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Female Millennials Buying Behaviour in Apparel Products

¹D Poorani, ²C Gomathi

^{1,2} PhD Scholar, Department of Business Administration, Anamalai University, Tamilnadu, India

Corresponding Author: **D Poorani**

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore how the Millennials attributes occur during apparel purchasing decisions through social interactions. Also, this research investigates concerns generated from interactions with others when consuming apparel behaviour. An exploratory investigation was undertaken with millennials using an online survey that included open and closed questions. Qualitative data revealed positive relationships between consumers' social interactions and purchases of apparel products online. Specifically, information searches through social interactions with trusted individuals utilizing online channels were found to validate purchasing decisions and attributes with purchasing apparel products online.

However, consumers were also concerned with certain interactions due to the lack of credibility regarding reviewers, channels, and conflicting information. These findings provide an insight into millennial consumers' learning processes through consumer-to-consumer interactions in social media environments for apparel purchases. As online and mobile shopping along with consumers' social media usage for interacting continue to increase, these research findings guide retailers how to turn their attention to investing and utilizing these channels to enhance millennial consumers' positive purchasing behaviour.

Keywords: Millennials, Interaction, Buying Behaviour, Apparel Products

1. Introduction

Globally, apparel is the most popular product category in online retail, projected to grow from \$60 billion in 2015 to \$86.4 billion by 2018 in the U.S. (*Statista*, 2016a). Among all age groups, Millennials, born between 1980 and 2000, are the primary consumer group in the online apparel market. They represent the only age group whose median income will grow over the next five years (Makortoff, 2015), allowing them expansive, future purchasing power. Besides having grown up with e-technologies, Millennials are comfortable with technical and online shopping environments than other older generations. Millennials constitute over half of those intending to purchase online. However, Millennials, like other consumers, have perceived risks in shopping for apparel products online. Since purchasing online apparel does not provide fitting, size and comfort can be problematic and negatively influence buyers' attitudes and behaviors toward apparel products and online retailers (Yu, Lee, & Damhorst, 2012).

However, Millennials still shop for apparel products online more than any other consumer age group. In 2014, 81% of Millennials shopped for apparel products online (*Statista*, 2016b) compared with around 55% of other consumers who shopped for apparel products online in the U.S. (Hook Logic, 2016) possibly due to online social behaviors. Millennials conduct more information searches for online products than older consumers (Patricia, Victor, & Stanley, 2005) and also engage with other consumers as well as company representatives when consuming products and services on social networks (Schawbel, 2015). According to Schawbel, these networks and blogs are their pre-purchasing information sources. It is also believed social interactions between online consumers provide helpful information and minimize perceived risk in online apparel shopping. Consequently, interacting with other consumers may make this age group distinctive from other consumer segments and relieve perceived risks in shopping for apparel products online. However, previous research had focused on Millennials' online social interaction or online apparel shopping behaviors and has not specifically explored the purchase decision process for alleviating perceived risks to purchase apparel products through interactions. This is despite the fact this age group heavily relies on e-technology to communicate and is an important, large, prospective market segment in apparel industry.

2. Related work

Theoretical Framework

Social learning theory offers an explanation of learning through social interaction processes and behaviors (Bandura, 1977). This theory provides a theoretical framework for understanding how individuals' norms, attitudes, motivations, and decisions to engage in certain behaviors are influenced by the social learning processes: (1) operational and (2) reinforcement (Bandura, 1977, 2001). Operational learning refers to the process individuals observe and learn from others' behaviors. Reinforcement learning refers to the process individuals learn when observing their behavior consequences; positive outcomes cause repeated behaviors, which lead them to avoid needless, costly errors before they evolve into negative behaviors (Bandura, 2001).

When applying the social learning theory to online consumer research, one sees how consumers' social learning evolves through interpersonal communication with other consumers, which in turn shapes cognitive and affective attitudes and behaviors and is delineated by previous research. Specifically, interactions among consumers who purchase the same products provide operational and reinforcement learning to consumers who share attitudes, purchasing behaviors, and outcomes of the behaviors. Consequently, it helps consumers to better understand apparel products online which they have not found in physical environments and minimizes the perceived risks in online apparel shopping. Also, online consumers use a variety of social media tools (i.e., emails, text message, social network websites) to discuss their apparel purchasing with people they know in offline areas, in addition to anonymous consumers in online communities or forums, before purchasing apparel products (Angela & Neil, 2017). Consumers actively seek product reviews from other consumers, which, in turn, help reduce risks associated with online shopping (Kulmala, 2011). For example, according to Cheung, Liu, and Lee (2015), observing peer members' postings and reinforcement through peer members' recommendations in online apparel social shopping communities facilitates consumers' communication about apparel products. Also, Wang *et al.*

