Issues in Business Management and Economics Vol.4 (2), pp. 18-23, March 2016
Available online at http://www.journalissues.org/IBME/
http://dx.doi.org/10.15739/IBME.16.003
Copyright © 2016 Author(s) retain the copyright of this article
ISSN 2350-157X

Original Research Article

Attributes of fashion clothing among female undergraduate students in tertiary institutions in South-West Nigeria

Received 16 February, 2016 Revised 23 March, 2016 Accepted 25 March, 2016 Published 26 March, 2016

Oladele, Patrick Olajide and *Ogundipe, Christie Folake

Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

*Corresponding Author Email: folakeogundipe14@gmail.com

Tel.: +2348109008142

This paper focuses on certain attributes used by female students when assessing fashion clothing in tertiary institution in Nigeria. The main objective of the research paper was to examine the attributes of fashion clothing. Both qualitative (focus group discussion) and quantitative (multistage questionnaire survey) research were employed. A questionnaire survey was conducted on 1,300 respondents in selected seven public Universities in Southwest Nigeria. Data collected were analyzed using conjoint analysis. Based on findings of this study, it was ascertained that the choice of fashion clothing by female university students was highly stimulated by fit and high fashion style.

Keywords: Fashion clothing, product attributes, branding, colour, fit and style

INTRODUCTION

In the highly competitive fashion market, a firm must deliver to the market a product that will be chosen by the consumer for purchase among any alternatives available. The Engel et al model of the consumer purchase decision process shows that consumers choose from among alternative products based on evaluative criteria, or particular product attributes (Engel et al., 1995). Therefore, like many other items, fashion clothing is composed of many physical characteristics; which are perceived differently by various consumers. When considering a product purchase, consumers tend to compare and contrast alternative products made up of different attribute combinations. Their preferences for fashion clothing may depend on the joint influence of price and product attributes such as quality, style, and brand. However, the presence of different brands has created a competitive environment unheard of in the past (Rutter and Edwards, 1999).

Adolescents and young adults have long recognized the significance of clothing as a signal to connectedness in order to distinguish themselves from others. These groups of young people adopt styles of clothing that express their particular distinct identity. Past researchers examine different attributes and product features that deliver a desired consumer benefit (Babin and Harris, 2009). The importance of product level of attribute has also investigated in several studies (Kahle, 1986; Shim and Kotsiopulos, 1992; Shim and Bickle, 1994; Baker et al., 2002; Kim and Chen –Yu, 2005; Moore and Carpenter, 2006).Researchers have examined attributes of apparel relative to purchase intention and subsequent implications for retailers (Abraham-Murali and Littrell, 1995; Forsythe, 1991; Johnson, 1989; Norum, 2003). Most research work done in the past used survey methods to directly measure consumers' attitudes towards products and their attributes (Lang and Crown, 1993).

The departing point of this study is the use of focus group discussion and survey method. The study carried out an empirical research using conjoint analyses to examine attributes considered by female consumers' when choosing fashion clothing in order to make purchasing decisions, based on the value they attach to certain product attributes.

Literature review

The evaluative criteria used during a purchase decision vary in quantity and importance from one product to another, and over time. In other words, many price,

aesthetics and quality are important considerations when buying decisions for clothing items (Eckman et al., 1990; Lang and Crown, 1993). The criteria that have been found to influence the evaluation and buying decision of apparel include; price, care requirements, brand, product composition (i.e style and colour), store image, and advertising image.

Branding

This is has been for centuries to differentiate goods of one producer from those of another. Brand can be seen from two perspectives one from companies point of view and other from consumers. Ambler (1992) defines branding as the promise of the bundles of attributes that someone buys and provides satisfaction. The attributes that make up a brand may be real or deceptive, rational or emotional, tangible or invisible. However, fashion branding could be broadly defined as a behavioral observable fact evidenced in a diversity of material and non material contexts. It could be generalized both as an object and as a behavioral process (Vieira, 2009). Brand name shows the source of the product and helps consumers to be aware and differentiate a product from its competitors. The core base of naming a brand is that it is unique; can be easily discriminated from other names; easy to remember and is eye-catching to customers (Keller, 2004).The demand for brand name apparel products have risen steadily over the past decade (Huddleston and Cassil, 1990).

