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An Examination of Male Consumers' Attitude toward Using Fit Mass-customization and Intention of buying Fit Mass-customized Apparel

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Keywords: mass-customization, fit, consumer characteristics, attitude, purchase intention

The purposes of the current study are (a) to develop a framework to examine the factors that influence consumer attitude toward using fit MC and intention of buying fit mass-customized apparel, and (b) to identify the characteristics of male consumers who have a greater intention of buying fit mass-customized apparel. Based on the purposes of the study, a conceptual model was developed through the integration of the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989), and previous propositions and study findings, and was used as the framework of the research. The consumer characteristics variables included in the framework were three types of benefits sought (i.e., uniqueness seeking, fit seeking, deal seeking) and two types of innovativeness (i.e., fashion innovativeness, technology innovativeness). These variables were included based on previous literature, which suggested possible relationships between benefits sought and perceived usefulness of fit MC (e.g., Fiore, Lee & Kunz, 2003), and between innovativeness and self-efficacy in using new technology such as fit MC (e.g., Parveen & Sulaiman, 2008). Based on the postulations of Theory of Planned Behavior and Technology Acceptance Model, perceived usefulness, self-efficacy, two types of facilitating conditions (i.e. time availability, money availability), attitude toward using fit MC, and intention of buying fit mass-customized apparel were included in the framework. Benefits sought were proposed to be significantly related to perceived usefulness, and innovativeness was speculated to be significantly related to self-efficacy. Perceived usefulness, self-efficacy, and facilitating conditions were proposed to be the predictors of attitude toward using fit MC. The relationship between attitude toward using fit MC and intention of buying fit mass-customized apparel was also tested.

Based on Goldsmith and Freiden (2004), consumers were willing to use the MC option for dressy clothes. It is possible that consumers would want a better fit for dressy clothing typically worn in a work environment for professional look, and thus, the men's dress shirt was selected as the product category in the investigation. The respondents of the current study were male consumers age 20 and older, who resided in the United States and held an occupation in either of the two categories: (a) Sales and Office occupations and (b) Management, Professional and related occupations, based on the categories used in the U.S. Census. The above criteria were used in sample selection because respondents who met the criteria were considered to have more frequent needs to purchase and wear men's dress shirts, and thus, may have a higher demand for a dress shirt that desirably fits their body. A national sample, based on the above-mentioned respondent selection criteria, was recruited by a marketing research company, which provided a proprietary panel that contained more than two million subjects. The demographic distribution of the panel was similar to the U.S. Census data, which led to a sample selection that better

represented the U.S. general population. As the instrument of data collection, a questionnaire was developed and uploaded on the marketing company's website. A total of 474 responses were received and used for data analyses.

Stepwise multiple regression results showed that uniqueness seeking, willingness to pay a premium, and fit seeking were significantly related to perceived usefulness of fit MC ($\beta=.19$, $p<.001$; $\beta=.18$, $p<.001$; $\beta=.13$, $p<.01$). Technology innovativeness was a significant predictor of self-efficacy in using fit MC ($\beta=.34$, $p<.001$). Perceived usefulness of fit MC, time availability to use fit MC, and self-efficacy in using fit MC were the predictors of attitude toward using fit MC ($\beta=.45$, $p<.001$; $\beta=.28$, $p<.001$; $\beta=.13$, $p<.01$). Attitude toward using fit MC significantly contributed to predicting the intention of buying fit mass-customized apparel ($\beta=.61$, $p<.001$). To identify the demographic characteristics of consumers who had a greater intention of buying fit mass-customized apparel, descriptive statistics were conducted. Over half of the respondents (54.2%) expressed that they were likely to purchase fit mass-customized dress shirts. The majority of these respondents were between 25 to 44 years old (54.4%), earned a bachelor's or higher degree (80.2%), were Caucasians (77.8%), and earned an annual household income between \$50,000 to \$149,999 (63.4%).

The above results provide useful bases for developing business strategies for apparel companies that offer the fit MC option. For example, the current study showed that the consumers who were more technologically innovative felt more self-confident in using fit MC. More favorable attitude toward using fit MC were found among the consumers who perceived fit MC as being more useful, had more time available to use fit MC, and were more confident in using fit MC. These results suggest that the apparel company may use an innovative technology such as a mobile application that enables customers to easily use fit MC and to make them feel more self-confident in using fit MC. Training sales representatives to understand the benefits of using fit MC and to recommend this option to the customers may be a useful approach to help customers to recognize the usefulness of fit MC. Clearly informing the customers of the information needed (e.g., body measurements) and approximate duration of time to engage in the process may help the customers to form an accurate perception about the time needed for using fit MC. In addition, a menswear company may use the above-described demographic characteristics of male consumers who were likely to purchase fit mass-customized dress shirts to develop the segmentation strategy for its fit MC business to focus its targeting effort on a profitable market segment.

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