

THE FASHION CONSCIOUS MALL SHOPPER: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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This paper models the relationship between the variables of fashion consciousness, price consciousness, variety seeking, comparison shopping, and attitude towards shopping. A mall intercept study found that those mall shoppers who are fashion conscious are also price conscious, have a positive attitude towards shopping, are variety seekers, and engage in comparison shopping. The results suggest that fashion conscious mall shoppers differ significantly from those mall shoppers who are not as fashion conscious. The implications for mall and retail managers are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s, half of all retail sales were mall transactions (Feinberg and Meoli 1991). Trends now indicate that malls are not effectively meeting the varied needs of shoppers and mall shopping is declining (Nichols, Li, Kranendonk and Roslow 2002). Fewer people are going to the mall, they are going less often, and they are spending less time there (Berry 1996; Nichols et al. 2002). The decline in mall patronage can be attributed to several factors. Mall shoppers find most malls look alike with malls basically offering the same services (Wakefield and Baker 1998) and that mall shoppers do not find shopping an enjoyable (Berry 1996; Wakefield and Baker 1998), comfortable or safe activity (Underwood 1994). Additionally, the busy lifestyle of shoppers and (Balabanis and Vassileiou 1999; Groover 2006; Wakefield and Baker 1998) and the advancements made by e-tailers to accommodate the Internet savvy shopper has contributed to the decline (Groover 2006). Finally, concerns about the economy and job security have alerted shoppers to be more prudent with their spending (ICSC 2006).

What is happening is that more shoppers do not like going to the mall, they do not think it is

worth their time or financial resources to go to the mall, and there are now many other non-mall retailing alternatives. Shopping centers face increased competition from power centers, discount malls, discount stores and home shopping (Barnes 2005; Groover 2006). Given the increase in competition and concerns of shoppers, mall owners and retailers need to determine who are their most profitable customers, what do they need from their shopping experience, and how can they meet those needs effectively (Carpenter and Fairhurst 2005; Yavas 2001). In today's current economy, the need for mall retailers to more effectively reach their key markets is becoming even more critical. While it is becoming increasingly difficult for retailers to differentiate themselves on the basis of merchandise, price, promotion, or location, the store itself can offer a unique environment that may influence shoppers' patronage (Roy and Tai 2003). For many mall retailers, this will suggest a change in strategy as they have reduced service and ambience as they have been trying to compete in terms of price with discount retailers.

Studies in the past have looked at a variety of factors impacting mall shopping behavior such as service quality (Laroche, Teng, Michon and Chebat 2005), the emotional components of shopping (Dawson et al. 1990), excitement (Wakefield and Baker 1998), retailer interest (Jones and Reynolds 2006), hedonic and

utilitarian needs or motivations (Babin, Dardin and Griffin 1994; Bardhi and Arnould 2005; Carpenter and Fairhurst 2005; Chang 2002; Nichols et al. 2002; Stoel, Wickliffe and Lee 2004), patronage motives and purchase patterns (Yavas 2001), risk (Mitchell and Harris 2005), consumer decision-making styles (Wesley, LeHew and Woodside 2006), personal values (Shim and Easterlick 1998), retail crowding (Eroglu, Machleit and Barr 2005), imagery elaboration (Roy and Tai 2003), social cues (Hu and Jasper 2006), and correlates of mall frequency (Roy 1994). No study however, focuses on how fashion consciousness, price consciousness, comparison shopping (for price), and variety seeking impact the mall shopping experience in the United States.

Ours is the first to examine the fashion conscious shoppers and what are their needs in terms of fashion consciousness, price, and variety. While there have been other studies that have looked at fashion conscious shoppers (Wan, Youn and Fang 2001; Walsh, Mitchell and Henning-Thurau 2001), these studies, with the exception of Goldsmith, Kim, Flynn and Kim 2005) who looked at price sensitivity of Korean fashion innovators, have not addressed in significant detail fashion conscious mall shoppers needs in terms of price. In today's mall retail climate, this is becoming a more critical issue to examine and this paper contributes to the literature by measuring and testing a model of fashion consciousness that examines price consciousness and comparison shopping. Additionally, there is little in the literature that has looked at fashion conscious mall shoppers in terms of their need for variety as the literature has focused on fashion in terms of innovativeness (Stanforth 1995; Goldsmith 2000; Wan et al. 2001; Goldsmith et al. 2005) rather than variety. This paper hopes to address this gap in the literature through a more detailed look at the needs of American fashion conscious mall shoppers specifically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Mall retailers need to make sure that they attract shoppers, particularly the heavy user.

