Effect of the need for popularity on purchase decision involvement and impulse-buying behavior concerning fashion clothing

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ABSTRACT

Consumer researchers specifically interested in popularity have generally focused on either product popularity or brand popularity but have been largely silent on the subject of the *need for popularity*. Although a large number of studies have examined reference group influence on consumer behaviors, no research has yet evaluated the need for popularity in the consumption context. With this aim, the main purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of the *need for popularity* on purchase decisions and impulse-buying behavior concerning fashion clothing. Accordingly, this study explores the relationships between fashion clothing purchase decision involvement, need for popularity and fashion-oriented impulse buying. Using a sample of Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants (*n* = 333), this study finds that (1) the *need for popularity* positively influences purchase decision involvement and impulse-buying behavior concerning fashion clothing and (2) the involvement in purchase decisions concerning fashion clothing positively influences fashion-oriented impulse buying. This research advances the understanding of the need for popularity in the context of fashion consumption. Implications and limitations for future research are discussed and consumer researchers are called to pay attention to this promising research area.

追求人气对流行服饰的购买决策涉入和冲动购买的影响

当今社会，流行服饰的消费具有很大的社会意义和经济学意义。我们喜欢的衣服，既是我们表达和定义自己的媒介，又是与他人沟通的桥梁。消费者同时也可以通过流行服饰很好地展现自己的社会地位和经济实力。由此看来我们可以这样说：流行服饰实现了消费者的功能性需求和符号性需求。

人气或流行一词广泛地出现于心理学和社会心理学的文献中。其中大多数研究都是针对同行的知名度，或是集中探讨某个特定主题，比如任务达成, 或人气的浪漫度 。消费者学和服装理论研究者却似乎对此话题并没有给予足够的重视。前者对于消费者的流行服饰消费行为兴趣颇深，也对消费者做了大量关于品牌和产品流行度的研究。但是，诸如"消费者认为他们自己有多受欢迎"

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，"人们通过什么样的消费活动能在同龄人中间变得很受欢迎、很酷""有没有什么时尚品牌，人们买了就会人气大增"以及广义上的"成为有人气的消费者意味着什么"此类的问题在消费者研究学中被尘封至今。为了更好地理解人气在流行服饰消费中的具体地位，本研究讨论了追求人气(NfP) 对于流行服饰的购买决策涉入和冲动购买的影响。

Kaiser, Ngasawa, & Hutton 提出了个人的构建性外貌既可以用作社会交流的工具，也会滋生不同的穿衣风格。消费者对于自己相貌的满意程度直接影响他们的自尊；生理吸引力则是直接影响到了社会权利、幸福和他人对自己的正面反馈。基于现有的研究，本研究提出了追求人气与流行服饰的购买决策涉入和冲动购买正相关。此外，我们还认为流行服饰的购买决策涉入与冲动购买正相关。假说关系如下：
H1:人气与流行服饰的购买决策涉入正相关。
H2:人气与流行服饰的冲动购买正相关。
H3: 流行服饰的购买决策涉入与冲动购买正相关。

本研究中所有概念都用既存的测量尺度衡量，并依次验证作者所提出的假说。零售环境中的冲动购买用3个项目测量，流行服饰的购买决策涉入用10个项目测量，流行性用12个项目测量.基于SmartPLS 3.0的偏最小二乘法 (PLS)，我们来检验概念之间的假说，同时也证实了测量方法的有效性和可靠性。本研究采样亚马逊土耳其机器(MTurk)上的333名受访者(n = 333)，得出了 如下结论：(1)人气的追求与流行服饰的冲动购买和购买决策涉入正相关 (2) 流行服饰的购买决策涉入和流行服饰的冲动购买正相关。

