



FASHION LEADERSHIP AND IMPULSIVE BUYING BEHAVIOUR: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW ON CONSUMERS.

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Abstract

The present paper aims to conceptually review the relationship between fashion leaders and their buying behaviour. It has been reviewed that for many years fashion clothing has been an area of interest in consumer research. Fashion Leaders influence fashion and pay great attention to what they wear. Fashion Leaders comprises of two important dimensions, fashion innovators and fashion opinion leaders. Well both the categories have impact on impulsive buying behaviour; however from the present researches it can be inferred that impulsive buying behaviour depends on the type of fashion one follows. The present paper aims to understand through existing empirical studies, the role of the two dimensions of fashion leaders on impulsive buying behaviour.

Keywords: Fashion opinion leaders, Fashion innovators, Impulsive buying behaviour.

**“Knowing who your customers are is great,
But knowing how they behave is even better”**

John Miller

Fashion is a dynamic phenomenon which changes with time. Every year a bewildering array of styles are prepared all over the world and replaced, year after, with the new ones. Fashion clothing industry is completely dependent on constant new ideas and expectations of the consumers. Marketers spend millions in research every year trying to predict, or anticipate, changing consumer behaviour. In the competitive business era, it is essential to be aware of the consumer's requirement, needs and wants. In recent years consumers in developing countries have attracted much attention from marketers. Since products mean different things to different people, consumers form differing attachments to them.

Clothing is a form of nonverbal communication which reflects the wearer's identity. Consumers usually tend to choose products and stores that correspond to their self concept. Clothing is one domain that fulfils both functional and symbolic needs of the consumers. Growing consciousness about the self-image due to choice of apparels and the role of brands in enhancing the consumers' image in their social environment has compelled market researchers to understand the concept of fashion with buying behaviour. The consumers who are involved in fashion and are the primary influencers of the current trends in fashion industry are called fashion leaders. The population involved with fashion has typical behavioural trends described below.

Fashion Leadership

Fashion leadership is the process in which; the fashion is presented to the premier audience, is judged by them if potentially viable and then accepted by the “key member” of society. (Blumberg,1974). Consumers with high levels of fashion leadership are more involved in fashion, enjoy shopping often, are not price conscious, and are not practical about their purchases (Goldsmith & Stith, 1993). Fashion leaders help fashion followers to engage in a new fashion and style (McFatter, 2005). Fashion leaders are more involved in the shopping than the followers, and are first to use new fashion irrespective of their social risk. Fashion leaders are less socially conscious, less risk averse and don't think of the cost as compared to fashion followers (Belleau, Nowlin, Summers, & Xu, 2001). Fashion leaders view themselves as more confident, colorful, pleasant and happy than the followers, and followers see them with respect.

The types of fashion leaders or change agents most commonly viewed are

Fashion Innovators are those individuals who are the first to age existing clothing styles by adopting different ones. They welcome new things earlier than the most members of a social system. Fashion innovators respond earlier than the general public to the “sensory of appeal of new silhouettes, details, and style combinations” (Brannon, 2010). As fashion innovators are the chief buyers at the introductory stage, they have significant influence on the product at the later stage, i.e. the decision of an innovator to buy the new product would largely impact the purchase of that product in the market. Because innovators are the first adopters of a new style, their role in the fashion diffusion process is important.

They play a role as propagators of what will become fashionable (Sproles,1981). Therefore, apparel designers and manufacturers are concerned with innovators, especially with their purchase practices. The marketers instead of trying to read all consumers, focus on the buying behaviour of the innovators to make their future products. Fashion innovativeness trait of the consumer, forces them to think about adopting the new fashion which in turn increases the chances of hedonic consumption rather than utilitarian consumption in fashion innovators (Goldsmith & Hofacker, 1991; Goldsmith, 2000).



Fashion innovativeness is a highly motivational driver, and has the positive direct effect on consumers' intentions to purchase fashion goods (Park et al., 2007). Fashion innovativeness contributes in the diffusion of a new fashion and results in a continuous growth in the sales of the companies. Therefore it will be interesting to know what percentage of population falls into this category for the marketing managers.

Fashion innovators generally exhibit impulsive behaviour. They might be able to expand their scope of fashion knowledge through the internet, not just merely through fashion magazines. Ian Phau, Chang-Chin Lo, (2004). This explains the consumers who are fashion innovators seem to have the tendency of impulsive buying.

Fashion Opinion Leaders are those consumers who accelerate the fashion aging process by legitimizing an innovative style and by influencing others to accept the style innovation as a replacement for the currently accepted one. These consumers are not the first adopters of fashion but they help in the diffusion process of innovation by communicating other people about the new launch. They are the ones who understand the innovation and convey the news to others in accepting it. Fashion opinion leadership is defined as the "ability or tendency to convey information regarding a new fashion in a way that influences successive purchasers to accept or reject it (Workman & Johnson, 1993).

Opinion leaders are always in search of uniqueness that makes them different from the others (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). Opinion leadership as a social value has a great influence on the decision of the individuals that influences their adoption behaviour (Rogers, 2003). Fashion opinion leadership has been studied with the different approaches; fashion opinion leaders are the innovators or early adopters but it is varied by the different levels and its relationship with the motives of fashion which has not yet been fully understood (Park et al., 2007). Fashion opinion leadership uses the new fashion in such a way to guide their fellows about that; fashion opinion leadership refers to the utilitarian value more rather than the hedonic value (Kang & Park-Poaps, 2010).

