A Cross-National Comparison of Fashion Purchase Behavior

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Abstract
This study investigated attributes used by consumers of fashion items by consumers in the United States and Austria. Based on a review of previous research on fashion adoption and cross-cultural studies of fashion behavior, research questions were posed. Fashion leadership and innovativeness in cross-cultural situations has not been well understood. This study examines the differences that may exist and therefore offers implications for market segmentation, promotion, and retail strategy.

A questionnaire was constructed, tested, and administered to subjects at two academic institutions, one in the U.S. and one in Austria. Results indicate that U.S. and Austrian consumers use different sets of attributes in their purchase decisions. This research used subjects from academic institutions in two nations. Caution must be used in generalizing results.

Future research should extend to subjects in other national markets. Goldsmith's and Hofacker's Domain Specific Innovativeness Scale has not been validated to effectively define fashion leaders and fashion followers in all nations. The identity and use of attributes by consumers in any decision is dynamic and may not adequately represent the attributes used by consumers at the time of the study.

Introduction
Success in international markets depends on knowledge of national culture, especially the perceptions which influence the decision-making that influence fashion consumers. Marketing strategies for fashion apparel that are successful in the U.S. may not be successful in other national markets if consumers' perceptions and decision making are different. To develop appropriate marketing and communication programs that extend across national borders, it is essential to understand the attributes that consumers use when making their purchasing decisions.

Literature Review
Fashion and Fashion Process
Fashion is a process that involves the adoption of symbols that provide the individual an identity relative to others (Reynolds 1968). Items that serve as socially symbolic include products, product attributes, services, and actions. The fashion process is characterized by continuous change. The fashion process, similar to the general product life-cycle concept, involves distinctive stages. These stages are described as: 1) invention and introduction, 2) fashion leadership, 3) increasing sociability, 4) conformity within and across social groups, 5) social saturation, and 6) decline and obsolescence (Sproles 1979).

The fashion adoption and diffusion model provides additional explanation of fashion behavior. This model identifies fashion "change agents" (innovators, opinion leaders, and innovative communicators) that play complementary roles in displaying new styles and

verbally influencing friends' choices. Fashion change agents influence fashion imitators toward a particular fashion style. This process continues until all fashion consumers of a society have adopted the style (Miller, McIntyre & Mantrala 1993).

Fashion consumers have been classified by their innovativeness. Hirschman and Adcock (1987) categorized fashion consumers as: fashion innovators, fashion opinion leaders, innovative communicators, and fashion followers. The first three groups are considered fashion change agents; those consumers that influence the behavior of others. These change agents assume a critical leadership role in the adoption and diffusion of new fashions (Phau & Lo 2004).

The commercial success of a new fashion item is a function of its acceptance by fashion leaders (Goldsmith, More, & Beaudoin 1999). Fashion innovators are the first consumers to purchase and wear new clothing fashions and communicate the season's styles to the mass fashion consumers. Fashion opinion leaders give the new clothing fashions their approval and influence other consumers to purchase and wear the new fashions. Innovative communicators combine the characteristics of fashion innovators and opinion leaders by being among the first to purchase and wear the new fashions while at the same time influencing others to follow the fashion style. Fashion followers are the largest group of fashion consumers and are considered imitators of the fashion innovators, opinion leaders, and innovative communicators (Workman & Studak 2006).

In previous studies, innovators and fashion opinion leaders were collectively termed innovators (Goldsmith, More, & Beaudoin 1999). Workman and Johnson (1993) investigated the relationship between four consumer groups; fashion innovators, fashion opinion leaders, innovative communicators and fashion followers. They found no significant differences between fashion innovators, opinion leaders and innovative communicators. Their findings support Gorden , Infante, and Braun's (1985) contention that there is an overlap between fashion innovators and opinion leaders. Goldsmith, Moore, and Beaudoin (1999) state that approximately 10 percent of the fashion consumers can be classified as fashion innovators.