本研究结果证实了人气的追求与流行服饰的购买决策涉入和冲动购买均正相关。这一点对于市场营销者来说很重要，因为消费者对于人气的追求影响了他们购买流行服饰的时机和方式。尤其是在流行服饰的购买上，既然服装企业影响甚至决定了潮流，企业们应该了解消费者如何利用自己的产品提升人气。根据本研究结果，流行服饰的购买决策涉入也与流行服饰的冲动购买正相关。由此，我们可以得出如下结论：购买决策涉入较高的消费者会更容易冲动消费，这种倾向在流行服饰的购买上更加明显。因此，消费者学研究者和流行服装理论研究者应该在他们的研究里加入"人气"这一既新颖又潜力无穷的概念。但是，人气的研究不应该只局限于流行服饰的领域，更应该拓宽至品牌忠诚度、奢侈品消费、名人效应等相关领域。在流行服饰领域研究人气的追求可以作为一个很好的出发点。

此外，本研究仍具有一定的局限性。本研究在数据的收集上受限于亚马逊土耳其机器；过多关注流行服饰的购买决策涉入；并没有选中某种特定的产品，而且受访者的回答多基于他们平日买衣服的习惯；没有考虑产品质量和品牌忠诚度等变量。此外，本研究没有考虑城乡差异。基于此种种原因，未来的研究应该囊括一下方面：(1) 比较城乡人们对于人气的追求 (2) 着眼于特定品牌，扩宽流行服饰的种类 (3) 研究能影响流行服饰购买决策涉入以及冲动购买的其他变量的影响。

1. Introduction

The consumption of fashion clothing has both economic and social importance in society today. Consumers express or define themselves and communicate with others through the clothes they prefer (Solomon, 1988). Fashion clothing/products can also be used as a tool by consumers to represent social status and economic power. From this perspective, we can say that fashion clothing fulfills both functional and symbolic needs for the consumer (Khare

& Rakesh, 2010). Consumer researchers have devoted special attention to understanding consumer behavior concerning fashion clothing, and some studies have been conducted on popularity in consumer research assessing either brand or product popularity. Questions such as, "How popular do consumers perceive themselves to be?"; "What consumption activities make them feel popular or cool consumers within their peer groups?"; "Are there any product brand groups that make consumers seem more popular to others?"; and in more general terms, "What does it mean to be or feel popular in a consumption context?" have been ignored by consumer researchers until now.

Although many different factors affect fashion-oriented impulse buying and its involvement in purchase decisions, the effects of the *need for popularity* on impulse buying, and the involvement in purchase decisions concerning fashion clothing, are investigated in this study.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

Dressing can be identified amongst other expressive communication styles as the manifestation of both taste and identity (Bourdieu, 1984). Bourdieu and Johnson (1993) explain how an aesthetic style becomes popularly desired. According to this notion, a style's desirability is inherent to its visibility to others. In other words, clothing is generally worn in a public space; therefore, we dress for others. Aesthetic stances adopted in matters such as cosmetics or clothing are opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social spaces (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 57). For example, fashion events are important aspects of the industry's lifecycle (Entwistle & Rocamora, 2006) and these events are not only about showcasing collections, but also involve displaying social status. From this perspective, when considered in the context of the need for popularity, the desire to be popular can be associated with one's social status and the nature of the fashion industry as a whole.

Some early scholars investigated motivations for wearing clothes using need theories (Barr, 1934; Creekmore, 1963; Hurlock, 1929). These theories mostly focused on why people need to dress. Although some sub-motivations have changed over time, the main motives for dressing have not changed substantially. In a more recent study, Shim and Bickle (1994) found that clothing is still seen as a way of enhancing reputation and prestige. Accordingly, gaining reputation and/or popularity has always been regarded as a key means for people to attract the attention of others in their social networks. However, the ways of gaining popularity have changed. Developing this argument further, as Rocamora (2011) stated, the importance of new technologies and the use of social media platforms such as fashion blogs have established social media as privileged spaces of identity construction and social interaction. In social media, dress is also used to mark out differences of taste, identity and lifestyle. Today, consumers actively use social media platforms and fashion blogs as a way of being seen as popular by others. For this reason it can be said that the need for popularity has taken a new form with the help of new media channels and fashion events. The foregoing argument can also be evaluated in the light of Veblen's (1934) theory of conspicuous consumption which claims that the conspicuous tendencies of consumers push them to consume their possessions in public. From this perspective, it can also be said that fashion consumers use social media platforms to signal their social status and gain personal popularity in the context of fashion consumption.

