



Profiling the Frequent Clothing Shopper

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Frequent shoppers are an important segment of consumers for the clothing industry because they account for a disproportionate amount of sales and profits and play an important role in the fashion diffusion process. The purpose of this study was to test hypothesized characteristics that distinguish frequent shoppers clothing from other buyers. We focused on characteristics that have been studied by previous researchers and characteristics that have received less study, but are no less interesting and potentially important to clothing marketing and management.

Previous research shows that frequent clothing buyers tend to be female, younger and to spend more than other buyers (). This study included these variables in order to replicate these findings and to provide confidence in the new findings original to the study. The study contained measures of three additional individual difference characteristics: brand engagement in self-concept (BESC), status consumption (SC), and subjective happiness (SH). BESC describes the tendency of consumers to incorporate brands into their self-images (Sprott et al., 2009). SC represents consumer purchasing in the pursuit of social status (Eastman et al., 1999), and subjective happiness (SH) refers to an individual's positive hedonic state (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). We hypothesized that frequent clothing shoppers score higher on measures of these characteristics than less frequent buyers do based on previous research with students (Goldsmith et al., 2012).

Study data came from a national sample of adults conducted online using Qualtric's online recruitment model. This process uses an online panel of 540,298 consumers dedicated to market research and gives incentives for survey completion reaching a completion rate of 20%. Multi-item measures operationalized BESC, SC, and SH. A five-point scale measured shopping frequency, and a nine-point scale ("Less than \$25 in a typical month" in \$25 increments to "More than \$200 in a typical month") measured clothing spending. Shoppers who scored 3, 4, or 5 on the shopping frequency measure, indicating that they shopped for clothing at least once every two weeks, were designated frequent shoppers (42 or 12%), while the remaining 309 (88%) were designated less frequent shoppers. One hundred, seventy-six men and 175 women completed the questionnaire (n = 351). Of these, 297 (88%) reported they were white, 28 (8%) Black or African-American, 12 were Hispanic, seven were Native American, and six of Asian origin. Ages ranged from 18 to 83 with a median of 54 years (four participants did not report their age). While the median ages for men and women were the same at 54, the means were different. Mean age for women was higher 54.1 versus men, 50.5 ($t_{(345)} = 2.61, p = .009, d = .28$).

Preliminary analyses of the responses to the multi-item scales confirmed that they were unidimensional and possessed adequate internal consistency. We tested the hypothesized

differences in buyers by comparing scores on the other measures between the 42 frequent and 309 less-frequent shoppers.

Cross-tabulation revealed that as expected, women (17%) reported being frequent clothing shoppers more than men did (7%) ($\chi^2_{(1)} = 7.0, p = .008, \phi = .14$). Although not statistically significant ($p = .068$), frequent clothing shoppers did report a younger mean age ($M = 49$ years) than the less frequent shoppers did ($M = 53$ years). The frequent buyers reported spending more on clothing ($M = 4.38$) on the nine-point scale. Frequent clothing shoppers also had higher mean scores on all three of the individual difference characteristics, indicating that they use brands to create and express their self-concepts ($p = .001$), are more likely to acquire social status through consumption ($p < .001$), and are happier ($p = .015$) than less frequent clothing buyers.

These results are consistent with other evidence that frequent clothing buyers tend to be younger women spending more than average on clothing. They suggest that this important segment of frequent apparel shoppers not only spend more, they shop for different reasons. Clothing is a means through which they create and express their self-concepts; clothing is part of who they are, want to be, or present themselves to other people. They appear to seek status through the consumption of clothing. Clothing is an important, visible badge of social standing, so we can surmise that frequent buyers are motivated by status needs to buy a variety of clothing and pay attention the brands they use (BESC and SC were correlated $.57 (p < .001)$). These findings do give important insights into the motives of frequent clothing shoppers. In addition, the finding that they report being happier than less frequent shoppers is quite novel.

The findings have the usual limitations of a single study, although the adult sample and confirmation of previous findings lend them credibility. Most importantly, the findings cannot be used to assert causal relationships among the variables. Whether shopping for clothing leads to happiness or vice versa cannot be determined. Nevertheless, the descriptive findings reported here contribute to our understanding of the important frequent clothing shopper segment to the benefit of clothing consumer behavior theory and clothing management alike.

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