Fashion innovators and fashion opinion leaders have been found to be positively related to interest in fashion and knowledge of clothing but the experience with the purchase of apparels or fashion clothing differ among both the groups. Where fashion innovators buy anything which stimulates them or attracts them to be different, the fashion opinion leaders survey the markets before buying anything new. The fashion opinion leaders have been found be positively related to attitudes-toward-conformity and self monitoring. In addition, fashion innovators and fashion opinion leaders also differ in their relationships with several psychological concepts.

Impulsive Buying Behaviour

A particular challenge for marketing science and practice is to research impulse consumer behaviour in shopping – a behaviour that occurs when consumers experience a sudden, powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately. The "unplanned purchase" was typically operationalized as the difference between consumer's total purchases at the completion of a shopping trip, and those that were listed as intended purchases prior to entering a store (Du Pont, 1948).

"If you want to know how to sell more, Than you better know what customers want."

Making an impulsive purchase requires certain mood, i.e. excitement, and the consumer's positive attitude. The most common impulsive purchases are those caused by hedonic urges and comprise the so-called hedonic consumption; these purchases, however, are also a cause of some emotional conflict, so the impulsive purchases may also be termed as 'emotional purchases' (Mari i , 2011).

Sharma et.al (2010) studied the variety seeking behavior of impulse buying. They found the variety seeking individuals are more prone to impulse purchases. Chang et .al (2011) observed that the positive emotional responses of consumer to the retail environment result in impulsive purchases. Peck and Childers (2006) found that touch increases impulse purchasing as the distance which can be explained as proximity, between product and consumer decreases. They suggested that point-of-purchase signs, displays, and packaging which encourages product touch may increase impulse purchasing. Kaur and Singh (2007) Studied the impulse buying aspects of Indian youths and found that shopping enjoyment and the sensory stimulants influences impulse buying.

Jiyun Kang, Haesun Park-Poaps, (2010) found that fashion innovativeness was significantly related to various hedonic shopping motivations and was positively associated with adventure and idea shopping motivations, whereas it was negatively related with value shopping motivation. Fashion opinion leadership was positively linked with utilitarian shopping



motivation. As hedonic shopping positively related to impulsive buying behaviour (Park et al. 2006), it can be concluded that fashion innovativeness is significantly related to impulsive buying behaviour.

Cho and Workman (2011) discuss that consumers who are high in fashion innovativeness usually incline to use more shopping channels therefore end up buying more impulsively compared to opinion leaders. Fashion leaders are more involved in the shopping, and are first to use new fashion irrespective of their social risk. Fashion leaders are less socially conscious, less risk averse and don't think of the cost as compared to fashion followers, therefore they tend to buy more than the non leaders. (Belleau, Nowlin, Summers, & Xu, 2001).

Prior researchers have studied the relationship of innovativeness with the shopping behavior of consumers and showed a significant level of impulsive buying arising among both fashion innovators as well as fashion opinion leaders (Blake et al., 2003). Therefore a clear statement of which of the fashion variable is more influential in buying behaviour cannot be given, however there seems to be clear indication by the present studies that fashion innovators are more inclined towards impulsive buying than the opinion leaders. The further studies can be conducted seeing the demographic differences, the personality traits etc. for understanding a clear difference in the impulsive buying behavior of the fashion leaders.

The present findings suggest that by understanding the fashion behaviour of the target population would help in better marketing and adoption of the fashion apparels. This means that if the consumers presently are more innovative then there would be more impulse buying therefore the product at the initial stage would be more popular but may or may not last long in the competitive market. However, if the people under study fall towards the category of opinion leaders, the product will be checked thoroughly, and if it becomes a hit, then the product will last in the market much longer. As the retailing in India is expected to grow multifold in the next five years, which is mainly driven by changing lifestyles, increasing disposable income and favourable demographic segmentation. Indian consumers have diametrically changed in terms of their shopping behaviour and impulse buying is emerging as a highly noticeable behaviour. In this context, the role of impulse buying plays a significant role for modern retailers and hence for researchers.

Future Implications

The consumers highly involved in fashion are important to monitor for the fashion industry and particularly for the fashion merchant; so the personal demand of the consumer can be met. The fashion involved group is small vis-à-vis total population, but that group is much larger in terms of proportionate share of clothing purchased, so if the amount of production is to be decided then the change agents and the buying behaviour have to be read beforehand. The present paper would give direction to the retailers for formulating marketing strategies to stimulate fashion.

Conclusion

The paper concludes that the marketers and researchers need to study the population involved with fashion and their impulsive buying behaviour in order to understand the demands and mind sets of the consumer and predict their behaviour. The more is known about which type of fashion leader is found more in target population, the survival of the new launch can be controlled. Also the present retailing and marketing strategies can be changed or reformed using the information collected from market surveys. Also by knowing the different characteristics of innovators and opinion leaders separately the required changes can be done on visual merchandising, advertising and publicity of the apparels.

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