2.1. Fashion clothing purchase decision involvement

Involvement can be defined as a variable influenced by motivations that direct consumers to certain behaviors (Houston & Rothschild, 1977). It has been contended that involvement relates to behaviors such as advertising receptivity, decision-making, and brand loyalty (Arora, 1985; Entwistle, Sheldon, Sowden, & Watt, 1996; Quester & Lin Lim, 2003; Bauer, Sauer, & Becker, 2006). With regard to involvement concerning fashion clothing, O'Cass (2004) examined the effect of materialism and self-image/product-image congruency on consumers' involvement concerning fashion clothing, discovering that having knowledge about fashion clothing influences consumer confidence in making purchase decisions. Also, O'Cass and Choy (2008) realized that consumers' level of involvement had a positive effect on brand-related responses. Hence, O'Cass (2000) developed a scale comprising four dimensions to measure involvement in fashion clothing. The dimensions on this scale are product involvement, purchase decision involvement, consumption involvement and advertising involvement. Until now, no study has examined the relationships among involvement in purchase decisions concerning fashion clothing, fashion-oriented impulse buying, and the *need for popularity*.

2.2. Need for popularity

In the psychology and social psychology literature, popularity has been widely investigated. Most studies conducted on popularity relate to peer popularity or are focused on specific topics, such as task success (Korman, 1968), individual friendship selection (Masters & Furman, 1981) and romantic popularity (Speed & Gangestad, 1997). Consumer researchers and clothing theorists, however, have been largely silent on the subject.

    In modern societies, physical appearance is a prominent element of fashion clothing. Kaiser, Nagasawa, and Hutton (1991) claimed that individually constructed appearance, which can also be used as a tool in social interactions, creates different varieties of clothing styles. Consumers' satisfaction with their physical appearance is associated with self-esteem (Jackson, 2004; Kwon, 1997). Equally, physical attractiveness is related to social power (Cann, Siegfried, & Pearce, 1981), happiness (Mathes & Kahn, 1975) and receiving positive feedback from others (Workman & Johnson, 1991). In addition, several studies found that attire can influence impressions of attractiveness (Hewitt & German, 1987; Solomon & Douglas, 1985) and that physical attractiveness is related to a perception of popularity within peer groups (Dion & Berscheid, 1974; Krantz, 1987). Therefore, it can be argued that the purchase of fashion clothing may be governed by the need or desire to be popular.

    Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) summarized the relationships between popularity, fashion, and purchase decisions in the following way:

> If a particular style becomes popular, behavior of a segment of society will be directed toward the purchase and use of items manifesting this style. As the fashion declines in popularity, the group will discontinue purchase of these items and may reject the use of the remaining portion of previous purchases (p. 25).

    Undoubtedly, one of the things that make a particular style popular is peer approval. For instance, Grant and Stephen (2005) found that peer group approval is a key decision factor when buying fashion items. Elliott and Leonard (2004) concluded that athletic shoes, as branded fashion products, are seen as a tool enabling popularity within peer groups. Johnson, Nagasawa, and Peters (1977) also found that college students evaluated their friends as being

more sociable and popular when they wore in-fashion clothing than when they wore out-of-fashion clothing. More specifically, Young and Cooper (1944) found that the appearance of clothing is associated with popularity. These results can also be seen as an indicator of the *need for popularity* being an important factor in fashion clothing purchase decisions.

2.3. Fashion-oriented impulse buying

Rook (1987) defined impulse buying as a sudden, intense and persistent urge to buy something immediately. When buying on impulse, consumers make spontaneous, unreflective and immediate purchases (Rook, 1987). In the case of fashion-oriented impulse buying, consumers have no previous experience with the fashionable product and fashion-oriented impulse buying can be influenced by positive emotions when shopping (Mattila & Enz, 2002). Although there are different motivations driving consumers to impulse buy, studies conducted on the subject have ignored the importance of the need for popularity.

