

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIALIZATION AGENTS ON FASHION CONSCIOUSNESS**Nor Asmahani Ibrahim (Corresponding Author)**

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate how socialization agents - media, parents, and peers - influence on students' fashion consciousness in apparel. Participants were involved is 200 students from semester one to semester six, who undertaking Bachelor of Accounting in Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin. The statistical methods used were similar with some of the methods which employed in the past researches such as independent sample t-test and Pearson Correlation Coefficient. Meanwhile, pilot test was conducted in order to develop an appropriate instrument for testing. The results by using Pearson correlation coefficients analyses suggested that, the students' fashion consciousness is, significantly correlated to each socialization factor. Overall, parents, online, music and TV exert the greatest influence. Moreover, significant differences were found for socialization agents and fashion consciousness across gender. Parent and consumer educators should consider findings of this study as a guide to give better education to students as consumers.

Key Words: Fashion consciousness, socialization agents, young customer, apparel, shopping, parent, peer, media.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Fashion consciousness is more than simply an awareness or preferences for fashion, style or trends in choosing apparel. Fashion consciousness refers to a person's degree of involvement with the styles or fashion of clothing. An individual does not have to be either a fashion opinion leader or a fashion innovator to be considered fashion conscious. Rather, fashion consciousness is characterized by an interest in clothing and fashion, and in one's appearance" (Summers, 1970; Jonathan and Mills, 1982). The fast fashion and famous retailers such as H&M, TopShop, River Island and Zara are those places the younger shoppers enjoy to shop almost two or three times a week. This is one of the fact that fashion conscious among teens had been increased from time to time. (Birtwistle *et. al*, 2007). By the age of nine, most of boys actually has a well-understanding of fashion brand. Indeed, they were looking forward to get the fashion brands by that average age. (Hogg and Bruce, 1998). Perhaps, a recent study of fashion consciousness in Eastern European markets indicates that young male respondents were more fashion conscious than female respondents (Manrai *et. al*, 2001). Women are better at decoding the communicative language of fashion statements based on gender differences studies previously (McCracken and Roth, 1989) and they tend to use fashion and clothing that represent them for self-definition and self-identity (Gould and Stern, 1989; Soloman, 1989).

College students are one of the potential markets for marketers to penetrate in since their available discretionary spending was totaled to \$287 a month, these market bring almost \$200 billion a year in buying power to the US market (Gardyn, 2002). Recently, college students has a similar spending power with adults which it has been estimated that between 70% and 80% of college students owned one of credit card, whereas, the average student has three of them. This percentage shows the ownership of credit card among college students rapidly increased from time to time (Hayhoe *et al.*, 2000). In addition, it gives reasons why adolescent are becoming more heavily targeted as a market segment recently. The purchasing power among adolescent has increased dramatically and the level of awareness towards branding, store images and price value concepts are keenly concentrated by them (Bristol, 2001).

Due to the growth of shopping malls in Malaysia, the marketers able to cater the most potential market in Malaysia since youth are the largest potential market in Malaysia which comprising those in the 15 to 24 age-group. This group was increased by 1.6 percent per annum which is from 4.03 million in 1995 to 4.37 million in 2000. Indeed, during the plan period, the youth population is expected to increase by 26% per annum which is from 4.37 million in 2000 to 4.98 million in 2005. (Eight Malaysia Plan 2001-2005).

According to previous study, by visiting six malls and spending almost 2.5 hours per mall visited indicate that the post-secondary students in the Klang Valley of Malaysia typically are the most frequent and long-staying visitors to shopping mall. Indeed, many of them have visited three or more different shopping malls in a month. A major spending destination for many Malaysian students is shopping mall as 56 per cent of respondents had spent more than 10 per cent of their monthly expenditures in malls and otherwise, more than 37 per cent spent over 15 per cent of monthly expenditures in malls. The result of this research shows that, there is not a much differences of money spent in shopping malls between young adult in Western countries and in Malaysia (Dahari *et. al*, 2005).

In this study, students are considered as young adults. Youth market is classified according to age such as tweens (7-10), young teenagers (11-13), teenagers (14-16), young adults (16+). (Spero and Stone, 2004).