Goldsmith (2000) finds that buyers who spend the most on new fashions (i.e., the heavy user) are significantly different than the light shopper (or user). The literature suggests that the heavy user of fashionable clothing is found to be more involved with fashion, more innovative and knowledgeable about new fashions, more likely to act as opinion leaders, and less price sensitive, plus they shopped more (Goldsmith 2000, p. 21). Retailers need to better understand today's fashion-conscious shopper to see what they are looking for in their mall shopping experience now. In this literature review, we discuss fashion consciousness; price consciousness; variety seeking; and comparison shopping. We also present the hypotheses to be tested.

Fashion Consciousness

Fashion conscious can be defined as consumers who are sensitive to their physical attractiveness and image (Wan et al. 2001). "Fashion conscious people are highly aware of their appearance, of how they dress and of how the things they possess are the extended forms of their self identity." (Wan et al. 2001, p. 272) Yavas (2001) finds the presence of new fashions to be an important shopping motive. Goldsmith and Stith (1990) find fashion innovators to be younger and to place greater importance on the social values of being respected, excited, and the fun/enjoyment aspect of life than non-innovators. Fashion conscious consumers have also been found to be self-assertive, competitive, venturesome, attention seeking, and self confident (Stanforth 1995).

In terms of shopping behaviors, fashion conscious shoppers tend to shop at high-quality stores and also engage in home shopping activities (Wan et al. 2001). Fashion conscious shoppers concerned with showing individuality, will be more likely to shop online (Wan et al. 2001). Fashion conscious shoppers also tend to spend more money on clothing (Wan et al. 2001). Finally, shoppers who are fashion conscious want to keep their wardrobe up to date with the latest style and gain pleasure from

shopping (Walsh, Mitchell and Henning-Thurau 2001). Thus, we propose that:

H₁: Mall Shoppers who are fashion conscious will have a positive attitude towards shopping.

Price Consciousness

Price is one of the most important marketplace cues due to the fact that the price cue is present in all purchase situations (Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer 1993). Price consciousness is the degree to which the consumer focuses solely on paying low prices (Lichtenstein et al. 1993; Jin and Suh 2005). Yavas (2001) found price competitiveness to be a primary shopping motive. Grewal and Marmorstein (1994, p. 459) found that the “consumers’ willingness to spend time comparing prices is affected by the psychological utility, as well as the economic value of the expected savings.”

Retailers need to recognize that the stereotype of the price conscious consumer as a frugal shopper may not hold, as the pursuit of thrift can be a hedonic experience due to the pursuit of the unexpected (Bardhi and Arnould 2005). Also, as consumers’ need for novelty increases, so does their price sensitivity (Anglin et al. 1994). While Wan, et al. (2001) finds that risk aversion and price consciousness showed weak relationships with fashion consciousness, shoppers in high stress situations though do have higher levels of price sensitivity (Anglin, Stuenkel and Lepisto 1994). Given the stressful economy, we propose that even fashion conscious shoppers are price conscious:

H₂: Mall shoppers who are fashion conscious are price conscious.

Variety Seeking

Variety-seeking behavior is the tendency of individuals to seek diversity in their choices of services or goods over time (Kahn, Kalwani and Morrison 1986) in order to maintain an optimal level of stimulation (Menon and Kahn 1995). “Consumers have some kind of internal need (due to satiation) or drive (due to thrill-

seeking), or even an intellectual curiosity that causes people to choose variety over time.” (Kahn 1998, p. 46) Shoppers seek variety to satisfy a need for stimulation by bringing something new into their lives, even if they are satisfied with their current brand (Walsh et al. 2001). This need for stimulation may be met by providing variety within a product category or in the choice context (Menon and Kahn 1995). Finally, Yavas (2001) finds that variety of stores and product selection to be primary shopping motives.

