

‘Just for you’: Unveiling the Traits of the Mass-Customized Clothing Shoppers

Gargi Bhaduri and Jihyun Kim, Kent State University, USA

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Although the concept of mass-customization was introduced as early as the 1990s, with the recent maturity of e-commerce and accessibility of 3D printing technology, mass-customization is getting new round of attention from various industries (Howland, 2014); and the return of the popularity of the mass customization technology in the fashion industry calls for the further understandings of the consumer trends and traits. Particularly, it has been seen that majority of purchasers of mass-customized clothing (MCC) are millennials, due to their desire for clothing that allows them to express their individuality (Deloitte, 2015). In addition, according to XXX (2018), young adult consumers who had purchased MCC (than those not) exhibited much higher perception of consumption value for the same. For instance, MCC purchasers indicated greater monetary value in MCC compared to non-purchasers. Interestingly, both purchasers and non-purchasers did not exhibit significantly different mean scores on quality value, social value, hedonic value and epistemic value. In the online retailing literature, customers who made purchases via the Internet exhibited significant discrepancies in consumer perception of the service quality of the e-commerce web site, compared to the counterparts (Yang & Jun, 2002).

The literature notes that offering various options during mass customization process may not necessarily result in greater value perception (Quelch & Kenny, 1994). Another literature highlights that there are mixed results in the relationship between the complexity in choice setting and consumer’s satisfaction with mass customization process/products (Kahn, 1998). Complexity of the choice setting also resulted in the longer process and perception of the uncertainty, which could increase the negative cognitive and/or emotional experience during the product customization process. Therefore, in the present study, we aim to examine the level of effort perceived by the purchasers and non-purchasers to inform the customer experience designers/engineers to optimize the mass customization process. In addition, Park and Yoo (2018) found that consumer’s positive benefit perception of mass customization yielded the higher level of emotional product attachment and more positive attitudes toward a mass customization, which in turn, positively affected loyalty intentions. The positive relationships were positively moderated by the individual consumer’s fashion innovativeness and also their previous exposure to mass-customization experience. Thus, in this study, we aim to address characteristics of young adult consumers’ who had an experience of purchasing mass-customized products in comparison to the counterparts, to draw more pragmatic implications for the MCC industry.

A survey was administered to adult undergraduates in a fashion program at a major US university. Out of 388 usable responses (95.6% female), there were 251 participants who had previously purchased an MCC, and 137 who had not. Participants indicated their fashion involvement using 7 items (O’Cass, 2000), shopping orientation (hedonic: 11 items, utilitarian: 5

items, (Babin, Darden & Griffin, 1994), perceived risk for purchase of an MCC compared to an MPC using 1 item each for monetary, functional, social, psychological, and delivery time risks, and 2 items for effort risk ($\alpha = .747$) (Lee & Moon, 2015), attitude toward giving an MCC as a gift to family and friends using 5 items (Childers, Carr, Peck & Carson, 2001). All items were measure on a 7-point Likert scale (1: Strongly Disagree to 7: Strongly Agree).

Age of the participants ranged from 19 to 35 (mean = 20.85, SD = 1.86). Two-group (purchasers/non-purchasers) independent samples t-tests revealed that purchasers of MCCs (mean = 6.5) were slightly more involved in fashion than non-purchasers (mean = 6.3, $p = .017$). Purchasers were also more hedonically motivated in their shopping orientation (mean = 5.9) than non-purchasers (mean = 5.6, $p = .005$). However, there was no difference in utilitarian shopping orientation between purchasers (mean = 3.3) and non-purchasers (mean = 3.3, $p = 0.669$). In terms of perceived risks of an MCC compared to a mass-produced product, purchasers (mean = 4.4) perceived higher functional risk than non-purchasers (mean = 4.1, $p = 0.25$). Purchasers (mean = 4.0) also perceived higher social risk than non-purchasers (mean = 3.5, $p = .004$). However, there were no significant difference between purchasers and non-purchasers for monetary, psychological, effort and delivery time risk ($0.93 < ps < 0.763$). When it came to attitudes towards MCC, purchasers (mean = 5.5) compared to non-purchasers (mean = 5.1) had more favorable opinion toward giving an MCC as a gift to close family and friend ($p = .009$). Also, purchasers (mean = 5.6) than non-purchasers (mean = 5.3) agreed more that mass-customizing a gift for close friend/family was worthy of spending time and effort ($p = .027$). Purchasers (mean = 5.8) than non-purchasers (mean = 5.5) also held more favorable opinions that MCC was a wonderful way to customize a gift for one-self ($p = 0.48$). However, for mass-customizing a gift for close friend/family as money well-spent, opinion between purchasers (mean = 5.5) and non-purchasers (mean = 5.2) were not significantly different ($p = 0.57$).

Results indicated that consumers who have purchased MCCs in the past are higher in fashion involvement than non-purchasers. Given that highly MCCs are mostly marketed based on their uniqueness, it is essential for consumers to be involved in the product category to understand what is unique, one-of-a-kind about such products. Therefore, brands of MCCs might benefit from targeting high involvement consumers. Purchasers were also more hedonically oriented during their shopping than non-purchasers. However, both groups ranked the same for their utilitarian shopping orientation. Therefore, in order to target customers better, brands of MCCs might benefit from highlighting the hedonic aspects of their offerings than utilitarian. However, since purchasers perceived higher risks than non-purchasers, brand managers might need to work on reducing such risk perceptions. Finally, purchasers favored MCCs as gifts for themselves as well as their friends and family. They also felt MCCs were worthy of more time and effort investment, but not money. Therefore, MCC brands will need to create differentiation based on their unique product features and the customization experience itself without charging a price premium.

Future research on delving deeper into personality traits of consumers as predictors of their buying behavior, such as their need for uniqueness and their self-monitoring tendency might provide interesting results.

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