3. Review of literature

Vishal Khasgiwala & Monica Sainy in their study titled "Gender disparity wise study of Impulsive buying behavior and exploratory tendencies of youth in central India", impulsive buying behaviour is experimented. Impulsive buying is a common behavior today and can occur in any setting. Much of the human activity is driven by impulses that are biochemically & psychologically stimulated. Beatty and Ferrell described that Impulse buying refers to immediate purchases which are without any pre-shopping objective either to purchase the specific product category or to fulfill a specific need. It is not consciously planned, but arises immediately upon confrontation with certain stimulus. India Being a transitional economy technological boom such as television shopping channels and the Internet expand consumers' impulse purchasing opportunities, increasing both the accessibility to products and services and the ease with which impulse purchases can be made. Impulse buying is an unplanned purchase that is characterized by relatively rapid decision-making, and a subjective bias in favor of immediate possession.

Dastidar & Datta (2009). In this study it was found that, relationship present gender wise between both the variable and influence of exploratory tendencies on impulsive buying behavior on in young female is higher than young male. It reveals that, variety seeking, risk taking/innovativeness, and curiosity motivated behavior in young female is higher result spontaneous buying behavior. While study shows that, in male it is very lower. The population in the age-group of 15-34 increased from 353 million in 2001 to 430 million in 2011. Current predictions suggest a steady increase in the youth population to 464 million by 2021. By 2020, India is set to become the world's youngest country with 64 per cent of its population in the working age group (The Hindu, 17 April 2013).

Sathish and A. Rajamohan (2012). In their study Consumer behaviour and buying behaviour marketing, a general approach of consumer is taken. A consumer's buying behaviour is seen as the sum of his interactions with his environment. Buying behaviour studies are a component of the broader behavioural concept called psychographics." Harold W. Berkman and Christopher Gilson define buying behaviour as "unified" patterns of behaviour that both determine and are determined by consumption. The term "unified patterns of behaviour" refers to behaviour in its broadest sense. Attitude formation and such internal subjective activities may not be observable, but they are behaviour nonetheless. Buying behaviour is an integrated system of a person's attitudes, values, interests, opinions and his over behaviour. It is found in this study that "Consumer behaviour is still a young discipline and most of the research now available has been generalised only during the past fifteen years or so. Innovations such as the buying behaviour concept and AIO research represent ways to move the study of consumers away from isolated, often unrelated projects towards broader integrated systems and research techniques.

Rashmi Bansal (2007), in her article defined urban youth as youth marketers of today in India and not as per the version of sociologists and media men who relate it to the statistics of men under the age of 25. Youth could be defined as a potent and cultural force, the consumers of today and the growth engines of tomorrow. This study concentrates on the aspirations, inspiration and perspiration of urban Indian youth and not on the response of the youth's choice of either Western or Indian styles or the cultural values. There is little doubt that increasing affluence would lead to radical choices for the future generations.

Priyanka Mehra (2009) in her article mentions that youth have always been a prime target for marketers. More so in India now, as two-thirds of the population is below 35 years of age. According to MindShare Insights, the research divisions of a media buying agency MindShare, 65%, or over 700 million Indians, are younger than 35 years. This segment has an influence on consumer spending far in excess of its numerical strength. Nine million people in the age group of 12-25 years from the top 35 cities (one million plus population) in India are the ones setting the trends and raising the aspiration value for one-billion-plus Indians, reports Mind Share Insights.

4. Methodology

In order to achieve the article's objectives, a quantitative market research was conducted. This was made from the point of view of apparel market companies which identified

an important marketing opportunity to diversify the product range and want to find out more information on the customers' behavior and their attitude toward the apparel product elements of design. The main objective of this research is to determine the female buying behaviour on apparel products through online shopping. This study was conducted using a convenience sample from female between the age group 25 to 49. The questionnaire through an online survey website,

5. Results and discussion

A qualitative method approach was used to (1) Examine how interactions with other customers can reduce perceived

risks associated with the decision-making process for buying clothing, and (2) identify issues with online communication to reduce perceived hazards that customers confront when purchasing for clothing online. An online survey was developed to collect qualitative data to capture rich data from Millennials. Participants were provided instructions to write reflective essays, based on their online apparel shopping experiences through open-ended questions that are what kind of concerns do you have when you shop apparel products online? How do you solve these concerns as you interact with other customers' reviews? The last part of the survey included demographic questions, such as age, gender, etc.

