Exploring the influencing role of expectancy values on online apparel rental:

The moderating effect of need for uniqueness

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Background and Purpose.

About 14.3 million tons of textile waste is dumped in landfills (Lang & Armstrong, 2018). Current consumption has been characterized by overconsumption and throwaway culture which is greatly unsustainable (Piscicelli et al., 2015). Such problematic consumption patterns have become prevalent due to economical and institutional reasons (Hamari et al., 2016). As an alternative way of consumption to overcome the current situation, renting products has received great attention (Piscicelli et al., 2015). However, the existing studies are limited to explore consumers' attitudes toward participating in online renting (Adam et al., 2018), and the study on consumer's values and perceptions of online apparel renting has not been fully studied. The expectancy values have been regarded as "perceived probability that an object possesses a particular attribute or that a behavior" (Lee & Chow, 2020, p. 3). Therefore, the purpose of the study was to examine the role of expectancy values in online apparel rental within the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), considering a moderating effect of need for uniqueness.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses.

TRA has long been used to help understand the consumer decision-making process, specifically using consumer attitudes to understand consumer behavior. The TRA framework was used with augmented expectancy-value theory in this study. According to the expectancy-value theory, attitude toward a behavior "is itself a function of the value one assigns to the perceived consequences of the behavior and the subjective probabilities one attaches to those consequences" (Eagly, 1992, p. 694). The four constructs of expectancy values, i.e., (relative advantage, compatibility, psychological ownership, ecological importance) were adapted to

include the original construct of cost, operationalized in consumer behavior as a financial risk. Relative advantage (RA) concerns a product's or service's superiority over similar products and services (Hansen, 2005) and within apparel includes exclusivity as a component of superiority (Littrell & Miller, 2001). Online apparel rental services offer advantages such as the opportunity to wear clothing outside of one's price range (Lee & Chow, 2020).

Compatibility (COMP) is considered the degree to which a product or service aligns with previous ideas and/or self-image (Littrell & Miller, 2001), and has been found to be a component of the decision-making process in multiple contexts (Cherney, 2004). Within the context of mass fashion rental services, there will likely be more compatibility with one's daily life.

Psychological ownership (PO) is "the personal sense of possession an individual holds for a material or immaterial target" (Jussila et al., 2015, p. 121). In the apparel rental services, the changing nature of the industry has created an emphasis on newness over ownership. High levels of psychological ownership were found to have a negative impact on attitudes toward apparel renting (Lee & Chow, 2020).

Ecological Importance (EI), a significant component of collaborative consumption concerns environmental consciousness, has been found to positively impact attitudes toward green consumption (Sclegelmilch et al., 1996) and specifically fashion rentals (Lee & Chow, 2020).

Financial Risk (FR), defined as a "net loss of money to a customer," can concern direct loss of money and/or concern with the potential for credit/debit card fraud (Forsythe & Shi, 2003).

In addition, Lang and Armstrong (2018) found that need for uniqueness (NfU) influences intention to rent clothing and it influences their renting behavior through attitudes. Tian et al. (2001) also suggest need for uniqueness might impact a consumer's attitudes and behaviors, suggesting its moderating effect.

Thus, we propose:

H1: Attitudes toward online apparel rental subscription services will be significantly influenced by expectancy-value and financial risk.

H2: Intention to rent apparel online will be significantly influenced by attitudes toward online apparel rental subscription services.

H3: Need for uniqueness will moderate the relationship between expectancy-value and attitudes toward online apparel rental subscription services.

Methodology and Results.

Participants were recruited among college students in the Southeastern region of the USA using a convenient sampling strategy. A paper survey was conducted and data cleaning yielded 242 valid samples. The majority of participants were females (84%) and the average age was 21. Participants were directed to consider mass retailer online rental services, such as Banana Republic, Express, or New York & Company, to address the context of the research. All items were adopted from previous research and were measured utilizing a 7-point semantic differential scale with “1 = strongly disagree” and “7 = strongly agree.”

For hypotheses analysis, structural equation modeling (SEM), using a two-step approach (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). First, the measurement model was developed by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to validate the construct measurements. CFA results showed that the seven 22-item measurement model was reliable and valid. Additionally, for the singleitem scale (i.e., financial risk), we followed Jöreskog and Sörbom's (1993) recommendation to establish a conservative error variance. SEM then was employed and results revealed satisfactory fit of the model; $\chi^2 = 473.51$, $df = 194$, $p < .001$, $\chi^2/df = 2.44$, RMSEA = 0.077, CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.91, and NFI = 0.89. The results also revealed that while attitudes toward online apparel rental services was positively influenced by RA ($\gamma_{11} = 0.20$, $t = 2.32^*$), COMP ($\gamma_{12} = 0.30$, $t = 3.24^{**}$), and EI ($\gamma_{14} = 0.12$, $t = 2.129^*$), attitudes toward online apparel rental services was negatively influenced by PO ($\gamma_{13} = -0.19$, $t = -2.36^{**}$) and FR ($\gamma_{15} = -0.20$, $t = -3.21^{**}$), supporting H1. Results further revealed that intention to rent apparel online was positively influenced by attitudes toward online apparel rental services ($\beta_{21} = 0.77$, $t = 10.01^{***}$), supporting H2. In testing the moderating effect of need for uniqueness (NfU) on the relationship between expectancy-value and attitudes toward online apparel rental services, we examined the interaction effect using the degree of need for uniqueness (low vs. high). For the impacts of three expectancy values on attitudes toward online apparel service revealed to be stronger among the high NfU group as compared to the low NfU group. The results indicated the significant χ^2 difference between two groups on the relationship between RA and attitudes, χ^2 Diff = 4.11, $p < .05$, SlopeDiff = .03. The relationship between PO and attitudes was also significant, χ^2 Diff = 6.58, $p < .05$, SlopeDiff = 0.07. Lastly, the relationship between EI and attitudes, the χ^2 difference test revealed a significant difference between two groups, χ^2 Diff = 5.39, $p < .05$ and SlopeDiff = .09.

Discussion.

The results indicated the relative advantage, such as quick and easy access to online renting, leads to positive attitudes toward online apparel renting. Since a new type of consumption (i.e., renting) is compatible with existing online shopping formats, compatibility also brings about positive online renting attitudes. Ecological importance, such as environmentally-friendly practices through renting rather than consuming new products also positively affects attitudes toward online apparel renting. People with psychological ownership tend to have a strong desire to possess a product, and thus, psychological ownership is negatively related to the renting system. Likewise, consumers who feel that they waste their money on renting apparel for a limited time (financial risk) may not engage in online apparel renting. Importantly, expectancy values more prominently lead to positive attitudes toward online apparel rental among consumers with a high need for uniqueness. The results of the study offer beneficial insights for marketers to understand consumers' motivational expectancy values, financial risk, and need for uniqueness that may induce online rental intention. These findings may help guide the construction of marketing plans among online rental service retailers to adopt more sustainable options.

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