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.2.1 Fashion Consciousness in Apparel

Styles exist in various forms such as in architecture, sculpture, painting, politic and music. It also appears in popular heroes, games, hobbies, pets, flirtations and weddings forms. However, in apparel, style is the characteristics or distinctive appearance of garment; it is likely the combination of features that makes it unique and different from other garments (Stone, 2004). The fast fashion and famous retailers such as H&M, TopShop, River Island and Zara are those places the younger shoppers enjoy to shop almost two or three times a week. This is one of the fact that fashion conscious among teens had been increased from time to time. (Birtwistle *et. al*, 2007)

Consumer socialization commonly refers to the process by which individuals acquire consumer role-relevant skills, attitudes and knowledge (Moschis and Churchill, 1978). Thus, consumer behaviors occur through a process of learning through overt consumer and socialization agent interactions. Consumer socialization research identifies three major socialization agents impacting the consumer behavior of children and adolescents: peers; parents; and mass media (Moschis and Moore, 1979; Moschis, 1987). The relationship of sex and fashion consciousness suggests that a link between what Millenson defined as "people profiles with product relationships" may be useful to "develop consumer insights, which in turns enable to give new insight like whom can be targeted, what the target is like, and how to position the product in potential segments in order to maximize the appeal" (Millenson, 1985).

According to Ward *et. al*,(1977), the consumer socialization perspective can be seen as parents teach children consumer skills through a continuous process of observation, imitation and also guided consumption opportunities. These skills have been developed from time to time among children. Meanwhile, LaChance *et. al*, (2003) described as mothers are recognized as being the family's most influential socialization agent. It is obviously can be seen due to their high level of involvement in daily decision-making from mothers compared with fathers who has level involvement in deciding what to buy. Perhaps, the interests also one of the factors why mothers tend to involve more in shopping decisions compared with fathers. According to Moschis and Moore (1979), when children move through adolescent, the parental influence is decreased because peer influence much stronger as adolescent had a close relationship with peers at this stage.

However, parents still remains as a most influential decision maker in purchase activities especially in terms of financial and budget per purchase and performance risk. Otherwise, peer influential also important as they will act as important sources for products perceived as relevant similarly suit with peer acceptance. Bachman *et. al*, (1993) found that peer group mostly was influenced by public luxuries such as prestigious clothing and shoe brands which emerges slowly as children progress through their elementary school years.

One of the most famous social interactions used by young adults is advertising as founded by Ritson and Elliott (1999). Obviously, advertising used as a conversation medium between peers and meanings learned through advertising are transmitted to peers through the acquisition and consumption of products perceived by them (Choi and Ferle, 2004).

1.3 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study used quantitative research approach and surveyed the student's fashion consciousness and their socialization, to compare individual differences among college-aged students. The participants in this study were all undergraduate students from the Faculty of Business Management and Accountancy, consisted of Bachelor of Accounting(BACC) students from first semester to six semester. Simple random sampling was used as a method in selecting respondents from this group. From the 230 questionnaires distributed, the researcher managed to get a return of a 200. This yielded a response rate of 87%.

1.4 RESULTS

The sample was composes of a dissimilar proportion of females and males (see Table 1). The usable sample of participants included 174 females (87.0%) and 26 males (13.0%). For December 2009/2010 session, the entire first to three years BACC was 223.

Table 1 : Frequency Distribution And Percentage Of Gender Reliability Analyses of the Measurement Scales

Gender	Frequency	Percent (100%)
Male	26	13.0
Female	174	87.0
Total	200	100

Table 2: Reliability Test for Variables

Scales	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Fashion consciousness	6	0.781
Peer influence	7	0.794
Parental influence	9	0.800

The reliability test for the first variable, media exposure, was not carried out because of this item consists of only one. The second variable labeled as parental influence, consisted of nine items. The coefficient alpha for this scale is 0.80. The reliability for third variable, peer influence consisted of seven items measured by coefficient alpha is 0.79. The fourth variable, fashion consciousness, consisted of six items is 0.78 as measured by coefficient alpha.