Price

Price and quality have different and differential effects on perceived value for money. Some consumers perceive value when the price is low. Others perceive value when there is a balance between quality and price (Cravens et al and Monroe in Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). There are typically five price zones in the apparel industry, namely; designer, bridge, better, moderate and budget or mass (Burns and Bryant, 1997). Terblanche (1990) conducted a life-style typification study of female students with specific reference to fashion awareness and clothing orientation.

Researchers found out that once consumers perceive a price difference between local-owned and foreign owned brands, price dissimilarities begin to affect their preference for local-owned brands. Since price is one of the most important extrinsic cues that consumers use when evaluating the product/brand (Hansen, 2005), we test the impact of price against consumer's ethnocentric tendencies to determine at what point they are willing to forsake preference for local products for a greater price discount with foreign owned products

Style and Fit

Fashion according to the Fairchild Dictionary of Fashion (Perna, 1987), is the custom or *style* of dressing that prevails among any group of persons. It is the style of the present, which may last for a year or two or a number of years. A *high fashion style* is the look of the moment. But if a look or trend persists for long becomes a classic. And, a *classic style* is a look that is always available in some form that is appropriate for many occasions, and acceptable to many consumer groups (Brannon, 2000). Some consumers make choices concerning apparel on the basis of comfort and practicality. Therefore, a third style can be identified, namely a *comfortable* fit. The relative importance of these three styles was examined in this study.

Colour

Color is one of the primary purchasing considerations among consumers and is a very important factor for product choice (Clarke and Honeycutt, 2000). Various studies suggest that consumer color choice depends on demographic factors, such as age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic level. (Boyatzis and Varghese, 1994; Krishna, 1972; Choungourian, 1968). Color response is learned and can be changed overtime (Adams and Osgood, 1973; Hupka et al., 1997). In addition, color preferences can be affected by external factors such as geographic location (urban vs. rural) and climate (Wagner, 1988).In general, color has the potential to affect a consumer's overall perception of a product and the persuasiveness of purchase decisions (Sable and Akcay, 2010). Color has different meanings and perceptions in different cultures (Aslam, 2006; Madden et al., 2000). The knowledge of consumers' color choices enables marketers to identify and offer the right product color. Color is also used to attract, draw attention, create a purchase intention, and desired atmosphere in retail stores (Bellizi et al., 1983; Kerfoot et al., 2003). The importance of color is a function of the average life and price level of a product.

The perceived importance on fifteen clothing product attributes, including fit, comfort, style, colour, workmanship, price, permeability, fabric softness, trendiness, durability, easy care, brand, fiber content, warmness and fabric thickness of Chinese consumers were investigated by using 3,534 Chinese samples in six cities of China (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, Harbin and Xian) Zhang et al. (2002). Results found that fit, comfort, style, colour and workmanship were the most important attributes for Chinese consumers in buying casual wears. Although many studies have investigated the clothing choice criteria, investigation on the relationship between these criteria and consumer decision-making behaviour is still lacking.

Daye et al. (2008), identified color as a critical element in developing a branding strategy. They opined that a firm needs to be wise in considering what they called the psychology of color when designing their marketing materials. They asserted that colors not only enhance the appearance of the item, but they also influence customer behavior. The color of your brand may make or mar your branding strategy while the effect of colors differs; from one culture to another.

