

Research on the Relationship between Clothing Product Attributes and Consumer Experience in Online Sales

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Abstract—product attributes refer to the characteristics that define a service or product. Product attributes deliver benefits through the tangible aspects of the product, that is, product appearance design, and the intangible feature, that is, product quality. Consumption experience is different from information processing, mainly related to the consumers' aesthetic taste and hedonic purpose. In online clothing sales, product attributes of clothing, including product appearance design, and product quality, consumers' consumption experience, including aesthetic taste and hedonic purposes, are the main factors that affect consumers' online buying behavior. This article uses the method of literature sources to re-organize the characteristics and meanings of product appearance, product quality, aesthetic taste, and hedonic purpose. Moreover, this article discuss the relationship between product design and product quality, the relationship between consumers' aesthetic taste and consumers' hedonic purpose, and the relationship between product design and consumers' aesthetic taste.

Index Terms—product appearance design, product quality, aesthetic taste, hedonic purpose.

I. INTRODUCTION

Product attribute is a product feature that influences customers buying decisions, mainly including product design and product quality. 94.7% of online shoppers pay attention to product attribute first, including appearance design and product quality [1].

From the information processing perspective, consumer choice consequences are typically viewed in terms of the product's useful function. By contrast, in the consumption experience view, consumption consequences appear in the fun that consumers derive from a product [2]. Clothing is classified as a highly hedonic and experience product; the consumption experience, especially hedonic aspect and aesthetic taste, is key for understanding clothing products [3]. Moreover, online consumers of clothing are pursuing emotionally, aesthetically-pleasing, and hedonic purposes products increasingly [4].

It can be seen that understanding the attributes of products, that is, the relationship between product design and product quality,

and understanding the relationship between product attributes and consumer experience are extremely important for understanding online clothing sales.

II. PRODUCT ATTRIBUTE

A. *Product Visual Appearance Design*

The design or physical form of a product is inherently linked with aesthetics, contains product shape, color, pattern, etc. [5]. A large volume of published studies describing the form and aesthetics of product appearance design play a significant role in consumers' purchasing behavior. By analyzing those researches, product appearance design mainly affects consumers in several ways. First, product appearance design is one way to achieve customer attention in cluttered markets [6] [7]. Actually, it is the first thing that connects a product with target customers. Products that are viewed as visually attractive are more likely to be chosen because customers have buying expectations and needs for a category [8].

Second, it is important to convey information to customers through the visual presentation of a product. In other words, the type of visual product element impacts the opinions of customers about the product [9] [10]. For instance, consumers' perspectives regarding such product characteristics as durability, value, technological complexity, ease of usage, sex-role appropriateness can be generated or affected through visual design elements. Bloch [8] and Creusen and Schoormans [11] showed that since consumer perceptions of product visual appearance design are the primary and basic relationships between human and product, those judgments naturally come from this experience of sensation and have a significant effect on consumers' buying decisions

Third, the consumers' perception of the beautifully visual appearance design of the product can offer sensory enjoyment and stimulation [12]. Moreover, the visual appearance design of products with an especially resonant nature will create very powerful emotional reactions among consumers [8].

B. *Product Quality*

The word of quality starts from the word of Latin 'qualitas' and signifies "of what." A clear definition of association between quality and product's properties is offered by the ISO 9000: "Quality is "the totality of those properties and characteristics of a product or an activity that relate to its suitability to fulfill stated requirements." Lots of scholars focus on the physical aspect of the product quality of clothing.

However, from the lever of consumer, Brown and Rice [14] held the view to add that the behavioral characteristics of the thing of clothing also can be divided into two main parts. One is the functional behavioral characteristics, and the other one relates to the aesthetic characteristics. The former means whether an item of clothing is durable and comfortable to the consumers. The latter emphasizes the sensory enjoyment and stimulation that clothing delivers to its consumers, for example, whether the color of clothing consumers is satisfying to the consumers. Therefore, as Schütte [15] suggested, clothing product quality definitions mainly focus on two important factors: functional factor and aesthetic factor.

