



Brand Perception and Repurchase Intent in Online Apparel Shopping

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Introduction. With increasing use of online apparel shopping, consumers have become price and product savvy, and competition among online retailers has intensified. To create competitive advantages and develop strategies to satisfy and retain customers, brand companies need more specific, research-based information about online shoppers' repurchase behaviors with brand apparel. Repeat purchases are critical to the success of brand companies. According to Daly (2002), obtaining a new customer costs 10 times more than retaining an existing customer. In the online apparel shopping context, repeat shoppers spend 67% more on average than new customers (Drew, 2012). However, apparel research for online shopping has focused on apparel shoppers' initial purchase behaviors rather than repeat purchases. The research in brand repurchase intent of online apparel shopping is even more rare. To fill this void in the research, this study examined the effects of types of consumers' brand perception on their brand repurchase intent in online apparel shopping.

Framework and Hypotheses Development. To understand consumers' brand perception and its effects, this study integrated relevant theories (i.e., brand synthesis theory, schema theory, image congruence theory, trust-commitment theory) and previous empirical findings reflecting the approaches of experimental, symbolic, emotional/affective, and cognitive psychological research in the literature. Within this theoretical framework, four types of brand perception were proposed as potential antecedents of brand repurchase intent in online apparel shopping: (a) brand experience (i.e., consumers' experience with the brand), (b) brand image-congruence (i.e., consistency between the image of the brand and consumers' own self-image), (c) brand affect (i.e., consumers' affective feelings about the brand, and (d) brand trust (i.e., consumers' trust in purchasing the brand products online). Eight hypotheses were formed to examine the interrelationships between the four types of brand perception and their effects on brand repurchase intent in online apparel shopping. Although these four constructs have been investigated individually in previous studies, no study was found that examined these constructs in relation to each other in either the initial or in repurchase online decision process.

Methods and Data Analysis. This research is a quantitative study using an online survey. A national sample of consumers was recruited by a marketing research company. The recruitment criteria for selecting the participants of the current study were residents in the United States, age 20 and older, who had experience with buying apparel products online within the last six months. Using previous research, a questionnaire was developed for data collection. Face validity of each item (i.e., extent to which content of the items is consistent with the construct definition) was

checked by three apparel and two marketing researchers. The questionnaire was pilot tested twice using convenience samples ($n = 75$ and 34) in various age ranges.

A total of usable 217 responses were received. Before testing the model, the multivariate normality of the data distribution was examined. The results showed that the critical ratio of Mardia's multivariate kurtosis was 44.73, which was greater than 3, indicating that the data set was not normally distributed. Therefore, a bootstrapping technique was used because it can correct for the standard error and bias in fit statistic that occur in the structural equation model (SEM) analysis due to data non-normality. Bias-corrected bootstrap method with a 95% confidence interval was used to adjust for bias. As with the traditional chi-square test of model fit, a non-significant Bollen-Stine corrected p value (i.e., $p > .05$) suggests good model fit.

Results. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to examine if the data fits the measurement model for the five constructs (i.e., four perception types and brand repurchase intent) in the proposed model. After one item within the brand image-congruity construct was removed, the Bollen-Stine bootstrap result showed a p value of .07, indicating that the model fulfilled the good-of-fit criterion (i.e., $p > .05$). Convergent validity and discriminant validity of the measures were verified.

The result of Bollen-Stine bootstrap for the SEM showed $p = .08$, greater than .05, indicating a good model fit. Six of the eight hypotheses were statistically supported. Brand experience and brand image-congruence were significant antecedents of brand affect. Of the two non-significant hypotheses, brand experience did not have a direct relationship with brand trust or with brand repurchase intent. Brand image-congruence and brand affect were significant antecedents of brand trust. Brand image-congruence and brand trust were significant antecedents of brand repurchase intent in online apparel shopping. The variance explained by these two antecedents was 68%. The indirect and total effects of each type of brand perception were also examined. The results of total effects showed that brand trust had the most significant effect on repurchase intent, followed by brand image-congruence, brand affect, and then brand experience.

Discussion and Marketing Implications. The results showed that brand experience played a dominate role in creating a positive emotional connection with a brand. When consumers perceived the brand image as congruent with their self-image, they considered the brand as more likable and trustable. When congruence with a brand was present, consumers were more likely to repurchase the brand products. Brand affect was the most important factor in influencing consumers' trust in the brand. If they felt the brand was more likable, they trusted the brand more. Among the four types of brand perception, brand trust, as measured by the results of total effects, was the most significant determinant of consumers' apparel brand repurchase intent in the online shopping environment. The findings of this study support that a holistic brand management approach allows researchers and marketers to understand the interaction between dimensions of brand perception and their combined effects on repurchase intent. To increase brand repurchase intent, brand experience, affective emotional connection, perceived brand image-congruence, and brand trust all need to be considered and incorporated into the strategic planning framework to develop holistic consumer-oriented managerial strategies.