Characteristics of Fashion Consumers

Studies have shown that fashion innovators have unique shopping behavior and characteristics compared to the other fashion consumer groups. In a study of U.S. fashion innovators, Goldsmith and Kilsheimer (1992) found that innovators go shopping more often than later adopters and they spend more money on clothes than the lagging group. Innovators also read fashion magazines, fashion-oriented articles and watch programs related to clothing styles more often than non-innovators.

Phau and Lo (2004), studying consumers in Australia, found that fashion innovators have a unique self-image. Innovators self-reported to be more delicate, comfortable, dominating, indulgent, contemporary, unorganized, irrational, youthful and colorful. Only two of the characteristics, contemporary and colorful, were similar to those found by Goldsmith, Moore, and Beaudoin (1999). Phau and Lo describe innovators as unorganized, excitable, and indulgent. Goldsmith et al. found innovators to be organized, comfortable, pleasant, and vain. Hirschman and Adcock (1987) study, conducted in the U.S., found that innovators, innovative communicators, and opinion leaders tend to be younger than fashion followers. O'Cass (2004) also found that age younger people place more emphasis on their appearance than older individuals. A cross-cultural study by Goldsmith and Kilsheimer (1993) also found a relationship between age and fashion leadership. These studies support Rogers's (1983) description of innovators. However, Goldsmith, Moore, and Beaudoin (1999) found demographic characteristics did a poor job of distinguishing between fashion consumer groups.

Workman and Studak (2006) found significant differences between men and women and among fashion consumer groups in fashion problem recognition style. Fashion followers and men reflected a need-based approach to problem recognition, fashion change agents and women reflected a want-based approach to problem recognition. Kwon and Workman

(1996) also found gender differences in fashion leadership, with women scored higher on fashion leadership scale than men.

Cultural differences may account for the inconsistency in identifying and describing the characteristics and behavior of fashion consumers. In some cultures, the behavior and characteristics of fashion innovators may be similar to fashion followers while in other cultures they may be very different.

Fashion and Culture

Culture may be among the most complex influences on consumer's apparel purchase decisions (Hyllegard et al. 2005). Consumers of different cultures have different value orientations that cause variation in preferences of products and brands. Geert Hofstede's model distinguishes cultures according to five dimensions: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation. The dimensions are measured on a scale from 0 to 100 and scores are available for more than 70 countries (De Mooij 2004).

A number of cross-cultural studies have been conducted which capture differences in the demographic and behavioral characteristics of fashion consumers from the U.S. and other countries. Tigert, King, and Ring (1980) compared the fashion-consciousness among female fashion leaders across four different cultures: Canada (English-Canadian and French-Canadian), the U.S. and the Netherlands. They found major differences in fashion involvement across these cultures with U.S. subjects differing significantly from the other three cultures. Females in the U.S. were more downscale in terms of fashion involvement and only a small portion of American women were identified as fashion leaders. The Dutch consumers were split much more sharply between fashion leaders and followers and they were more up-scale compared to the other three cultures. The researchers found significant differences in the way consumers choose fashion stores across the four cultures. English-Canadian females placed heavy emphasis on value for the money and selection of fashion merchandise, females in the U.S. traded away value for greater reliance on location and low prices.

Goldsmith and Kilsheimer (1993) examined the relative importance placed on social values by female fashion leaders compared with non-leaders in the U.S. and U.K. For U.S. and U.K. subjects, they found that leadership was associated with younger age. Fashion leaders in the both nations reported higher levels of clothing spending, fashion magazine readership, frequency of shopping for clothes, and actual new fashion items purchased than non-leaders. Fashion leaders also differed from non-leaders by placing more importance on excitement.

Friend, Farney, and Rabolt (1989) examined the behavior of female New Zealand (N.Z.) and U.S. clothing consumers. They found that N.Z. consumers were more inclined to wear clothing styles similar to others, while U.S. subjects tended to wear more individualistic clothing styles. Subjects in the U.S. considered fashion, fit, care, maintenance, quality, and brand all to be significantly more important in the selection of clothing. The most noticeable difference in the ranking of the ten apparel attributes was that U.S. subjects placed more importance on apparel quality. Another cultural difference was that for U.S. respondents who wore more individualistic styles than other U.S. respondents, price was not an important evaluative criterion in their selection of clothing. This relationship was not found for the N.Z. sample.

