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The Effects of Brand Familiarity on Perceived Risk, Attitude, and Purchase Intentions toward an Intimate Apparel Brand

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Previous studies have found that female consumers are frequently dissatisfied with intimate apparel purchases due to certain unfavorable factors, such as inconsistent sizing and variation in fit across different brands and even within the same brand (Hart & Dewsnap, 2001). To avoid mis-purchasing risk, female consumers are likely to remain faithful to previous choices and buy the same intimate apparel from the same brand from which they used to buy (Hart & Dewsnap, 2001). Compared to unknown brand names, well-known brand names decrease a consumer's perception of risk, thereby increasing positive perceptions of the brand and, in turn, increasing purchase intentions (Park & Lennon, 2009). Little research has previously focused on reducing perceived risk to increase purchase intentions toward intimate apparel brands. Thus, further investigation is necessary to better understand intimate apparel purchase behaviors by exploring factors that might lower the perception of risk.

This study adopted perceived risk theory (Cox, 1976) and the theory of reasoned action (TRA; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Perceived risk theory explains that consumers utilize stored information to reduce undesirable consequences in the purchase decision process. According to the TRA, beliefs about behaviors/objects affect the attitude and sub-sequential intentions regarding the particular behaviors/objects. A well-known brand provides better recall (Kent & Allen, 1994) and lowers the level of risk perception, which may increase attitude and purchase intentions toward the brand. Thus, we hypothesized that brand familiarity decreases the perceived risk of intimate apparel shopping, while also increasing attitudinal and behavioral responses toward the brands. A well-known U.S. intimate apparel brand, Victoria's Secret, was used to explore consumers' real intimate apparel shopping behavior.

A pre-survey was conducted to identify the most familiar intimate apparel brand. A convenience sample of 73 students participated in a paper-pencil survey. The majority of respondents (90%) indicated Victoria's Secret as the most prominent brand and was selected in this study to examine the effects of brand familiarity on perceived risk and attitudinal and behavioral responses toward the brand. An online survey was conducted using adult females from an Alumni Association at a large Mid-Southern university in the US. Reliable and valid measures from previous research were adopted and modified to assess the four variables (i.e., brand familiarity, perceived risk, attitude, and purchase intentions). Seven-item attitude scales and five-item purchase intentions scales were adopted from Lee, Fiore, and Kim (2006). A sample of 368 females between the ages of 18 to 64 participated in the study. The majority of respondents (85%) identified as highly-educated young Caucasian or European American women between 18 and 29 years with a median age over 25. Over 92% of participants indicated that they had previously worn or purchased intimate apparel from Victoria's Secret. Structural

equation modeling (SEM) was run in Mplus 7.0 to analyze the relationships proposed in the framework.

An exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation extracted one factor for each construct with an Eigenvalue greater than 1.0. Items were retained if standardized factor loadings were above .50 on the factor but below .30 on the other factors. All factor loadings of the retained items were greater than .73. Reliability was supported for all four variables ($\geq .85$). Results showed that both measurement and structural models fit the data well [$\chi^2 = 115.17$ ($df = 48$), $p \leq .001$, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .03]. All proposed six paths in the SEM model were statistically significant ($p \leq .001$), with the exception of the path from brand familiarity to attitude ($\gamma = .07$, $t = 1.07$). These results indicated that brand familiarity influenced perceived risk ($\gamma = .65$, $t = 17.85$, $p \leq .001$) and purchase intentions ($\gamma = .10$, $t = 2.28$, $p \leq .05$). Perceived risk influenced attitude ($\gamma = .62$, $t = 11.16$, $p \leq .001$) and purchase intentions toward the intimate apparel brand ($\gamma = .72$, $t = 14.67$, $p \leq .001$). Attitude influenced purchase intentions toward the intimate apparel brand ($\gamma = .11$, $t = 2.57$, $p \leq .05$).

These findings implied that young female consumers who are familiar with a particular intimate apparel brand are likely to perceive a low level of risk, leading to positive and strong attitude and purchase intentions toward that particular intimate apparel brand. The results indicated that perceived risk had a much stronger impact than did brand familiarity on attitude and purchase intentions in intimate apparel shopping, a conclusion that may have implications for intimate apparel marketers. These findings also suggest that young female consumers may perceive a low level of risk from personalized shopping experiences using specialists to help with fit and sizing and through labeling for performance information, including easy care, odor resistance and moisture management. Consumers may perceive health-related risks such as back pain and poor posture from unfamiliar intimate apparel brands. Thus, establishing brand familiarity through integrated marketing communication is crucial for risk reduction strategy in intimate apparel shopping.

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