Table 1: Conjoint Estimates Showing the Preference for Fashion Clothing Attributes

Attributes	Levels of Attributes	Utility Estimates	Utility Range
Brand	Designer	.098*	0.166
	Unbranded	-.068	
	Private label	.055	
Style	High fashion	.942*	1.523
	Classical	-.361	
	Comfortable	-.581	
Price	Moderate	.419*	0.745
	High	-.093	
	Budget price	-.326	
Colour	Loud	-.340	0.680
	Dark	.135	
	Soft	.340*	
Fit	Loose	-.830	1.575
	Normal	.745*	
	Tight	.572	
Total			3.944

*represents the most preferred level in the attributes

Adirika et al. (1997), recorded the outcome of a study on branding carried out on Taiwanese manufacturers who produce a great amount of the worlds clothing, consumer electronics and computers but not under Taiwanese brand names. The result of the study showed that marketing power lies with the brand-name companies and not with actual manufacturers. This is because brand name companies can replace their Taiwanese manufacturing sources with cheaper sources in Malaysia and elsewhere and still retain their market shares. This study portrays the fact that consumers are more susceptible to brand names rather than quality.

Understanding exactly what consumers require or desire in fashion clothing poses a challenge for many fashion designers and other fashion icons who have traditionally dictated fashion trends. But, over the past ten years consumers have become more demanding and the focus of marketing in the fashion industry has shifted to what the consumer wants (Brannon, 2000). Retailers therefore, need a better understanding of what consumer's value when they make purchase decisions. This understanding will lead to a more accurate merchandise mix. Little is known about the importance consumers place on the various attributes involved in the fashion clothing. The purpose of this study is to examine the various attributes considered by female undergraduates when making purchase decisions that determine these preferences. The conjoint analysis was used, to measure consumer preferences among competing products and services.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The research work combines both exploratory and casual research design. Both qualitative (focus group discussion) and quantitative (multistage questionnaire survey) research method we employed. First, a focus group discussion was conducted in Ekiti state university among female undergraduate students to provide more insight into the topic and offer a contextual basis for the survey questionnaire design, in order to capture the inter-group opinion variations which could be under - reported by the focus- group (Bloor et al., 2001).This was meant to eliminate some attributes utilizing the result from stage one questionnaire survey. A stage two questionnaire surveys was conducted with 1,300 respondents in selected seven public Universities in Southwestern Nigeria. Data collected were analysed using conjoint analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Attributes used by female undergraduates students when assessing clothing fashion product

Results in Table 1 show utility estimates obtained from conjoint analysis to elicit preference of female undergraduate students for fashion clothing attributes. The result highlights the specific attributes preferred by female undergraduate students when assessing clothing fashion products. The result shows that the most preferred attributes of fashion clothing in the order of utility are fit, style, price, colour, and brand. Fit is the most preferred attribute which contribute 1.575 of the total utility of 3.944. The most preferred attribute level of fit is normal fit, with utility estimate of 0.745 followed by tight fit (U = 0.572) and loose fit with utility estimate of -0.830 respectively. This finding corroborates earlier studies (Zhang et al., 2002; Wu and Delong, 2006) who established that many consumers expressed that fit was important in judging satisfaction with apparel products. Fit is defined as the conformance of a garment to an individual's body type or

Table 2. Importance Values of fashion clothing attributes

Attributes	Importance values (%)
Fit	34.93
Style	33.62
Price	13.89
Colour	12.24
Brand	5.32

Table 3. Correlations between observed and estimated preferences

	Value	P-value
Pearson's R	.853***	.000
Kendall's tau	.722***	.003

***, significant at 1%

size. This was often considered as one of the most salient evaluative criteria for jeans. It focuses on the shifting notions of aesthetic and psychological values. Well-fitting clothing is generally shaped by personal taste, fashion trend and physical comfort (Wu and Delong, 2006).