1.4.1 Differences of Demographic Factors on Socialization Agents

Results showed that influence from parents revealed the most significant differences by gender: females were more likely to be influenced by parents ($t = -1.302$, $p=0.097$) as shown in Table 4. Other significant differences were noted for peer influence: males were more likely to be influenced by peers ($t = 2.070$, $p = 0.02$). Results of media exposure revealed females were more likely to spend time online ($t = -1.143$, $p = 0.127$), listening to music ($t = -2.530$, $p = 0.0006$) and watching tv ($t = -1.653$, $p = 0.02$) than were males.

Table 3 : Mean Values Of Media Exposure, Parents, Peers Variables By Gender

	Gender	Mean
Movies	Male	3.12
	Female	2.95
Spending time online	Male	3.50
	Female	3.74
Listening to music(cd/tapes/radio)	Male	3.00
	Female	3.52
Watching TV	Male	2.85
	Female	3.22
Parent	Male	3.13
	Female	3.29
Peer	Male	2.92
	Female	2.63

This table shows the mean values of socialization agents by gender. The highest mean score to each agent was recorded by female.

Table 4: Results of Independent Samples t-Test by Gender Differences on Socialization Agents

	t	df	Significant
Movies	0.708	198	0.235
Spending time online	-1.143	198	0.127
Listening to music(cd/tapes/radio)	-2.530	198	0.006
Watching TV	-1.653	198	0.05
Parent	-1.302	198	0.097
Peer	2.070	198	0.02

Results show that the student fashion consciousness is shown a positive relationship to each of socialization agents (media, socialization, parents, peers). Parental influence viewing ($r = 0.200, p < 0.05$), peer influence ($r = 0.376, p < 0.05$), movies ($r = 0.281, p < 0.05$), online ($r = 0.305, p < 0.05$) and listening to music (cd/tapes/radio) ($r = 0.317, p < 0.05$). See Table 5

Table 5: Pearson Correlation Coefficient Matrix of Seven Variables

		watching tv	movies	spending time online	listening to cd/tapes/r adio	parent	peer	Fashion consciou sness
watching tv	Pearson Correlation	1	.292**	.043	.195**	.145*	.134	.138
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.545	.006	.040	.059	.051
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
movies	Pearson Correlation	.292**	1	.367**	.296**	.060	.072	.281**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.399	.312	.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
spending time online	Pearson Correlation	.043	.367**	1	.251**	.069	.106	.305**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.545	.000		.000	.331	.134	.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
listening to cd/tapes/radi o	Pearson Correlation	.195**	.296**	.251**	1	.094	.240**	.317**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.000	.000		.187	.001	.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
parent	Pearson Correlation	.145*	.060	.069	.094	1	.189**	.200**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.040	.399	.331	.187		.007	.005
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
peer	Pearson Correlation	.134	.072	.106	.240**	.189**	1	.376**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.059	.312	.134	.001	.007		.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Fashion consciousne ss	Pearson Correlation	.138	.281**	.305**	.317**	.200**	.376**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.051	.000	.000	.000	.005	.000	
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

This table shows the correlations between socialization agents and fashion consciousness. There are significant relationships between seven variables. The most significant was recorded by relationship between "movies, spending time online, listening to music, peers, parents" and fashion consciousness.

1.5 DISCUSSION

1.5.1 Differences of Demographic Factors on Socialization Agents

The findings of the study indicate that demographic profiles, gender particularly, on fashion consciousness exert a strong influence on the interaction process between Unisza students and socialization agents. It shows that the influence of socialization agents on college students may vary across genders.

This study revealed that female students were more likely spending time online, listening to music and watch TV, which it influences their behavior in choosing apparel but also affect their level of consciousness towards fashion as well. This finding also consistent with the past research by Spero *et. al* (2007) teenagers had exposed with massive advertising across media, it gives the opportunities for them to control the information. These teenagers able to assess, interact and digest the information they was exposed in. It has no doubt that this is a new ways of learning and self-taught program skills among teenagers whereas they know when those products are being sold. In fact, Morrison (2007) shows 90 percent of teens have a mobile phone and readily use it in the shopping process. Otherwise, 25 percent of teens used a mobile phone or PDA to access the Internet while in a store and almost a third bought something using their mobile phone. The availability and accessibility of technology actually contribute to the driven and motivation for shopping, either offline or online.

