

What's Mine is Yours: Does Fashion Leadership Impede Clothing Renting and Swapping?

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Background and Purpose: The apparel sector plays a significant role in the global economy and has a major impact on the development of sustainability as a whole (Markkula & Moisander, 2012). To maintain profitability and competitiveness, many apparel companies employ a strategy called fast fashion, reliant on frequent purchasing (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007). Consequently, consumers are becoming more fashion sensitive and more demanding of new fashions (Ritch & Schroder, 2012). Approximately 14.3 million tons of textiles now makes its way to landfill (US EPA, 2014), increasing environmental concerns. To approach a sustainable state, consumers must reduce their level of consumption or modify the kinds of goods and services they consume. A number of opportunities, such as providing rental clothing and clothing swapping, have been suggested as alternative revenue streams for the apparel industry as a way to extend the life of and increase the use intensity of clothing products (WRAP, 2011). However, apparel consumption behavior is highly affected by fashion trends, a potential barrier for sustainable consumption.

Fashion leadership is an important concept to consider in sustainable apparel consumption because fashion leaders play a key role in the diffusion of new fashions. Fashion leaders learn about new fashion trends earlier and purchase new fashion items soon after introduction to the market (Goldsmith, Freiden, & Kilsheimer, 1993). A great deal of clothing is discarded because of style or fashion considerations (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007), which is a contradiction to sustainability. Clothing rental and swapping would extend the lifespan of clothing via shared use of same clothing; at the same time, they may be able to satisfy consumers' need for latest fashion trend and newness.

The purpose of this study was to explore the potential influence of fashion leadership on consumers' intention to rent or swap clothing, and to investigate the roles of demographics, including age, income and education, in this relationship. The findings of this study will provide a better understanding about the relationship between fashion leadership and clothing renting and swapping behaviors. This understanding will contribute to future strategies used to promote clothing renting and swapping business.

Methods: A convenience sampling strategy was utilized. An online survey was set up in Qualtrics. Female consumers are generally more involved in fashion products (O' Cass, 2004), so women who are living in the United States were recruited for this study. To develop a sample representative, a consumer panel of the target population was purchased from an online research firm. Data cleaning yielded a final usable sample size of 431 out of 552 returned responses, with overall completion rate of 78.08%. Scales were developed to measure fashion leadership. Two hypothetical scenario statements were developed for clothing renting and swapping, and participants were requested to rate the level of willingness of adopt each of them by responding to the question, "I intend to purchase or consider renting clothing (attending clothing swap event) during the next 12 months?" All items were measured utilizing a 6-point Likert scale 1= "strongly disagree" to 6= "strongly agree." Demographic information were also collected, including age (18-34=31.1%; 35-49=33.9%; 50-68=35.0%); income (<US \$39,999=23.4%; US \$40,000-US \$79,999=34.8%; >US\$80,000= 41.7%; education level (Some college or lower=42.9%; College graduate=36.9%; Graduate school=20.2%); ethnicity

(Caucasian/white=82.1%; Asian/Pacific Islander=6.5%; African American/Black=4.4%; Hispanic Latino= 4.4%).

Fashion leadership: participants completed a four-item survey asking about their interest in fashion trends, responding to items such as, “I am aware of fashion trends and want to be one of the first to try them” and “I am confident in my ability to recognize fashion trends.” Alpha = .936. *Clothing renting scenario*: a clothing library provides a rental service for consumers to rent certain number of garments for a short time. *Clothing swapping scenario*: tickets are sold for a clothing swap event, where consumers can bring some un-wanted clothing that are in good condition to swap with others.

Findings: Structural equation modeling was applied to examine the influence of fashion leadership on the intention to adopt clothing renting and swapping. The fit statistics indicate a great model fit ($\chi^2_{(df=8)}=19.173$, $p=0.014$; RMSEA=0.057; CFI=0.994; TLI=0.989; SRMR=0.013). Significantly positive relationships were found between fashion leadership and clothing renting ($\beta=0.216$, $p<0.000$) and clothing swapping ($\beta=0.157$, $p<0.017$), which indicates that participants with a higher level of fashion leadership would be more likely to rent clothing or swap their clothing with others. Moreover, clothing renting was positively correlated with clothing swapping ($r=0.568$, $p<0.000$), suggesting that people who like to rent clothing would also like clothing swapping. Further, multi-group Chi-square difference test indicated the three demographics age ($\chi^2_{diff}=35.182$, $df_{diff}=30$, $p<0.035$), income ($\chi^2_{diff}=45.48$, $df_{diff}=30$, $p<0.008$), and education ($\chi^2_{diff}=41.29$, $df_{diff}=30$, $p<0.015$) all have significant moderating effect on the relationship between fashion leadership with clothing renting and swapping. Fashion leadership is most prominent in the intention to adopt clothing swapping for people who are aged 50-68, have less education and income lower than US\$39,999; for participants who aged 18-34 and 50-68, income lower than US\$39,999 and higher than US\$80,000, have less education and graduate degree, fashion leadership plays significant role in their intention to rent clothing.

Discussion: The study points out that fashion leadership stimulates interest in clothing renting and swapping, but for people in different age groups or income and education levels, the influence of fashion leadership varies. For those who are interested in fashion trends with less income, price might be a crucial factor they will consider when it comes to purchasing. Thus, to appeal to these consumers, an ideal marketing strategy might be to focus on the cost savings, satisfying the need for newness by swapping clothing. Clothing renting retailers could highlight that renting could provide the latest fashion items with a relatively low price. Fashion-related magazines and websites would be ideal advertising approach to appeal to those consumers.

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