Ko, et.al. (2007) examined the responses of fashion consumers in South Korea, U.S., and Europe to advertising messages. Using cluster analysis the researchers identified four life

style segments that cut across national boundaries. The cross-culture lifestyle segments were more responsive to fashion advertising than traditional national segmentation. This suggested that cross-cultural standardized promotion may be appropriate for building brand equity in some fashion markets and that fashion consumer groups cross cultures.

Research Questions

Prior research indicates there are differences between consumers of fashion products. A number of studies have found differences between consumers based on when they adopt fashion items. These studies have found differences in demographic characteristics, level of involvement, and values between fashion leaders and fashion followers (Goldsmith and Kilsheimer 1992; Goldsmith, Moore & Beaudoin 1999; Phau and Lo 2004; Hirschman and Adcock 1987; O'Cass 2004). Findings suggest that fashion leaders are more involved with fashion decisions than fashion followers. Leaders also tend to be younger and female. Leaders use more fashion oriented media, spend more, and shop more frequently than non-innovators.

Differences between fashion consumers have also been found in cross-cultural studies of fashion behavior. There is also a growing body of research that indicates culture affects the clothing and fashion behavior of consumers (Friend, Farney & Rabolt 1989; Ko et al. 2007; Goldsmith and Kilsheimer 1993; Tigert 1990). Research that compared U.S. consumers of fashion goods to their European counterparts found both similarities and differences in behavior. U.S. consumers were less fashion conscious and placed more importance on price and convenience. European consumers are more involved with fashion purchase behavior than U.S. consumers.

To provide guidance for this research in exploring the role of the timing of customer adoption and the role of culture in the consumer decision making for fashion apparel, the following questions are posed:
1. Do consumers in different nations use different criteria to evaluate fashion apparel?
2. Do fashion leaders use different criteria than fashion followers to evaluate fashion apparel?

Research Method

To evaluate the research questions, a questionnaire was developed to measure antecedents of fashion purchase behavior, behavioral intention toward fashion apparel purchases, and demographic characteristics of fashion consumers in the U.S. and in Austria. Fashion leadership was measured using Goldsmith's and Hofacker's (1991) Domain Specific Innovativeness Scale (DSI) consisting of six items. A self evaluation question was included as a manipulation check for the DSI measure. Individual questions were developed to measure the importance of specific attributes when purchasing clothing, fashion purchase location, purchase frequency, fashion spending, and demographic characteristics. The attributes were selected from among those used in prior studies.

The DSI scale has been evaluated by its authors in a series of tests and results showed that the scale is a one-dimensional measure with high reliability (Cronbach's alpha= 0.73) and possesses good validity. Apparel attributes used in this study included intrinsic attributes (color, style, comfort, durability, fit, care, fiber, product, design originality) and extrinsic attributes (suits my personality, country of manufacture, store image, price, and brand name). Measures for shopping frequency, shopping location, media use, and information source were also developed from measures used in prior studies. Three additional questions were developed to assess purchase behavior concerning expensive fashionable clothing, fashion trends, and the influence of personal style of clothing. A final question asked the average amount spent on clothing per month.

The questionnaire was distributed as a self-administered 'hard copy' and as an internet-based survey. The German version was translated and independently reverse translated to English using both bilingual and mono-lingual translators (Douglas & Craig 2005). Comparison of the translated version to the original revealed no major difference in wording or interpretation. A convenience sampling plan was used to obtain European subjects. European graduate students studying at the researchers' University were asked to

contact academic referents (prior instructors) in their undergraduate institution in their native country to solicit their support. The instructors were asked to send an e-mail message to students in their current classes and to colleagues at their institution. The e-mail message included a link to the appropriate language version of the survey. A note from the researchers explaining the purpose of the study and asking for their cooperation in participating was provided to the graduate students to include in their e-mail message to their contacts. Academic referents were asked to randomly select potential subjects. Where possible, they were asked to select equal proportions of males and females and from different age groups.

