

Facing the rising consumer sophistication: The factors motivate Chinese consumers' apparel customization adoption

Chunmin Lang, Louisiana State University, USA; Ruirui Zhang, Framingham State University, USA;
Li Zhao, Indiana University

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Background and Purpose: Notably, consumers' desire for novelty and uniqueness had a great impact on the economic vividness of the fashion industry (Kawamura, 2005). These needs drive consumers to consistently seek new products that differentiate them from others. New goods are purchased frequently and disposed of quickly by consumers, which provide a short-term experience of novelty and newness (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). Apparel customization provides consumers with an option to create their own personalized clothing items. Customized participatory design can increase product longevity because it results into personal attachment from customized styles and well-fitted garments (Armstrong et al. 2015). In addition, customization also makes it possible to adjust production so as to reduce waste (Flynn & Vencat, 2012), since people may prefer keeping the product they feel attached to for longer periods of time. Furthermore, the customization service has become a significant strategy in the development and maintenance of loyal customers. Creative and innovative marketing campaigns can be devised by using customization as a launch pad to obtaining customer attention and loyalty.

The apparel customization has an interactive feature that allows consumers to participate in the process. Perceived enjoyment is critical intrinsic motivation, which encourage consumers to behave in a particular manner (Solomon & Rabolt, 2006), because pleasure and entertainment aspects of shopping are also major motivating reasons for shopping (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). According to the shopping values model developed by Arnold and Reynolds (2003), adventure shopping refers to shopping for excitement or something that just feels different from the ordinary. Value shopping includes shopping for sales and the enjoyment of finding reduced prices. Idea shopping stimulates shoppers who want to learn about new styles and want to keep up with trends by discovering new products and innovations. The co-design process, in itself, conveys adventure and it gets the consumer involved in the process of learning how to obtain new fashion skills. Therefore, these three shopping motivations contribute to consumers' pursuit of apparel customization.

Although a variety of studies have been done on customization, understanding of Chinese consumers' intention toward apparel customization is lacking. By applying the theory of planned behavior (TPB) model, the purpose of the current study is to determine the factors that influence Chinese consumers in pursuing apparel customization.

Research Method: Data were collected in China. An online survey was set up on a Chinese online research website called *Wenjuanxing*. Participants were recruited by sending the survey link to potential participants via *WeChat*, a popular Chinese social media app having over 864 million active users in 2016. A total of 321 usable responses were collected and used in the main analysis. Demographically, the sample was aged 18-35(67.0%), 36-50 (27.7%) and 51-69 (5.3%), with education of some college or lower (20.9%), college graduate (49.2%) and graduate school (29.9%). Regarding income, the sample comprised less than US\$12,000 (26.2%), \$12,001-16,000 (20.7%) and greater than \$16,001 (53.1%). Majority of them were female (63.9%). Multi-item scales were used to evaluate the variables, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale with "1=strongly disagree, to 5 = strongly agree." *Adventure shopping* was measured by two item ($\alpha = .751$). Both *value shopping* ($\alpha = .750$) and *Idea*

shopping ($\alpha = .927$) were measured by three items. Five items were adopted to measure *perceived enjoyment* ($\alpha = .961$). *Perceived behavioral control* ($\alpha = .952$) contained four items. *Subjective norms* ($\alpha = .948$) was measured by three items. *Attitude* ($\alpha = .973$) was measured by five items. In addition, one hypothetical scenario statement was developed for apparel customization, and participants were requested to rate the level of willingness to adopt customization by responding to the question, “I intend to customize my clothing within the next 12 months?”

Results: The confirmatory factory analysis (CFA) results indicated a good model fit ($\chi^2_{(df=254)} = 743.725$, $p < .000$, $\chi^2/df = 2.93$; RMSEA = .078; CFI = .948; TLI = .939; SRMR = .044). All factor loadings were statistically significant as $p < .001$, and in the .549-.964 range. Further, a structural equation model (SEM) was then conducted to examine the influence of adventure shopping, value shopping, idea shopping, perceived enjoyment, attitude, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control on Chinese consumers’ intention to buy customized apparel products. The statistic results revealed an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2_{(df=279)} = 826.414$, $p < .000$, $\chi^2/df = 2.96$; RMSEA = .078; CFI = .943; TLI = .933; SRMR = .051). The outputs demonstrated that adventure shopping was positively associated with subjective norms ($\beta = .144$, $p < .001$) and perceived behavioral control ($\beta = .124$, $p < .022$), but had no effect on attitude ($\beta = .001$, $p < .973$). Similarly, idea shopping was positively related to subjective norms ($\beta = .179$, $p < .001$) and perceived behavioral control ($\beta = .149$, $p < .008$), but not attitude. Value shopping was found to be associated with only subjective norms ($\beta = .124$, $p < .020$), but had no influence on either perceived behavioral control or attitude. In addition, perceived enjoyment was positively related to attitude ($\beta = .935$, $p < .000$), subjective norms ($\beta = .757$, $p < .000$) and perceived behavioral control ($\beta = .609$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, significantly positive relationships were also exhibited between intention toward apparel customization and attitude ($\beta = .225$, $p < .003$), subjective norms ($\beta = .222$, $p < .007$), perceived behavioral control ($\beta = .217$, $p < .001$). Additionally, positive relationships between intention toward apparel customization with idea shopping ($\beta = .112$, $p < .041$) and perceived enjoyment ($\beta = .407$, $p < .018$) were also found among Chinese consumers.

Discussion and Implications: The results point out that shopping values and perceived enjoyment in customization motivate Chinese consumers to participate in apparel customization. Chinese consumers who enjoy the process of customization or co-design have relatively positive attitude towards customized apparel products and are also more likely to get involved in customizing their own apparel products. Additionally, adventure shopping, value shopping and idea shopping also drive subjective norms and perceived behavioral control among Chinese consumers, which further stimulates Chinese consumers to adopt apparel customization. Drawing upon the results of this study, some implications were provided. To encourage more apparel customization among Chinese consumers, enhancing the entertainment aspect of co-design and emphasizing the enjoyment and benefits of learning new fashion ideas would be beneficial for the development of customization businesses.

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