In terms of fashion, Stanforth (1995) suggests that fashion innovators have a greater need for experiences (as a subscale of sensation seeking) than fashion followers. Goldsmith, Frieden, and Kilsheimer (1993) offered that fashion leaders in both the U.S.A. and the United Kingdom value excitement more than non-fashion leaders. Finally, Lee and Lee (2007) offer that variety is a critical attribute for consumers who buy fashion products online. Thus, we propose that fashion conscious mall shoppers will also have a need for variety:

H₃: Mall shoppers who are fashion conscious are variety seekers.

Comparison Shopping

Comparison shopping is seen as a form of information seeking and the need to comparison shop increases as the need for novelty increases (Anglin et al. 1994). Given the considerable inter-store price variations for standardized consumer products (Grewal and Marmorstein 1994) and as department stores have become more competitive with off-price retailers, comparison shopping is becoming more important (Kirby and Dardis 1984). There are costs though associated with comparison shopping including time costs and uncertainty about specific product availability (Kirby and Dardis 1984). For those who enjoy shopping, price comparison shopping may be seen as worth the time (Marmorstein, Grewal and Fishe 1992). Finally, comparison shopping has been found to increase with high stress situations, time pressures, and a high number of life status changes; this may be due to the use of gathering

information as a coping mechanism (Anglin et al. 1994). Thus, as comparison shopping can serve as a means for saving money (Kirby and Dardis 1984), for addressing novelty needs (Anglin et al. 1994), and can be seen as worth the effort (Marmorstein et al. 1992), we propose the following:

H₄: Mall Shoppers who are fashion conscious will engage in comparison shopping.

METHODOLOGY

This paper addresses the relationship between the variables of fashion consciousness, price consciousness, variety seeking, comparison shopping, and attitude towards shopping. Our model depicting these relationships is presented in Figure 1.

Sample

The study employed a mall intercept study. Permission was sought from the mall authorities and, with their cooperation, data was collected by three upper level undergraduate marketing students who were trained in data collection procedures and used as interviewers. This approach has been successfully used in previous retailing and services research (e.g., Arnold and Reynolds 2003; Jones and Reynolds 2006). Interviewers were instructed to recruit non-student participants only. All surveys were personally administered by the interviewers. The mall administration was (covertly) sponsoring the study and they provided interview areas inside the mall. The study was conducted in a southeastern U.S. city. Thus, the sample is a regional convenience sample.

A total of 210 respondents participated in the study. The descriptive information for the sample is presented in Table 1. All scales used to test the proposed model can be found in Table 2. A three-item comparison shopping scale was developed following standard scale development procedures (i.e., Churchill, 1979; Gerbing and Anderson, 1988; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994) utilizing depth-interviews and pretesting. All scales were measured on a five

point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

As Table 1 illustrates, we had a strong representation of both men and women. Our sample was diverse in terms of age and income. It needs to be noted that the county in which the mall was located had a younger population with lower incomes compared to the state and the USA in general (Census 2006). For example, the median household income was \$32,672 for the county and \$42,421 for the state compared to \$43,318 for the country; the percent of the population below the poverty level was 17.7 percent for the county and 13.3 percent of the state compared to 12.5 percent for the country (Census 2006). As education and income have not been shown to be significant predictors of fashion consciousness by others in the literature (Goldsmith et al. 1993; Wan et al. 2001), we do not feel that the median income of our sample was an issue. Finally, we measured occupation, mall frequency, and why the respondents visited the mall. These results suggest that people visit the mall for a variety of reasons.

Each scale was first investigated using exploratory factor analysis and the results supported a single dimension for each scale. Additionally, item-total correlations were higher (greater than 0.50) for each construct. Descriptive statistics for each scale as well as correlations between all constructs are presented in Table 3. A measurement model using LISREL with maximum likelihood estimation was then conducted, consistent with Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) two-step approach. The results indicated an acceptable measurement model fit ($\chi^2_{(80)} = 175.75$, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = 0.07, CFI = 0.97; IFI = 0.97; NNFI = 0.97). The results supported the internal consistency of all scales as the composite reliability was greater than 0.76 for all scales (see Table 2). Variance extracted for all scales was greater than the generally acceptable value of 0.50 (see Table 2), indicating a high level of shared variance between the indicators of cognitive age. The completely itemized standardized loading for all measurement items are in Table 2.