Verhagen and van Dolen (2011) defined fashion products as hedonic products, that is, they evoke affective reactions, being one of the characteristics assumed to trigger impulsive decision-making. Also, Han, Morgan, Kotsiopulos, and Kang-Park (1991, p. 15) summarize fashion-related shopping motives as the "need for attention", "desire to be with peers" and "desire to be informed about latest trends in fashion, styling or product innovations". Each of these motivations can be associated with the need for popularity. Therefore, the desire to be popular may drive consumers to make purchases on impulse. In addition, impulse buyers are more status-conscious and image-concerned (Tam & Tai, 1998) and therefore, they may buy impulsively as a way of looking good in the eyes of others. However, only a few studies have been conducted on fashion-related impulse-buying behavior. Han et al. (1991) argued that new brands and fashion styles prompt impulsive buying by consumers. Joo Park, Young Kim, and Cardona Forney (2006) found that fashion involvement has a positive effect on consumers' fashion-oriented impulse-buying behavior, which means that consumers with high fashion involvement were more likely to buy clothing with a new style or that had just entered the market if they saw it. Phau and Lo (2004) concluded that fashion innovators exhibit impulse-buying behavior in their Internet purchases. Japarianto and Sugiharto (2012) found that impulse buying is influenced by fashion involvement. However, no study has specifically investigated the effect of popularity and the purchase decision involvement concerning fashion clothing on impulse buying until now. Luo (2005) found that the presence of peers increases the urge to purchase. Similarly, Zhang and Shrum (2009) found that peer presence increases impulsive consumption tendencies. It can be concluded that impulse buying might be seen as a result of the desire to be popular within peer groups.

Based on the findings of prior studies and the foregoing discussion, it can be proposed that the *need for popularity* is related to impulse buying and purchase decisions in fashion clothing. In addition, fashion clothing purchase decisions are thought to affect fashion-oriented impulse buying. The study model is illustrated in Figure 1.

The hypothesized relationships between the constructs are as follows:

H_1: *Popularity is positively related to fashion clothing purchase decision involvement.*

H_2: *Popularity is positively related to fashion-oriented impulse buying.*

H_3: *Fashion clothing purchase decision involvement is positively related to impulse buying.*

3. Research method

3.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of two parts. The first part included demographic questions on age, income and education. The second part included items related to the respondent's *need for popularity*, fashion clothing involvement and impulse buying (see the Appendix for items).

3.2. Sample

The sample comprised 333 individuals (US residents) recruited from a web-based recruitment site, Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). It took participants 3 minutes on average to complete the survey. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 64 years (mean age = 32; SD = 8) and reported the following education levels: bachelor's degree = 43.5%, graduate degree = 24.9%, some college = 18%, associate's degree = 7.8%, and some high school = 5.8%. They also reported the following income levels (USD): $24,999 or less = 29.7%, $25,000–$49,999 = 30.6%, $50,000–$74,999 = 17.4%, and $75,000 or more = 22.3%. These participants received $0.05 in their Amazon.com account for successfully completing the survey, which is an average rate of pay compared with similar tasks on MTurk.