In addition to the electronic version of the survey, print versions of the German questionnaire were distributed in Innsbruck, Austria to students of a Business High school and students of the University of Innsbruck. Instructions on the print version also identified a link to the survey on the internet if they wished to fill it out on-line. Completed surveys were returned to a contact person in each institution who then forwarded them to the researchers. Print versions of the English questionnaire were distributed to graduate and undergraduate students from randomly selected classes whose instructors agreed to allow participation in the study at the researchers' university. A total of 200 print versions were distributed to students at the researchers' university and 200 were distributed in Austria.

Results
Sample Characteristics
Completed questionnaires were received from 362 subjects. Approximately half of the total responses (47%) were obtained from the online survey and the remainder from print versions. One hundred eighty nine (185) questionnaires were received from U.S. subjects and 166 from Austrian subjects. As shown in Table I, the Austrian and the U.S. groups are predominately women, although there are a higher proportion of men in the U.S. group than in the Austrian group. The difference in gender distribution was significant. The majority of subjects are between 16 and 35 years of age. The U.S. group is however, significantly older than the Austrian group with a higher proportion of subjects in the 46-65yr. range. Comparison of gender and age by means of administration, electronic or paper copy, produced no significant difference on gender but did produce a significant difference in age. A greater percentage of electronic responses were received from the 16 through 35 age groups. This difference is attributed to the method of administration in which student subjects residing in the University environment were provided with the link to the survey in their classes. Non-students were contacted personally and given a letter and the print version of the survey with a return envelope. In the letter, the link to the on-line survey was provided.

Table I
Characteristics of the Sample

	U.S	%	Austria	%	Total	%	X^2 (d.f.)	p
Gender							13.91 (1)	.000
Male	79	42%	41	24%	120	33%		
Female	108	58%	132	76%	240	67%		
Total	187	100%	173	100%	360	100%		
Age							14.89 (5)	.013
15 or less	2	1%	0	0%	2	1%		
16-24	82	44%	97	56%	179	50%		
25-35	51	27%	46	26%	97	27%		
36-45	25	13%	22	13%	47	13%		
46-55	14	7%	5	3%	19	5%		
56-65	14	7%	3	2%	17	5%		
Total	188	100%	173	100%	362	100%		

To evaluate the research questions, a MANOVA was conducted to compare responses of four groups of subjects; U.S. fashion leaders, U.S. fashion followers, Austrian fashion

leaders, and Austrian fashion followers. Fashion leaders and fashion followers were identified using Goldsmith's and Hofacker's Domain Specific Innovativeness Scale (DSI). Internal reliability was assessed via Cronbach's alpha and found to be acceptable (alpha = 0.82). Distributions of DSI scores were computed for both Austrian and U.S. subjects and compared. No significant difference was found between U.S. and Austrian subjects.   The top 10% (lowest scores) of all subjects were assigned to the innovator group (Goldsmith, et al. 1999). A DSI score of 13 was established as the cut off point for assigning into the innovator category. This score accounted for 12.5% of all subjects. A DSCI score of 12 accounted for only 8.9% of subjects. Using this approach, 45 subjects were classified as innovators and 317 as followers. Of the 45 innovators, 28 were U.S. subjects and 17 were Austrian subjects