Table 1: Survey respondents' demographic characteristics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage	
Gender	Female	72	89.60%
Income	Below Rs.15,000	26	32.50%
	Rs.15,000 -20,000	12	13.20%
	Rs.25,000 -30,000	15	19.50%
	Rs.35,000-40,000	12	13.20%
	Above Rs.50,000	17	21.20%
Products	Apparel designs	68	79.20%
	Others	15	20.80%
Have purchased online	Yes	83	98%
	No	7	1.20%
Product review	overall purchasing online	79	99%
	Apparel purchasing online	79	99%

Note. A total of 80 surveys aged between 18 to 25 (mean.21.58, SD.1.36)

6. Conclusion and future scope

This study also confirmed that Millennials interact through diverse social media channels (Angela & Neil, 2017), findings in this study revealed that Millennials are cognizant of the differences in information they obtain through social interactions in learning environments of independent parties versus commercially produced advertisements from brands or retailers. Millennials selectively interact with like-minded consumers or opinion leaders in non-business channels for social learning purposes.

Findings from qualitative data provide evidence that consumers' social interactions (i.e., seek information about products and services from other consumers via diverse social media channels) positively influence their apparel purchasing online, therefore aligning with previous research (Angela & Neil, 2017; Cheung *et al.*, 2015; Cui *et al.*, 2012; Kulmala, 2011; Wang *et al.*, 2012). In specific, findings from qualitative data demonstrated how social learning through information searches, online reviews, social interactions with trusted individuals, and/or channels alleviate risks consumers perceive during apparel purchasing online. These findings provide insight into Millennials' social learning through interacting with others, impact on their purchasing decisions, and evaluation of their online processes.

To overcome perceived risks of purchasing apparel products online such as visual, tactile, and trial risk (Yu *et al.*, 2012), Millennials prefer visual information, such as enhanced mobile photos or video sharing applications, which allow consumers to indirectly experience products by watching reviewers' demonstrations of products. These sources communicate more useful information as opposed to solely relying on written content. This could be related to Millennials' reliance on mobile-technologies for

communication which are comprised of visually enhanced media channels.

Additionally, this study revealed social learning effects may not be maintained when Millennials experience doubt about the credibility of an individual or a channel they interact. Unlike previous research that asserted of less credibility online reviews (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Sher & Lee, 2009), most of Millennials have shared product reviews online for overall purchasing. However, reviews with unintelligible, unreliable, unusable information, or those with low credibility of content can negatively influence Millennials' social learning. Therefore, concerns arise through these interactions with diverse social media channels (i.e., blogs, social network websites, review sites) and could negatively impact Millennials' social learning processes and ultimately their online apparel purchasing decisions. Combining findings endow with impediments of social learning online. Consequently, this study asserts social interactions with other consumers could increase apparel product purchases online, but could also prevent purchases, due to concerns of credibility issues around the information, interactions, and/or shared content.

This study provides a theoretical framework for understanding the processes underlying the development of consumer-to-consumer interactions for apparel purchase decision-making in social media environments based on social learning theory. As consumers' online, mobile shopping, and social media usage for interacting and sharing pre-, current-, and post-purchasing experiences continue to increase, retailers and brands turn their attention to investing in the utilization of these channels to enhance consumers' positive online purchasing experiences. Consequently, an understanding of the cognitive and behavioral underpinnings of consumers' social interactions on social media becomes

essential. With qualitative approach, this research offers a theoretical explanation for how consumers learn from each other through social interaction in online environments without face-to-face interactions in a more traditional apparel shopping environment. Specifically, this research revealed consumers facilitate operational learning and reinforcement learning as they interact with others to alleviate perceived risks in the absence of product trials in a store environment. Subsequently, consumers show reciprocal social learning in the form of learning from other consumers' product reviews and services, but also through sharing their learning, as well as sharing their product reviews, and confirming their purchasing behaviors with others. However, consumers selectively learn and accept reviews by others, based on self-determined credibility toward source information (i.e., reviewer, channel, contents).

This research further extends implications of social learning literature into marketing within the scope of social media. Both social media operational and reinforcement learning capabilities create an ideal platform for generating reciprocal interactions and learning among consumers. Both consumer-to-consumer interactions and learning could be built and strengthened by the findings from this study in combination with other factors, such as anonymous reviews, as well through the credibility of individuals in social media.

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