**FIGURE 1:
Proposed Model**

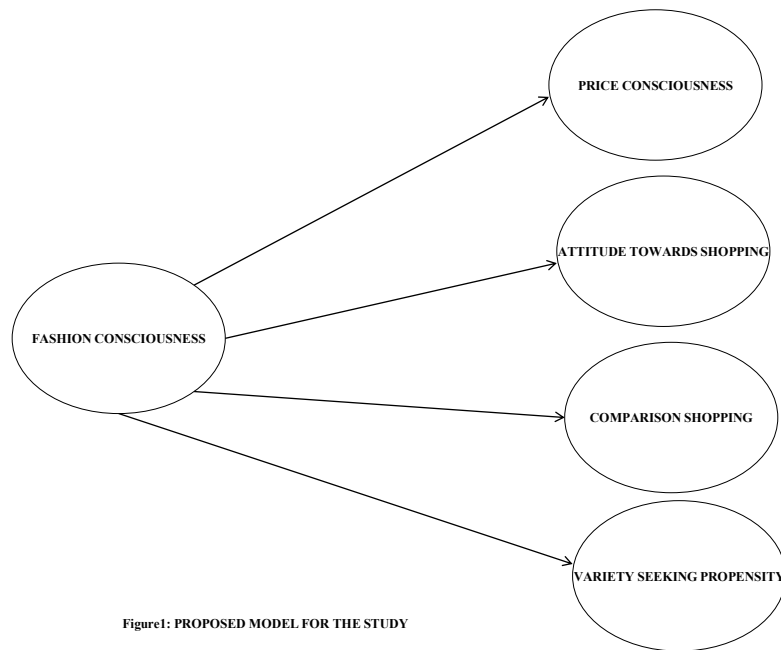


Figure1: PROPOSED MODEL FOR THE STUDY

The results also support the convergent and discriminant validity of all of the scales. The items of each scale loaded highly on its respective construct (t-values ranging from 7.81 to 14.99), providing evidence of convergent validity (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). As evidence of discriminant validity, none of the confidence intervals of the phi matrix included 1.00 (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). Discriminant validity was also tested by comparing variance extracted estimates with the squared phi estimates (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The variance extracted estimates were greater than the squared phi estimates for all sets of constructs, supporting discriminant validity.

The structural model (see Figure 1) using LISREL was then estimated to test the proposed relationships. The fit statistics indicated an acceptable model fit ($\chi^2_{(86)} = 197.39$, $p < 0.01$; RMSEA = 0.08, IFI = 0.96; CFI = 0.96; NNFI = 0.95) (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson and Tatham 2006) and the results can be found in Table 4.

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1 was supported in that mall shoppers who are fashion conscious will have a positive attitude towards shopping ($t=11.74$). Hypothesis 2 was supported in that mall shoppers who are fashion conscious will be price conscious ($t=2.55$). Hypothesis 3 was supported in that mall shoppers who are fashion conscious will exhibit variety seeking behavior ($t=9.85$). Finally, mall shoppers who are fashion conscious will engage in comparison shopping ($t=3.84$). Thus, hypothesis 4 was supported.

Fashion Consciousness

In this study we found significant support for our hypotheses dealing with the relationships between fashion consciousness and other attitudinal and behavioral variables. H1 (that shoppers who are fashion conscious have a positive attitude towards shopping) was supported. This suggests that shoppers who are fashion conscious like to shop. Per Goldsmith (2000), the heavy user of fashionable clothing