3.3. Measurement instruments and analysis

All constructs were measured using existing and tested scales and were used to test their hypothesized relationships. Three items measured impulse buying in the retail setting (Park & Lennon, 2006), 10 items measured fashion clothing purchase decision involvement (O'Cass, 2000) and 12 items measured popularity (Santor, Messervey, & Kusumakar, 2000). Partial least squares (PLS) analysis using SmartPLS 3.0 was used to test the hypothesized relationships between the constructs and to assess the validity and reliability of the measurements. In this study, SmartPLS was intentionally chosen because the data were non-normally distributed (Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2011).
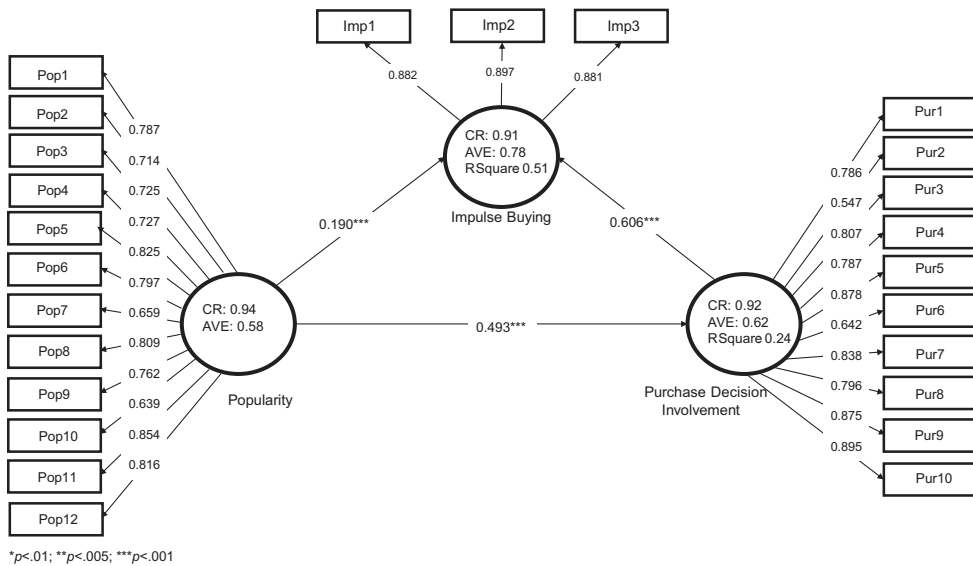
4. Results

4.1. Reliability and validity

Internal consistency was assessed by examining composite reliability statistics reported in SmartPLS. The composite reliability for all measurements exceeded the commonly used cut-off of .70 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2008). Moreover, as can be seen from Figure 1, all item loadings and AVE values (Popularity: .58; Purchase decision involvement: .62; Impulse buying: .78) for the constructs were higher than the threshold values. These results support the convergent validity of the measurements. Table 1 compares the square roots of the AVE (diagonal values) with the correlations among the reflective constructs. All constructs were more strongly correlated with their own measures than with any other constructs, suggesting good convergent and discriminant validity (Duarte & Raposo, 2010).

Table 1. Discriminant validity coefficients.

Variable	Impulsive buying	Need for popularity	Purchase decision inv.
Impulsive buying	**.886***		
Need for popularity	.490	**.762***	
Purchase decision inv.	.698	.492	**.792***

Note: Values were emphasized in bold for *p*-values greater than 0.07.

*p<.01; **p<.005; ***p<.001

Figure 1. Research model with results.

4.2. Structural model assessment

SmartPLS was used with a bootstrapping algorithm of 500 samples to analyze the path coefficient significance of the structural research model. Results of the model assessment are reported in Figure 1. According to the results, popularity positively influences both fashion clothing purchase decision involvement (β = .493, p < .001) and fashion-oriented impulse buying (β = .190, p < .001), supporting both H$_1$ and H$_2$, respectively. In addition, fashion clothing purchase decision involvement positively influences fashion-oriented impulse buying (β = .493, p < .001), thus supporting H$_3$. Results show that all hypothesized paths are significant at the .001 level.

5. Conclusion and implications

This study examined the relationships among the *need for popularity*, involvement in purchase decisions concerning fashion clothing and fashion-oriented impulse-buying behavior. The results demonstrated that the *need for popularity* positively influences both fashion clothing purchase decision involvement and fashion-oriented impulse buying. For marketers, this suggests that the need to be popular affects when and how one buys fashion clothing products. Particularly regarding fashion clothing, given that companies are the main actors that affect and shape fashion trends, they need to understand how consumers use their

products to be popular. The results of the study also showed that fashion clothing purchase decision involvement had a positive effect on fashion-oriented impulse-buying behavior. From this result, it can be concluded that consumers with higher levels of purchase decision involvement exhibit higher impulse-buying tendencies, especially when purchasing fashion clothing. This result also supports the findings of a study conducted by Joo Park et al. (2006).

In the literature, popularity studies generally have been focused on younger generations. However, in this study a broader age spread in the findings shows that the need for popularity cannot be limited to a particular age group (i.e. younger generations) in the context of fashion consumption. In other words, although fashion clothing shopping motivations vary by generations (Portolese Dias, 2003), the need for popularity can be seen as a common motivation for different age groups and this assumption needs to be retested in future studies.

