



Investigating Consumers' Online Clothing Buying Behavior through the Lens of Extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and the Use of Technology

Md. Abdullahil Kafi, Doctoral Candidate and Bruce Cameron, PhD, Louisiana State University

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Background of the Study

The apparel industry has experienced a boom in online shopping. Globally, apparel is among the most frequently purchased online items (Wollenburg, Hübner, Kuhn, & Trautrim, 2018). In North America alone, online apparel sales accounted for approximately \$102.8 billion in 2018, and are projected to reach \$138.7 billion by 2022 (Statista, 2019). To effectively plan their marketing strategy, brands need to understand why consumers are increasingly making their apparel purchases online.

Consumer behavioral studies are widely accepted as an effective and efficient tool to examine why consumers exhibit a certain behavior and have been used as a basis for strategic planning (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). An abundance of literature exists investigating online apparel consumer behavior. Most of these studies have used the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) or the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as a framework for their investigation. Both TPB and TAM have been criticized for not capturing many important characteristics specific to online shopping (Ingham, Cadieux & Berrada, 2015).

To better understand why consumers are choosing to purchase their apparel online, this study employed a relatively new theoretical model, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2). The UTAUT2 is a combination of eight social and behavioral science theories that capture both the utilitarian and hedonic need aspects of a consumers' behavioral intention to use technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003, 2012). In the field of Information and Communication Technology, the conceptual framework of UTAUT2 has attained popularity and is known as a rational theoretical approach (Williams et al., 2015). It is important for both researchers and online vendors to understand online customers have double identities as both shoppers and technology users (Wen, Prybutok & Xu, 2011). Therefore, for this study UTAUT2 was adopted and its use expanded to the apparel sector to better understand consumers' online shopping behavior.

Methods and Procedure

This study sought to investigate antecedents of consumers' intention to buy apparel online using a quazi-mixed method research approach framed by UTAUT2. An online survey consisting of 32 Likert scale questions adopted from Venkatesh et al., (2012), and 6 open ended questions with essay length response capability were used to investigate the intention to buy apparel online. Exploratory Factor Analysis was used to test the scale. Cross loaded items with a Cronbach alpha less than 0.7 were dropped. Resulting in the final scale reliability of 0.80.

Participants were recruited from a pool of marketing students at a research university in the southern US. Data was collected over a two month period of time. Quantitative data were analyzed

using the software 'Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 25.0' version. Open ended responses were analyzed and coded using 'NVivo 11 Pro' software version, guided by constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Result and Discussion

A total of 251 (158 female and 93 male) participants completed the online survey. Eighty percent of participants were aged 20 to 27 years. Analysis revealed among eight predictor variables (perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, social influence, facilitating condition, hedonic motivation, habit, price value, perceived risk), five variables (perceived usefulness, social influence, perceived risk, habit and price value concern) significantly affected the consumers' intention to use online shopping for their purchases. Rotated Factor Matrix of Principal Axis Factoring results indicated that 81% of behavioral intent to purchase online was explained by the five factors of: perceived usefulness, perceived risk, social influence, habit, and price value. The factor of "perceived usefulness" was found to explain more than 37 % of the total variance. The remaining variance was explained by perceived risk (19%), social influence (11%), habit (8%) and price value (7%).

55 participants chose to answer the open-ended questions. The qualitative findings corroborated the quantitative findings of why consumers purchase their apparel online. The most frequently discussed themes were: convenience (76%), cost comparison ability (54%), finding the best price value (43%), larger product assortment (22%), and faster shopping process (15%). The qualitative data also revealed why some consumers do not purchase apparel online. The reasons included: inability to try on and feel, assessing the size and fit, return policy, and shipping charge. When discussing the type of apparel consumers are comfortable purchasing online shirts, underwear, shoes, and socks were the most frequently mentioned items. Bottoms (both pants and skirts) and dresses were the most frequently mentioned items that consumers were reluctant to purchase online due to size and fitting issues. Findings suggested that consumers' antecedents to buy apparel online were mostly driven by utilitarian needs. The constructs captured by the UTAUT2 theory were found to closely align to the themes that emerged from participants' responses. However, the construct of perceived risk which is not covered by UTAUT2 was frequently mentioned by participants.

This study adds to the current literature by expanding the use of the UTAUT2 theory as a framework to investigate online apparel consumer behavior. However, it is suggested that future studies incorporate the construct of 'perceived risk' to better understand consumer concerns. This research was conducted with a limited number of college students. Therefore, it is suggested that further research with a larger and more diverse population be conducted to assess the usefulness of UTAUT2 in the context of online apparel shopping. From an industry standpoint it uncovered that online retailers need to address utilitarian aspects of their website including: appropriate product display, competitive pricing, ease of navigation, and security of the web platform. Additionally, retailers should work hard to build a trusted online consumer community to boost their word of mouth marketing strategy.

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