High preference of female undergraduate students for fit attribute is closely followed by fashion style with a utility range of 1.523 out of total utility of 3.944. Attribute levels of fashion style preferred by the respondents are 'high fashion' (U= 0.942), 'classical' (U= -0.361), and 'comfortable fashion' (U = -0.581). The result is an indication that Aesthetic characteristics of fashion clothing such as style play a vital role when undergraduate students show preference for clothing. As young consumers, students may choose a fashion cloth based on aesthetic value and distinctiveness of design in order to construct their identity and self-image. In other words, fashion clothing style can be used as a social signifier to maintain or elevate an undergraduate student image. This argument is in line with a prior study by Schmitt and Simonson (1997), who also found that style to be important in consumer preference for fashion clothing.

Following preference of female students for fit and fashion style, preference for fashion price is next with utility range of 0.745 out of the total utility of 3.944. Moderate price with a utility estimate of 0.419 was the most preferred price attribute level. This was followed by 'budget price' (U = -0.326) and 'high price' (U = -0.093) attribute levels respectively. The preference order for price attribute was lower in relation to other attributes such as fit and style. This lower preference for price could be attributed to earlier findings that higher price does not necessarily imply higher quality (Szybillo and Jacoby, 1974). However, the price cues were used to measure the salient determinant of purchase intention.

Female undergraduate students also preferred colourful fashion clothing which presents utility range of 0.680 out of the available total of 3.944 utility values. 'Soft colour' (U= 0.135), 'dark colour' (U = 0.135), and 'loud colour' (U = - 0.340) fashions. Colour has often been considered as one of the important and visible cues of many apparel products (Rasband, 2001). It elicits specific emotional responses and plays a significant role on the aesthetic appeal to the consumer. But, the lower preference order for this attribute could be an indication that, colour, though relevant in preference decision, is not the most important determinant for undergraduate students' decision.

Fashion brand is the least preferred fashion attributes by female undergraduate students. Fashion brand attribute presents utility range of 0.166 out of total utility of 3.944. However, 'designer brand' (U= 0.098), 'private label' (U = 0.055) and 'unbranded' (U = -0.068) attributes levels are respectively preferred by the students. However, this finding is contrary to the assertion made by Rahman et al. (2008) that brand is relatively insignificant for evaluating fashion clothing. This is an indication that the importance of brand name has been challenged and questioned in today's consumer market.

The overall, result indicates that the preference range that would deliver the most utility for fashion clothing consumers (female undergraduate students) would include fashion products attributes such as normal fit (U = 0.745), high fashion style (U = 0.942), moderate price (0.419), soft colour (U= 0.340) and designer brand (0.098). Clothing producers and marketers that deliver fashion clothing within the stated preference range would have successfully delivered high utility range for their consumers with a corresponding increase in willingness to purchase which will increase the production and marketing of fashion clothing.

Most important clothing attributes

Results in Table 2 shows the most important and significant attributes of fashion clothing. The diagnostics of the specification as presented in Table 3 shows the significance of the estimates. The result is also graphically represented in Figure 1. From the result 'fit' of fashion clothing is the most important factor that will attract consumers (students) only if it is 'normal or tight fit'. Importance value of 34.93% is obtained for fashion fit attribute. Fashion style has an importance value of 33.62% representing the second most preferred attributes by female undergraduate students. The result indicates that female consumers would also give preference to fashion clothing with 'high fashion' or 'classical styles' respectively. Price, another important attributes of any commodity also received relatively high preference from respondents.

Female undergraduate students prefer either moderate or budget price attached to fashion clothing. The importance value of price attribute is 13.89% indicating that consumers would only consider price attribute after fit and style attributes respectively. Colour attribute with an importance value of 12.24% is preferred after fit, style, and price attributes. Female students consumers prefer fashion clothing with 'soft' or 'dark coloured' fashion cloth more than loud colours. The least preferred fashion clothing

attributes by female undergraduate students is 'brand' attribute with an importance value of 5.32%. Female consumers who preferred fashion clothing choose brand with 'designer' or 'private label' more than 'unbranded' fashion brand.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on findings of this study, it was ascertained that the choice of female university students for fashion clothing is highly stimulated by attributes such as fit and high fashion style. The choices of female university students for fashion clothing are highly sensitive to attributes of fashion such as style and fit. Consumers attach a lot of value to most of these attributes when making fashion clothing purchase decisions. This will enable apparel manufacturers and retailers to plan and implement their strategies more effectively. This research also provides an insight to understanding behavioral characteristics when making purchase decisions that various types of consumers will make.