TABLE 1
Descriptive Information on Sample

Items	
Gender:	
Male	53%
Female	47%
Age:	
21-30	43%
31-40	23%
41-50	17%
51-60	8%
61-70	5%
Above 70	4%
Income:	
0-10k	21%
10,001-30k	34%
30,001-50k	23%
50,001-70k	13%
Above 70k	8%
Occupation:	
Homemaker/Not Employed	22%
Self-Employed	16%
Educator	6%
Professional	7%
Work for Company/Business	41%
Other	8%
How often do you frequent the mall?:	
Daily	6%
Weekly	35%
Monthly	25%
Less than once a month	24%
Once or twice a year	10%
Why do you visit the mall?:	
Shopping/Gathering Product Information	69%
Window Shopping	28%
Food/Eat	26%
Check out what is on sale	17%
Entertainment	12%
Walk/Exercise	10%
Meet Friends	8%
Other	6%

TABLE 2
Measurement Items

Scale/Items ^a	Standardized	Loading Source/Adapted From
Attitude towards Shopping (CR=0.85, VE=0.65)		Donthu and Gilliland (2002)
Shopping is fun.	0.88	
I get a real high from shopping.	0.80	
Buying things makes me happy.	0.74	
Comparison Shopping (CR=0.78, VE=0.54)		New
I print coupons from the Internet and use them to buy products at the mall.	0.68	
I normally return products back to the stores from where I bought the product when I find a better deal on the Internet.	0.81	
I often bring “price check-sheets” or “comparison prices” when shopping for specific items in the mall.	0.71	
Fashion Consciousness (CR=0.85, VE=0.66)		Wells and Tiggert (1971)
It is important to me that my clothes be of the latest style.	0.77	Lumpkin and Darden (1982)
I usually have one or more outfits that are of the very latest style.	0.87	Wilkes (1992)
When I choose between the two, I usually dress for fashion, not for comfort.	0.79	
Price Consciousness (CR=0.76, VE=0.52)		Lichtenstein, Ridgway and Netemeyer (1993)
I usually purchase the cheapest item.	0.71	
I usually purchase items on sale only.	0.86	Donthu and Gilliland (2002)
I often find myself checking prices.	0.57	Donthu (2000)
Variety Seeking Propensity (CR=0.86, VE=0.71)		Donthu and Gilliland (2002)
I like to try different things.	0.82	Donthu (2000)
I like a great deal of variety.	0.85	
I like new and different styles.	0.86	

TABLE 3
Construct Correlations, Means, Standard Deviations and Coefficient Alphas

Construct	Mean	Standard Deviation	Coefficient Alpha	1	2	3	4	5
1. Price Consciousness	3.08	0.97	0.83	1				
2. Variety Seeking	3.39	1.02	0.92	0.322**	1			
3. Fashion Consciousness	3.06	1.07	0.89	0.207**	0.636**	1		
4. Attitude towards Shopping	3.22	1.09	0.85	0.349**	0.589**	0.598**	1	
5. Comparison Shopping	1.94	0.99	0.83	0.207**	0.041	0.049	0.091	1

* correlation significant at $p < 0.05$
 ** correlation significant at $p < 0.01$

TABLE 4
LISREL Results for the Hypothesized Model

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized estimate	t-value	Result
H ₁	Fashion Consciousness—Attitude towards Shopping	0.84	11.74	Supported
H ₂	Fashion Consciousness—Price Consciousness	0.22	2.55	Supported
H ₃	Fashion Consciousness—Variety Seekers	0.76	9.85	Supported
H ₄	Fashion Consciousness—Comparison Shopping	0.34	3.84	Supported

was found to be more involved with fashion, more innovative and knowledgeable about new fashions and shopped more.

Price Consciousness

Our results revealed that the fashion conscious shopper was also price conscious. Thus, H2 was supported. While the fashion conscious shopper is looking for the newest fashion, with a limited budget and current economic conditions, it is becoming more difficult for the fashion conscious consumer to be extravagant in his/her spending. Although, they have an eye for good fashion and want to be accepted among their peer groups, they are becoming more prudent in their spending and looking for value.

Variety Seeking

Shoppers who are fashion conscious want to keep up with the changes in fashion and adopt the latest styles and trends. Thus, H3 (that shoppers who are fashion conscious are variety seekers) was supported. According to Menon and Kahn (1995), consumers' need for variety can be addressed through either brand switching or from variation across product categories or choice situations. This would suggest that for retailers to keep fashion conscious shopper loyal to their store, they will need to provide a variety of brands and styles to satisfy them.