On the relationship between college students and socialization agents' influence on teens fashion consciousness, parental influences emerged as a primary source to college-student-age. This finding is consistent with previous studies by Ward *et. Al* ,(1977) the consumer socialization perspective can be seen as parents teach children consumer skills through a continuous process of observation, imitation and also guided consumption opportunities. These skills have been developed from time to time among children. Meanwhile, LaChance *et. al*, (2003) described as mothers are recognized as being the family's most influential socialization agent. It is obviously can be seen due to their high level of involvement in daily decision-making from mothers compared with fathers who has level involvement in deciding what to buy. Perhaps, the interests also one of the factors why mothers tend to involve more in shopping decisions compared with fathers.

1.5.2 Differences of demographic factors on fashion consciousness

The finding of this study revealed that male and female students were significantly difference on fashion consciousness. According to past study, one's consciousness of one's own gender will influence one's feelings about oneself as a fashion object as well, since gender in society is closely linked with clothing, the expression of stereotypical sexual roles (McCracken, 1985), values (Millenson, 1985), and personality traits (Dichter, 1985). However, this study showed that female students were more fashion conscious than male counterparts. It can be supported by previous research on shopping which indicates strong behavioral differences in shopping activities between genders. (Grewal *et al.* 2003, Otnes & Mcgrath 2001). According to Borchert, *et al.*, 1996, the public self-consciousness of women in relation to fashion consciousness suggests that women tend to look more on appearance- related reinforcement whereas, men who are more fashion conscious focus more on what they are, as reflected by the positive relationship between fashion consciousness and private gender-consciousness. It shows that men are more gender conscious when it comes to fashion as they will connect themselves with their self-identity since what they prefer means to be a man.

1.5.3 Socialization Influences on Fashion Consciousness

This study had related with study done by Greco and Paksoy (1989) which they found that commonly that commonly fashion-conscious shoppers rely more on information from mass media compared with non-fashion conscious shoppers. A branded-fashionable products are now commonly can be easily can be found in media content and as a product placements in various places such as movies, television shows, songs , electronic games and even in books. This commercial message actually can be seen as an influence factors to young people by linking media consumption to consumer-oriented values and attitudes. It also indicates that most of the male shoppers in US spend almost 34 percent of their disposable income on fashion related items includes an apparel and related product. (Chain Store Age, 2002).This study shows that media had influences student's fashion consciousness, which is all of the media related, TV, music and online have a significant relationship. This study had related with study done by Greco and Paksoy (1989) which they found that commonly that commonly fashion-conscious shoppers rely more on information from mass media compared with non-fashion conscious shoppers.

1.6 CONCLUSIONS

The general purpose of this study is to explore fashion consciousness based on sample college students. As noted in the procedural problem, the study linked selected personal characteristic (gender) and socialization agents (mass media, parents, peers) to fashion consciousness. This study was conducted Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (Unisza) in September 2010/2011. These findings provide insight on factors that help to explain the variation in attitudes toward fashion. The consumer variables of peers influence, parental influences, media exposure and gender are associated with fashion consciousness. For advertising practitioners, these results have shows the implications on attitudes towards fashion and gender. Indeed, the overall finding of current study shows that individuals are socialized by parents, peers and mass media were influenced by their attitudes on fashion. Therefore, advertisers can manipulate this implication by generating messages that able to influence socialization process through parents, peers or media. In addition, the advertisers can develop messages that can best market their products while building and maintaining positive attitudes toward fashion. Meanwhile, such attitudes can influence individual's attitudes toward individual advertisement and ultimately the fashion itself. The positive attitudes toward fashion hopefully can lead to positive attitudes toward the advertisement and ultimately, to make a buy. Overall, this findings suggests that female students especially can be targeted by marketers because of these are the most potential markets since they are more conscious toward fashion, more likely to be influenced by media exposure (spending time online, listening to music, watch TV).

Those potential markets also were likely to be influenced by opinion leader, such as parents. For example in this study, parents indicate the major influencer than peers for female students when choosing products. Otherwise, they won't buy the products if they don't get an approval. So this is the best indicator to the marketers and advertisers to capture these potential markets.

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