-off hedonic attribute for EF ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 6.108$, $p = .01$).

Experiment 2. A total of 254 participants were recruited via Amazon Mturk: promotion condition ($n = 127$), prevention condition ($n = 127$). Within each regulatory focus priming condition, participants were asked to make a selection in a hedonic trade-off situation. In support of H2, results from a logistic regression showed regulatory focus priming to significantly interact with fashion leadership to predict choice ($\beta = -.59$ $p < .05$). For further insight, we split our participants into two groups based on their fashion leadership score. Within the promotion condition, only fashion leaders were not willing to trade-off hedonic attributes for EF ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 7.158$, $p = .01$); however, there was no significant difference between leaders and non-leaders in the prevention condition ($\chi^2_{(1)} = .007$, $p = .93$).

Experiment 1 showed that while non-fashion leaders are willing to trade-off hedonic attributes for EF, fashion leaders are not willing to trade-off either hedonic or utilitarian attributes for EF. That is, in order to attract fashion leaders, retailers need to offer EFCs that bear not only superior utilitarian but also hedonic attributes. This finding poses an issue for EFC retailers since the industry is still struggling to develop hedonically attractive EFCs. To mitigate this issue, EFC retailers may consider our findings from Experiment 2 - that prevention-focused fashion leaders are more likely than promotion-focused to trade-off hedonic attributes for EF. That is, prevention-priming messages may attenuate the fashion leaders' unwillingness to trade-off hedonic attributes – such messages may enable retailers to better attract fashion leaders using EFCs that only bear superior utilitarian features (or EFCs that are not hedonically attractive).

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