Wakefield and Baker (1998) found that mall tenant variety can lead to higher levels of excitement about the mall as well as increased desire to stay at the mall. Retailers can address the need for variety though offering a high variety product line or by changing the store atmospherics (Kahn 1998). Firms need to make sure that this variety is truly distinctive and enjoyable and avoid redundancy that makes the decision process more difficult (Kahn 1998) and confusing for shoppers (Walsh et al. 2001). Retailers need to ensure that the customer is equipped to handle the variety, particularly with greater assortments (Huffman and Kahn, 1998). For shoppers who are familiar with a product

category, such as the fashion, if the products are organized in the store in a manner congruent with the shopper's internal schema, shoppers will have a higher perception of variety and greater satisfaction (Morales et al. 2005).

Comparison Shopping

Given our findings that fashion conscious shoppers are more price conscious and are more prone to variety seeking, it makes sense that we would also find these shoppers to do more comparison shopping (supporting H4). Additionally, fashion conscious shoppers have a more positive attitude towards shopping, suggesting that they like to shop and are willing to put in the time to get the best deal. Our findings suggest that fashion conscious consumers like the latest style, but are prudent in what they will spend to get the latest style through taking the time to search for the best price.

IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Laroche et al. (2005) noted that the higher the levels of pleasure consumers felt with mall shopping, the higher the perceptions of service quality they had; with higher levels of service quality, there was a higher intention of purchase. Terblanche and Boshoff (2006) find that satisfaction with the in-store shopping experience determines consumers' attitude loyalty toward the retailer which over time influences behavioral loyalty in terms of actual sales. The literature clearly illustrates that satisfaction with a retailer leads to store loyalty and positive word of mouth (Carpenter and Fairhurst 2005; Jones and Reynolds 2006) as well as repatronage intentions, looking forward to going to the retailer again, wanting to learn more about a retailer, and retailer interest (Jones and Reynolds 2006), and time spent in the mall (Stoel et al. 2004). Finally, Pappu and Quester (2006) find a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and retailer equity. Thus, as satisfied shoppers can mean enhanced sales and profits for retailers and that the fashion conscious shopper is a key segment

for mall retailers to reach, retail managers need to understand how they can best serve the fashion conscious shopper.

In terms of the findings of our study specifically, we recommend that mall retailers need to actively pursue the fashion conscious shopper as they will shop more often, but to recognize that while these fashion conscious like shopping and want variety, they are also price sensitive and will comparison shop to get fashion at the best price. Our results suggest that for mall retailers to be successful, they will have to recognize that fashion conscious consumers may no longer be price insensitive as suggested by earlier research, but that fashion shoppers are demanding more from retailers in today's economy. Additionally, as shown in Table 1, shoppers visit the mall to meet a variety of needs that mall retailers will need to recognize and address.

Kahn (1998) suggests that the firm with most varied lines and the most varied store atmospherics will be most likely to capture the fashion conscious consumer, but care needs to be taken to not confuse the consumer (Huffman and Kahn 1998). Given that fashion conscious consumers spend more (Wan et al. 2001) and satisfied consumers will be more loyal and spread positive word of mouth (Carpenter and Fairhurst 2005), retailers need to ensure that they truly offer distinctive variety to attract fashion shoppers.

This research though is subject to several limitations. Firstly, this study was done in a southeastern city in the U.S. which was home to a regional shopping mall. Therefore, additional studies, done in different areas of the USA are needed to enhance our findings. Second, as this study surveyed only consumers in a regional mall, additional research is needed to replicate this study with other retail formats (such as discount stores or online shopping) to help increase the generalizability of our findings about the fashion shopper.

In addition to replicating this study in other regions as well as other types of shopping

centers, there are other areas of future research. In terms of price comparison, future research needs to determine what the fashion conscious considers to be a good value; is it everyday low prices or is it getting discounts on designer items. For comparison shopping, future research needs to examine how mall shoppers utilize this (i.e., do fashion shoppers first look online and then go to the mall). Thus, this paper hopes to encourage research on the fashion shopper and what are they looking for in shopping.

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