This study reveals that the *need for popularity* is an important factor in fashion clothing consumption. This has some theoretical and practical implications. First, it is interesting that "the need to be popular" among others has been disregarded by both consumer researchers and clothing theorists. However, it would not be wrong to say that being popular or feeling popular has always been an important part of social interaction. As human beings, we always want positive attention and desire to leave a good impression on others. Furthermore, this is particularly true when we think about fashion clothing. Undoubtedly, dressing in fashion clothing products is an effective way to impress others. For this reason, both consumer researchers and clothing theorists who study fashion clothing should add "popularity" to their research agendas as a new and promising concept. However, popularity should also be studied not only in the fashion clothing context, but also in other related areas of consumer research, such as brand loyalty, luxury consumption, celebrity endorsement etc. However, it might be thought that studying the *need for popularity* in the context of fashion clothing is a good starting point.

6. Limitations and future research

Several important limitations must be kept in mind when considering the results of this study. First, this study relied on MTurk for data collection. However, previous research has demonstrated that data collected via MTurk shows reliable and valid results, similar to results obtained using traditional methods (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). Second, a significant focus of the study was on the involvement in purchase decisions relating to fashion clothing. In a previous study, O'Cass (2000) developed a scale to measure involvement in fashion clothing that consists of four dimensions: purchase decision involvement, product involvement, consumption involvement and advertising involvement. In this study, other involvement dimensions, except purchase decision involvement, were disregarded. For this reason, future studies should include other involvement dimensions. Third, respondents were asked to answer questions regarding their general fashion clothing activities. Future studies should be conducted considering different fashion product categories and specific brands. Furthermore, since the main purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of popularity, variables such as product quality and brand loyalty have not been taken into consideration in this study. For this reason, future studies need to focus on examining the effects of other variables that may be related to the fashion-related decision-making process and fashion-related impulse buying. Finally, rural–urban differences have not been taken into consideration in this study. For this reason, future studies might additionally investigate rural–urban differences regarding popularity.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Appendix. Measurement scales

Need for Popularity – five-point scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree
Pop1. I have done things to make me more popular, even when it meant doing something I would not usually do.
Pop2. I have neglected some friends because of what other people might think.
Pop3. At times, I have ignored some people in order to be more popular with others.
Pop4. I'd do almost anything to avoid being seen as a "loser".
Pop5. It's important that people think I'm popular.
Pop6. At times, I have gone out with people, just because they were popular.
Pop7. I have bought things, because they were the "in" things to have.
Pop8. At times, I have changed the way I dress in order to be more popular.
Pop9. I have been friends with some people, just because others liked them.
Pop10. I have gone to parties, just to be part of the crowd.
Pop11. I often do things just to be popular with people at school.
Pop12. At times, I have hung out with some people, so others wouldn't think I was unpopular.

Fashion clothing purchase decision involvement – five-point-scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree
Pur1. Making purchase decisions for Fashion Clothing is significant to me.
Pur2. Some individuals become completely involved or engrossed in making purchase decisions for

Fashion Clothing. For others purchase decisions for Fashion Clothing are not that involving. "How involved do you feel in making purchase decisions for Fashion Clothing?" – *five-point scale: Very low to very high)*
Pur3. I think a lot about my choices when it comes to Fashion Clothing.
Pur4. I place great value in making the right decision when it comes to Fashion Clothing.
Pur5. Purchase decisions for Fashion Clothing are very important to me.
Pur6. Making a purchase decision for Fashion Clothing requires a lot of thought.
Pur7. I attach great importance to purchasing Fashion Clothing.
Pur8. I like being involved in making purchases of Fashion Clothing.
Pur9. The purchase of Fashion Clothing is important to me.
Pur10. Purchasing Fashion Clothing is significant to me.

Fashion-oriented impulse buying – five-point scale: Strongly disagree to strongly agree
Imp1. If I see clothing in a new style, I buy it.
Imp2. When I see a garment with a new feature, I buy it to try it out.
Imp3. I like to buy new clothing which has just come out.