

Access-Based Fashion Consumption and Consumer Happiness

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Global access-based consumption revenues are expected to increase from \$15 billion in 2014 to over \$335 billion by 2025 (Zhuo, 2015). Among the various access-based service categories, access business models in the fashion industry have achieved noteworthy success in recent years. Despite the growing practical importance, studies on access-based consumption in the fashion industry are still limited. One theory that could provide an interesting perspective on access-based fashion consumption is the Experience Recommendation Theory (Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009). This theory proposes that consumers are more satisfied, have greater subjective well-being, and feel happier after spending money on experiences, rather than on material goods (Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). One of the psychological explanations for the superiority of experiential purchases relative to material purchases is the close connection between experiential purchases and a person's sense of self (Carter & Gilovich, 2010). To understand the applicability of the Experience Recommendation Theory in the context of access-based fashion consumption, three experiments were conducted. Research participants were limited to American female millennials because this group is the primary target audience of access-based fashion services.

Study 1 employed a single factor (material vs. experiential framing) between-subjects experimental design ($n=148$). Participants were asked to think about the item they had rented and to focus on its material features (i.e., material framing) or experiential features (i.e., experiential framing). Study 2 employed a two (framing: material vs. experiential) x two (consumption type: renting vs. buying) between-subjects experimental design. A final sample of 201 participants ($M_{age} = 29.12$, $SD = 4.50$) was randomly assigned to one of four conditions by asking to imagine that they were attending a friend's wedding and had decided to rent (or buy) a dress from an online clothing store focusing on the material elements of the dress (i.e., material framing) or the experience of wearing it (i.e., experiential framing). In addition, study 3 employed a two (framing: material vs. experiential) x two (product type: terminal vs. instrumental) between-subjects experimental design. A final sample of 128 participants ($M_{age} = 29.82$, $SD = 4.49$) was randomly assigned to one of four conditions by asking to imagine that they rented a formal outfit for a party (i.e., terminal condition) or rented a projector for a

business meeting (i.e., instrumental condition) focusing on the material elements of the object (i.e., material framing) or the experience of using it (i.e., experiential framing).

Across three studies, this research showed that when the rented fashion products' material features, rather than their experiential features, were highlighted, people perceived the products as closer to their sense of self and felt greater happiness. However, this is only for terminal products. Terminal products, such as fashion products, which themselves serve as primary sources of happiness, the associated material qualities and benefits may strengthen their ability to increase the hedonic consequence (Csikszentmihalyi & Halton, 1981). For instrumental products, such as electronic devices, that offer little variability in style or symbolic value to enable us to differentiate ourselves from others, thus, the important factor would be the occasion and experience, such as enjoyable time with loved ones. Thus, the Experience Recommendation Theory still holds true in the instrumental condition. This research deepens our understanding of the Experience Recommendation Theory by examining the interactions between the material/experiential framing approaches and the renting vs. purchasing consumption modes and the terminal vs. instrumental product types. This research highlights the importance of material framing in managing the ambiguity of access-based fashion consumption to generate positive consumer responses.

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