Based on the major findings and conclusion thereof, it is recommended that design and targeting of fashion clothing in a university market environment should be based on needs of female university students. The design of fashion clothing should be tailored towards specific need of female university students in order to optimize returns from marketing of fashion clothing among undergraduates in universities and other institutions of learning. The fulfillment of female consumer needs for fashion clothing requires that fashion marketers and designers understand the specific attributes of fashion clothing that are desirable and most significantly valued by targeted consumers.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests

REFERENCES

Abraham-Murali L, Littrell MA (1995). Consumers' conceptualization of apparel attributes. Clothing and Textiles Res. J., 13 (2):65-74.

Adams FM, Osgood CE (1973).A Cross-Cultural Study of the Affective Meanings of Color. Int. J. Cross Cultural Psy. 4 (2): 121-125.

Adirika EO, Ebue BC, Nnolim DA (1997). Principles and Practice of Marketing. Enugu:John Jacobs Publishers.

Ambler T (1992), "Need-to-Know-Marketing", Century Business,London

Aslam M (2006), Are You Selling the Right Colour? A Cross-cultural Review of Colour as a Marketing Cue, Int. J. of Marketing Communications, 12 (1): 15-30.

Babin BJ, Harris EG (2009), *CB.* Mason, OH, United States of America: South-WesternCengage Learning.

Baker J, Parasuraman A , Grewal D, Voss P (2002), The influence of multiple store environment cues on perceived Merchandise value and patronage intention, Int. J. Marketing, 66:120-41

Bellizzi J, Crowley AE, Hasty RW (1983).The Effects of Color in Store Design. Int.J. of Retailing, 59:(1):21-41.

Bloor M, Frankland J, Thomas M, Robson K(2001) Focus Groups in Social Research: Introducing Qualitative Methods, Sage Publications: London

Boyatzis C J , Varghese R (1994). Children's Emotional Associations with Color. Int. J. Genetic Psy. 155(1): 79-85.

Brannon EL (2000). Fashion Forecasting. New York. Fairchild.

Burns LN, Bryant N (1997). The Business of Fashion. New York. Fairchild.

Choungourian A (1968). Color Preferences and Cultural Variations, Perceptual Motor Skills, 23(3):1202-1207.

Clarke I, Honeycutt ED (2000). Color Usage in International Business-to Business Print Advertising, Industrial Marketing Management (29):255-261.

Daye D, VanAuken B, Asacker T (2008).Color Psychology in Marketing. [Online] Available:http://www.brandingstrategyinsider/color-psycholog.html,page. (22 June, 2008)

Eckman M, Damhorst ML, Kadolph SJ (1990). Toward a model of the in-store purchase decision process: consumer use of criteria for evaluating women's apparel. Clothing and Textiles Res. J. 8(2):13-22.

Engel J, Blackwell R, Miniard P (1995). Consumer Behavior (8th ed.). The Dryden Press, FortWorth, TX, USA.

Forsythe S (1991). Effect of private, designer, and national brand names on shoppers' Perception

Hansen T (2005). Perspectives on consumer decision making: An integrated approach. J. Consumer behaviour 4(6):420-437

Huddleston, P, Cassil NL(1990). Female Consumers' Brand Orientation: the influence of quality and demographics. Home Econ. Res. J., 18(3):255-262.