Table II

Decision Attributes in Fashion Purchase: Austrian and U.S. Fashion Consumers

Attribute			Mean			F	p	Power
Nation		Austria		U.S.				
Adopter	Total	Leader	Follow	Leader	Follow			
Fit	4.52	4.44	4.43	4.93	4.54	1.80	0.01	0.99
Suits My Personality	4.11	4.19	4.10	4.41	4.05	1.30	0.13	0.94
Comfort	4.08	3.38	3.93	4.19	4.27	1.61	0.01	0.99
Color	4.05	4.06	4.03	4.26	4.15	1.29	0.16	0.93
Quality	3.99	4.31	3.91	4.44	3.95	1.65	0.00	0.99
Style	3.98	4.44	3.97	4.67	3.82	1.85	0.01	0.99
Price	3.77	3.00	3.65	3.85	3.95	2.45	0.00	1.00
Durability	3.64	3.19	3.42	3.85	3.85	2.33	0.00	0.99
Fiber	3.40	3.69	3.59	3.30	3.24	2.02	0.02	0.98
Design	3.25	4.06	3.26	4.04	3.02	2.53	0.00	1.00
Brand Name	2.85	3.25	2.51	3.89	2.96	3.26	0.00	1.00
Store Image	2.48	3.12	2.26	3.48	2.46	2.97	0.00	0.99
Country	1.99	2.44	2.10	2.33	1.87	2.48	0.00	1.00
Wilk's Lambda (Nat/Adopter)						2.64 (42,311)	0.00	1.00
Wilk's Lambda (age)						1.05 (56,1211)	0.38 0.11	0.99
Wilk's Lambda (gender)						1.50 (14,311)	0.02	0.85
Wilk's Lambda (age*Nat/Adopter)						1.28 (126,2390)		1.00

Note. Scale: 1 – Not at all Important; 5 – Extremely Important

Model: Intercept+Nat/Adopter+Age+Gender

* Significant difference between groups ($\alpha \leq 0.00$)

Table II presents the results of the MANOVA. The main effect of Nation/Adopter category had a significant effect on the importance assigned to the attributes. The main effect of age and of gender did not have a significant effect on the importance attributed to the attributes. The interaction of age and Nation/Adopter did have a significant effect on the importance attributed to the set of attributes. A plot of the means indicated the interaction was ordinal. Importance of Attributes

Table III identifies the importance subjects attached to attributes by national grouping and by adopter grouping.   This table also identifies the attributes for which significant differences between groups were found using Scheffe's post-hoc test.   The attributes of Color, Fit, and "Suits My Personality" were considered very important to all groups (assigned 4 or greater on importance scale). Post-hoc tests indicated no significant difference between groups on these three attributes.   The attributes of Style, Quality, Comfort and Design were also considered very important for one or more of the Nation/Adopter groups. However, significant differences exist between the groups on the importance attached to

these attributes. Austrian consumers, especially Austrian fashion leaders consider Comfort to be less important than their U.S. counterparts. Fashion leaders attached greater importance to Quality, Style and Design than fashion followers.

Country of origin, Store Image, and Brand Name were generally considered least the important attributes. Significant differences were, however, found between these groups. Fashion leaders attached more importance to all three attributes than fashion followers and U.S subjects consider Store Image and Brand Name to be more important than Austrian subjects while Austrian subjects consider Country of origin to be more important than U.S. subjects. Although Price was considered an important attribute by all groups, significant differences were found between the groups. Austrian fashion leaders attach the least importance to price of the four groups followed by Austrian fashion followers. Price was significantly more important to the U.S. fashion consumers.

Table III

Importance of Attributes by National and Adopter Grouping

	Austria	*U.S.*	*Fashion Leader*	*Follower*
	Total	Total	Total	Total
Very Important (≥ 4)	Color Style Fit Suits My Personality	Color Comfort* Fit Quality Suits My Personality	Color Style** Fit Quality** Design** Suits My Personality	Color Comfort*** Fit Suits My Personality
Important (3 ≥ ≤ 4)	Comfort*,*** Durability* Fiber* Quality Design*** Price*,***	Style Durability* Fiber* Design Price* Brand Name*	Comfort Durability Fiber Store Image** Price Brand Name**	Style** Durability Fiber Quality** Design**,*** Price***
Not Important (< 3)	Country Store Image*,*** Brand Name*	Country Store Image*	Country**	Country** Store Image**,*** Brand Name**

* Significant difference (α≤0.05) between Austrian and U.S. subjects
** Significant difference (α≤0.05) between Fashion Leader and fashion follower
***Significant difference (α≤0.05) between national and adopter group

