



Do Consumers' Apparel Shopping Orientation Changes? An Exploration of Life Event Influence

Chuanlan Liu, Yang He, Louisiana State University

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Shopping orientation is defined as shopping style, which reflects shoppers' interests, opinions, attitudes, shopping preferences, activities and behaviors prior, during and after the shopping process (Stone, 1954). Investigation of shopping orientation can determine why consumers patronize a particular type of store or choose a particular brand, which can benefit retailers for their marketing planning. Transitional life prior, during, and after experiencing events is critical phase in one's life (Cohen, 1988). Research has documented that transitional life periods are associated with significant changes in consumer behavior in general (e.g., Andreasen, 1984). Experienced or anticipated life events that are related to role transitions and demand for readjustments. Individuals may handle this readjustment by making changes in shopping orientation.

Apparel is a highly symbolic product category and individuals often make assumptions about a person's self-concept simply on the basis of his/her clothing behaviors. Self-concept is a dynamic structure that changes according to individuals' social roles framed by the social surroundings or situations (Solomon & Rabolt, 2004). Consumers' apparel shopping orientations, and patronage and brand preferences may change when social surroundings or situations and their social roles change. Research has suggested the importance of life events on understanding changes in consumer preferences; however, the research on this subject is limited. Relatively little is known about the relationship between life events, apparel shopping orientation, and patronage, brand preferences.

It is important for retailers to understand consumers' apparel shopping orientation change so that they may adjust marketing strategies and operation to better meet consumers' shopping needs during the process of their life transition. To this end, the purpose of this study was to examine whether experienced and anticipated life events change consumers' apparel shopping orientations and their patronage preferences. Based on the review of literature (Andreasen, 1984; Euehun Lee, Moschis, & Mathur, 2001), a research framework was developed to guide empirical exploration (see Figure 1). Research hypotheses were proposed as following: H1: The level of effects from life events experienced will be associated with changes in a consumer's apparel shopping orientation; H2: The level of effects of life events anticipated will be associated with changes in a consumer's apparel shopping orientation; H3: The apparel shopping orientation changes will be associated with the store preference change; and H4: The apparel shopping orientation changes will be associated with the brand preference change.

Graduation can be considered a significant life event to college students because of anticipated role transitions (e.g., student–employee). Graduating seniors from a major university

were recruited to participate in data collection via an online survey. The questionnaire consisted multi-item scales measuring research constructs. A random-selected sample email list was requested from the university's registration office, and 1,200 graduating students were identified and sent the invitation. A total of 279 responses were received with a response rate of 23%. After data cleansing, 190 completed responses were used for the empirical study.

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine the dimensionality of the research construct of apparel shopping orientations. Six dimensions were confirmed including brand conscious, fashion conscious, local store oriented, price conscious, shopping mall oriented, and time conscious. Summit indicators were created for research constructs and further analysis. Correlation coefficients between research variables were obtained to test hypotheses.

Empirical testing showed effects of experienced life event are associated with only changes in the dimension of brand conscious, but not with any other dimensions of shopping orientations while three dimensions of shopping orientations, fashion/appearance conscious, local conscious, and price conscious of apparel shopping changed due to anticipated life events.

Therefore, H1 and H2 were partially supported. The results also showed that changes in brand consciousness, fashion/appearance consciousness had a significant positive influence on changes in store preferences and brand preferences, providing supports to H3 and H4. More specifically, when consumers have increased brand consciousness, their shopping preference to patronage specialty store, local fashion boutique and online shopping, and choosing private labels increase. Findings also showed increases in fashion/appearance consciousness lead to more shopping online and selecting national/designer brands. The research findings indicate that retailers targeting their customers' lifetime value must pay closer attention to their life changes to provide better services and keep and grow their customers' loyalty.

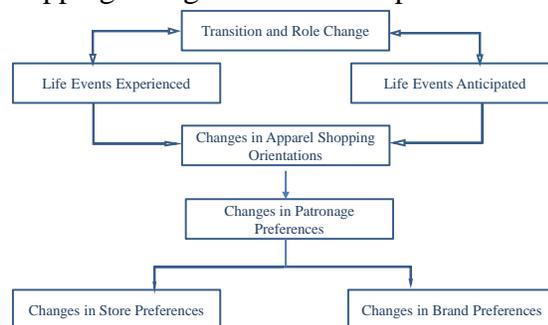


Figure 1. A Conceptual model of consumer changes under life events

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