

Development of Fashion Product Evaluation (FPE) Framework

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Background. To develop successful products, it is important to understand how consumers perceive and evaluate apparel and what criteria they use in the process. Product attributes or cues consumers use to examine apparel and make purchase decisions are known as evaluative criteria (Abraham-Muralli & Littrell, 1995; Eckman et. al, 1990; Jeong & Lee, 2014; Swinker & Hines, 2006). Examination of various apparel evaluative criteria and existing classifications reveal an array of overlapping and unclear categories and dimensions of product attributes. The **purpose of this research** was to develop an integrated and comprehensive classification system that can be effectively used by researchers and industry professionals for development and evaluation of fashion products.

A common approach for classifying apparel evaluative criteria is to group them into: (a) *intrinsic criteria*, or attributes that are inherent, physical part of product (e.g., fiber content, color); and (b) *extrinsic criteria*, which are not a physical part of product (e.g., price, brand). Extrinsic criteria are also referred to as retailer- or manufacturer-defined attributes (Forney, Park & Brandon, 2005). However, extrinsic criteria category has also included attributes like ‘approval of others’ or ‘coordination with wardrobe’ (Eckman et al., 1990), which are consumer-ascribed attributes. Similarly, under the intrinsic category, some researchers have included only product structural and physical attributes, such as fiber content and construction (e.g., Swinker & Hines, 2006), whereas others included product performance attributes such as comfort and fit (e.g., Jeong & Lee, 2014).

More complex classification approaches have also been proposed in an attempt to organize the multitude of apparel evaluative criteria (Abraham-Murali & Littrell, 1995; Eckman et al., 1990; Fiore & Damhorst, 1992; Fiore & Ogle, 2000). Existing frameworks used different classification logic and rules, which often were not justified. A need for a comprehensive and systematic classification approach that integrates and logically organizes various apparel evaluative criteria and clarifies the descriptions and labeling of both criteria and categories is apparent.

FPE Framework. Based on a systematic review and analysis of extant research on apparel evaluative criteria, a new framework for Fashion Product Evaluation (FPE) was developed (Figure). FPE framework integrates all apparel evaluative criteria

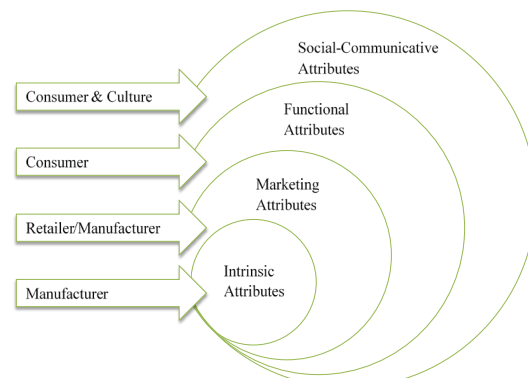


Figure. Dimensions and interactions in Fashion Product Evaluation (FPE) framework.

into four clearly defined dimensions. Following procedural steps for theory development (Hunt, 2002), law-like generalizations and propositions were formulated to define each dimension and guide the classification of evaluative criteria.

First, evaluative criteria identified from extant research through content analysis were recorded, evaluated and constantly compared to other criteria, helping to clarify them and eliminate redundancies. For example, situational appropriateness, appropriateness, and appropriateness to lifestyle attributes were combined under the suitability attribute. Next, the final list of the distinct evaluative criteria were grouped into two broad categories: *tangible* and *intangible* criteria. Finally, tangible and intangible criteria were categorized into four mutually exclusive dimensions (Table).

All *tangible* criteria constitute one dimension: *intrinsic attributes*. These are inherent, tangible parts of a product (e.g., color, shape), and changing any of them would physically alter the product. These attributes relate to product appearance, composition,

and structure and are observable or perceivable through senses. Intrinsic attributes are defined by producers and retailers during product development and manufacturing stages.

Intangible criteria were classified into three distinct dimensions: marketing attributes, functional attributes, and social-communicative attributes (Table). *Marketing attributes* are defined by retailers or manufacturers and aid in promoting and selling products: price, brand, country of origin, service, etc. *Functional attributes* are instrumental outcomes of consumer-product interaction during product evaluation and use: durability, quality, comfort, protection, etc. Functional attributes are enabled by intrinsic criteria. For example, a thicker fabric of a certain fiber content (intrinsic attributes) can enable greater durability and protection from harsh weather.

Social-communicative attributes relate to product symbolic and communicative aspects. They allow consumers to express or communicate their identities, values, beliefs in the process of social interactions. This dimension includes attributes such as fashionability, pleasing to others, suitability, and uniqueness. Social-communicative attributes are enabled through complex interactions of tangible and intangible product attributes and mediated by culture. Consumers go through complex mental and intuitive processes to make inferences about social-communicative product attributes, synthesizing information about tangible and intangible product attributes and interpreting them through the lenses of societal and cultural norms.

Table. Fashion Product Evaluation (FPE) framework

Tangible Attributes	Intangible Attributes			
	Intrinsic	Marketing	Functional	Social-communicative
Color/pattern	Brand	Comfort	Fashionability	
Construction	Country of origin	Durability	Pleasing to others	
Design features	Ethics/ social responsibility	Fit	Suitability	
Materials	Price	Performance	Uniqueness/ novelty	
Shape/silhouette	Service	Protection/safety	Identity/status	
Style		Versatility		

Conclusions and Implications. FPE framework is the first to integrate apparel evaluative criteria into a comprehensive classification system consisting of four mutually exclusive dimensions. Each dimension is enabled by different interactions between product, producer, consumer, and society/culture. The framework was tested by using it to examine consumer perceptions of an innovative fashion product, utilizing focus groups. The dimensions of the framework were successfully used to guide the focus group discussions as well as to analyze and categorize the findings.

The framework can be useful for examining consumer perceptions, evaluations, and decision-making processes related to fashion products such as clothing, footwear, and accessories. It can help to identify gaps between consumer needs and existing products, resulting in new or improved products that address consumer expectations. The framework also helps to clarify and simplify the use of evaluative criteria by researchers and practitioners.

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