An Empirical Study on Chinese Adolescents' Fashion Involvement

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Research Background and Theoretical Framework

Today's children live in a fast paced, highly commercialized world where they are relentlessly targeted by companies and advertisers. For adolescents, fashion products play a key role in defining who they are and communicating this to others around them. Adolescents represent the group that grants the greatest interest in fashion clothing (Nelson & McLeod, 2005). In China, it is estimated that there are 154.2 million (about 11.2% of total population) young people between the ages of 10 and19 in 2015 (UNICEF, 2016). It gives a sense of the size of the opportunity and the priority that deserves to be given to understanding their attitudes. Most Chinese adolescents are the only child in their family, and the only-child has become the foremost concern. They have been regarded as spoiled little "princes" and "princesses". Essentially this is the up and coming group of China's fashionistas. However, research studies on Chinese adolescents and their fashion consumer behavior are lacking.

The research fills the literature gap by utilizing the theories of consumer socialization, the theory of the "extended self" and fashion clothing perspectives in the context of China's adolescents. Research has demonstrated that fashion clothing can serve as a means of self-expression that communicates about consumers' identities, status and aspirations (Belk, 1988). From Consumer socialization perspective, consumer behaviors or attitudes, such as fashion involvement is seen as the results of learning acquired through interaction between the consumer (the learner) and the socialization agents which are the main sources with which the consumer interacts (Moschis & Churchill, 1978). During adolescence, parents/family, peers and media are recognized as representing the major sources of interaction when it comes to consumer behavior related to clothing, although their respective influences are different in nature and relative importance (Lachance, Beaudoin, & Robitaille, 2003; Miller-Spillman, Reilly, & Hunt-Hurst, 2012). Based on the literature review, a research conceptual model (with seven hypotheses) was developed to examine the linkages between agents of consumer socialization and adolescents' fashion involvement (see Figure 1).

Research Method

Empirical survey-based research method was used to investigate the relationships in the model. A total of 42 items were developed to measure the eight constructs in this study based on extensive literature reviews (Lachance, et al., 2003; Nelson & McLeod, 2005; O'Cass, 2000). All the items were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale. A translation and a back-translation of the questionnaire were performed by two Chinese scholars who are fluent in both English and Chinese languages. After IRB was approved, an online survey was first distributed to select Chinese parents and teachers for approval; then the parents helped distribute the survey to their children and the teachers helped distribute the survey to middle/high school students. Data were collected mainly

from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Chengdu, which are the major urban areas in China. A total of 243 responses were collected and 169 responses are valid for data analysis.

Data Analysis and Results

We used the two-step approach in structural equation modeling to test the structural relationships among the agents of consumer socialization and adolescents' fashion involvement. Thirty-nine test items were retained as measures of the eight constructs in the study, with all of the constructs meeting both reliability and validity requirements. All of the model fit statistics, indicating the overall acceptability of the structural model analyzed, were acceptable: $\chi 2/df = 1.46$, GFI = .85, CFI = .93, and RMSEA = .05. Thus, the estimated structural model illustrated in Figure 1 seems to be a good fit for the sample data. The statistical results displayed in Table 1 indicated that fashion websites, fashion magazines, and peers had positive and significant impacts on fashion involvement of Chinese adolescents. This confirms a strong influence of fashion related media and peers on Chinese adolescents' fashion interests and buying behaviors. Surprisingly, the Internet's effect on this young group of consumers' fashion involvement was negative. This implies that Chinese adolescents who spend more times on the internet are less interested in fashion and fashion clothing products than their peers. Parents and TV did not exhibit significant influence on Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement.
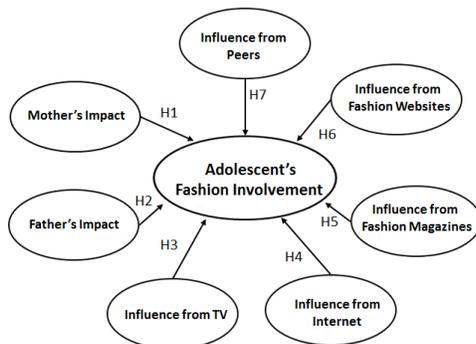

Figure 1. Research Model

Table 1. Structural Model Estimates

Hypotheses	From	To	Standardized Coefficient	T-value	P-value	Results
H1	Mother's Impact	Fashion Involvement	0.11	1.45	> .05	Not support
H2	Father's Impact	Fashion Involvement	-0.01	-0.12	> .05	Not support
H3	Influence from TV	Fashion Involvement	0.01	0.11	> .05	Not support
H4	Influence from Internet	Fashion Involvement	**-0.18**	**-2.26**	⩽ .05	Not support
H5	Influence from Fashion Magazines	Fashion Involvement	0.34	3.34	⩽ .001	**Support**
H6	Influence from Fashion Websites	Fashion Involvement	0.46	4.58	⩽ .001	**Support**
H7	Influence from Peers	Fashion Involvement	0.15	1.96	⩽ .05	**Support**

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