Hupka RB, Zaleski Z, Otto J, Tarabrina NV (1997). The Colors of Anger, Envy, Fear,Jealousy: A Cross Cultural Study. Int. J. Cross-Cultural Psychol., 28 (2) 155-172.

Johnson M (1989). On the nature of product attributes and attributes relationships. Advances in Consumer Res. 16, 598-604.n of apparel quality and price. Clothing & Textiles Res.J. 9 (2):1-6.

Kahle L(1986).The nine nations of North America and the value basis of geographies Segmentations. Int. J. marketing. 2(1):37-47.

Keller KL (2004), Building, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity,2nd Edn, Pearson Education, Singapore.

Kerfoot S, Davies B, Ward P (2003). Visual Merchandising and the Creation of Discernible Retail Brand, Int. J. Retail and Distribution Manag., 31(3):143-152.

Kim SH, Chen-Yu J(2005). Discount store patronage: A comparison between South Korea andUnited States, Clothing and Textile Res. J. 23, 165-79.

Krishna KP(1972).Colour Preferences as a Function of Age and Sex. J. Indian Acad. Appl. Psychol. 9 (1):10-14.

Lang JQ, Crown EM (1993). Country-of-origin effect in

apparel choices: A conjoint analysis. J. Consumer Studies and Home Econ. 17:87-98.

Madden TJ, Hewett K, Roth MS (2000), Managing Images in Different Cultures: A Cross National Study of Color Meanings and Preferences, J. Int. Marketing, 8 (4):90-107.

Moore M, Carpenter J (2006).The effect of price as a market place cue on retail patronage, J. Product Brand Manag., 15: 265-71.

Norum PS (2003). A Comparison of Apparel Garment Prices By National, Retail, and Private Label, Clothing and Textiles Res. J. l, 21(3):142-148.

Perna R (1987). Fashion Forecasting. New York. Fairchild.

Rahman O, Zhu X, Liu WS (2008). A study of the pyjamas purchasing behaviour of Chinese consumers in Hangzhou, China. J. of Fashion Marketing and Manag., 12(2):217-231.

Rasband J (2001). Art Essential in Colour, Fairchild, New York NY

Rutter N, Edwards O (1999). Ready to Ware. Forbes 163(7): 30-33.

Sable P, Akcay O (2010). Color: Cross Cultural Marketing Perspectives as to what Governs our Response to it, Proceedings of ASBBS, 17 (1):950-954.

Schmitt BH, Simonson A (1997). Marketing aesthetics: The strategic management of brands, identity and image. New York, NY: Free Press.

Shim S, Bukle M (1994).Benefit segments of the female apparel market, Psychographics shopping orientations, and Demographics. Clothing and Textile Res. J. 12:1-12

Shim S, Kotsipulos A(1992).patronage behavior of apparel shopping:part1.shopping orientations, store attributes, information source and personal characteristic. Clothing and Textile Res. J. 10:48-57

Sweeney JC, Soutar GN(2001). Consumer perceived value: The development of a multiple item scale. J. Retailing 77, 203-220.

Szybillo G, Jacoby GJ, (1974) Intrinsic versus extrinsic cues as determinants of perceived quality. J. Appl. Psychol. 59(1) :74 -78.

Terblanche RM (1990). A lifestyle typification of female students, with specific reference to fashion awareness and clothing orientation. Unpublished MEcon-dissertation: University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Vieira AA (2009), An extended theoretical model of fashion clothing involvement, J. Fashion Marketing and Manag., 13(2):179-200.

Wagner C(1988) The Wagner Color Response Report, Revised Edition, The Wagner Institute for Color Research, 29-95.

Wu J, Delong M (2006). Chinese perceptions of western-branded denim jeans: A Shanghai case study. J. Fashion Marketing and Manag., 10(2):238-250

Zhang Z, Chen Gong YL, Wu H (2002).Casual wear product attributes, a Chinese Consumer's perspective. J. Fashion Marketing Manag., 6(1):53-62.