Significant interactions between age and Nations/Adopter grouping were indicated for Comfort, Fit, Store Image, Price, and Country of origin. Plots of means for these attributes indicated that the importance assigned to Comfort increased with age for fashion leaders and U.S. followers. However, older Austrian fashion followers attached less importance to Comfort than younger followers. Older fashion leaders in both nations attached more importance to Fit than younger fashion leaders, while older followers in both countries attach more. Although older subjects attached more importance to Country of origin than younger subjects, the increase is most noticeable for U.S. fashion leaders. Older Austrian leaders attach less importance to Store Image while older U.S. fashion leaders attach greater importance to this attribute. Older U.S. fashion leaders attach greater importance to Price than younger U.S. leaders. For other groups, the importance attached to Price remains stable across age groups.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the importance fashion consumers attach to decision attributes is influenced by adopter category, by nation, and by the interaction of age with nation and adopter category. How these factors influence the relative importance fashion consumers attach to individual attributes has important implications for fashion

marketers in their target market selection, product design as well as their presentation and promotional programs.

Several attributes were considered very important by all groups where age did not significantly affect the importance assigned. These attributes are "Suits My Personality", and Color. This indicates that a primary focus must be placed upon these attributes by fashion manufacturers and marketers for all market offerings. These attributes can be the basis for standardized components of global fashion campaigns, those that appeal to customers in many nations, regardless of when they adopt the fashion item and irrespective of age. An additional attribute, Fit, was also considered very important by all national and adopter groups, however, fashion marketers must adjust the emphasis they place on this attribute based on the age of the targeted fashion consumer. Fashion items targeted to older groups of fashion consumers will put greater emphasis on this attribute than campaigns targeting younger fashion consumers. Using and emphasizing other attributes in marketing campaigns must be sensitive to the adopter status, the national market, and the age of the fashion consumer. Style, design, and the perceived quality of the fashion item are very important to early adopters, they lose their importance as later adopters enter the market. Caution must also be exercised in emphasizing attributes to different national markets. Comfort is considered to be a significantly more important attribute by U.S. fashion consumers than Austrian consumers. There is also a significant difference in the importance U.S. customers attach to price. Age also influences the importance attached to price. Using a price appeal targeted to U.S. consumers, especially to older consumers, may not be as effective with Austrian consumers, especially Austrian fashion leaders.

Branding and image have been standard components of promotional campaigns for fashion apparel. In the present study, brand name and store image were not considered to be important attributes for fashion followers. Age also impacts the importance of these attributes. Older fashion consumers attach less importance to the brand and store image attributes. This suggests that a campaign using store and brand image may be best suited for younger fashion leaders.

Summary

The first question guiding the research concerns the impact of culture on purchase decision making for fashion apparel. Focusing on the importance consumers associate with decision attributes, this study found that culture does influence the purchase decision of fashion consumers. The second question posed in this study concerned the impact of adopter status on the purchase decision. Study findings also indicate that when consumers' adoption category influences their purchase decision. Although age alone did not significantly affect the purchase decision, age's interaction with adopter status and culture did influence the fashion purchase decision.

There are numerous strategic and tactical implications of these findings. Strategically, the findings suggest that elements of marketing campaigns should be standardized across nations, adopter groups, and age groups. Other elements of marketing campaigns should be differentiated across national markets, adopter categories, and age groups. Tactically, these findings suggest which attributes are best emphasized in different national markets, to consumers at different times of adoption, and to different age groups.

With increasing globalization, sound knowledge of differences in consumer purchase behavior across cultures is essential for apparel manufacturers and marketers to be successful in foreign markets. Cross-cultural studies conducted in the past have shown that consumers from different cultures differ in their apparel purchase behavior and therefore, a one-size fit all marketing strategy will not be successful to respond to different needs of fashion consumers from different countries.

Limitations

This research used subjects from academic institutions in two nations. Projecting specific findings to groups other than normally found in these environments is susceptible

to error. Future research should extend to subjects in other national markets. This research used Goldsmith's and Hofacker's Domain Specific Innovativeness Scale. Although this instrument has been used in other cross-cultural studies, it may not effectively define fashion leaders and fashion followers in all nations. This study adds evidence to establishing this scale as a reliable measure. The selection of attributes fashion consumers base their purchase decision on was extracted from prior studies. However, the identity and use of attributes by consumers in any decision is dynamic and may not adequately represent the attributes used by consumers at the time of the study.

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