C. *The Relationship between Product Design and Product Quality*

As mentioned in product visual appearance design, since the aesthetic factor of product quality is directly related to product design, this paragraph mainly analyzes the relationship between product design and functional factors of product quality. The product quality in this paragraph only represents the functional factor of product quality. Consumers' perceptions of product quality are influenced by their product appearance [16]. Actually, product appearance design is a significant signal of product quality [17]. For instance, product appearance design may convey quality by its solid-looking or reliable appearance [16] [18]. As Dickson [19] further pointed out that quality also has some intangible things. It resides in many aspects, the look, the sound, and even the feeling. People perceive it even though they cannot find a sound explanation. Therefore, product appearance design can be

actively used to provide consumers with a specific impression of high product quality. Similarly, Garvin [20] found that the impression of a product's appearance influences how customers perceive the quality. Furthermore, as an essential dimension for perceptible information of product quality, product appearance has a larger impact than that of the performance or price [16]. Some Other studies about the thing of clothing also illustrate evidence supporting this argument. Forsythe [21] pointed out that the product appearance of clothing, instead of the appeal's brand and price, is the main criteria for customers when evaluating its quality. Forsythe et al. [22] also highlighted the decisive role of the product appearance, design, and aesthetic characteristics in consumers' attitudes towards apparel quality while making purchasing decisions.

Research indicates that visually desirable products could strengthen the perceived quality in that they may even trigger a halo effect [23]. Therefore, more attention to product appearance aesthetics could boost sales. More specifically, online companies can manipulate the product appearance design to provide superior online shopping since the perception of a product's quality is more firmly linked with its appearance and aesthetic, and customers' online purchasing decisions are highly dependent on product appearance design [24] [25].

III. CONSUMPTION EXPERIENCE

A. *Aesthetic Taste (feeling)*

Jones [26] defined taste as "the discrimination of beauty from deformity and is shown in the preference for one object over another." A common-sense explanation of the taste refers to a person's attitude and response to the aesthetic phenomenon. Taste even means the perception and pleasure of outstanding achievements in the fields of art and fashion. [27]. Actually, by the mid-eighteenth century, the concept of taste became the most influential aesthetic term mainly owing to the immediacy and its close relation with senses [28].

On the one hand, the aesthetic taste is generally "perceived," and therefore, it is subjectively judged by people [29]. Judgments of taste totally rally on feelings, especially the feeling that makes people feel right and good. This view is in line with conventional wisdom and the well-known proverb "every man to his taste" alike. Under this view, people have his/her own unique taste. For example, when judging an item of clothing, two persons may have opposite preferences and choices. There is no right or wrong in aesthetic taste, and everyone has the right to pursue and enjoy their own aesthetic preferences [27].

On the other hand, those views did not consider that some aesthetic objects are generally agreed by society to be "better" than others. That is, some general principles of aesthetic taste are essentially unified. If not, people could not share the same beautiful items with others and even with their former generations. Take the attitude to the clothing, for example, and some clothes are commonly agreed to be more "tasteful" than others. Hoyer and Stokbuser-Sauer [27] also supported this view, believing that there are specific and generally accepted aesthetic preference or aesthetic taste criteria in the market, which can be objectively measured. To summarise, these subjective aesthetic tastes can be objectively reflected by specific objects and methods.

Overall, it shows that taste is neither fully subjective nor objective. As reflected by Kant and Bernard [30], the concept of aesthetic taste is subjective because it originated from personal feelings, but at the same time, he also emphasized that a certain degree of objectivity in these feelings exist, which is general views about specific objects.

In summary, every consumer has his own unique aesthetic taste. There is no right or wrong to this kind of feeling. However, there are universal aesthetic standards and preferences among mass consumers. This kind of aesthetic preference for certain products can be measured [31].

B. Hedonic Purpose

In terms of consumer subjects, Holbrook and Hirschman [2] divided the reasons for online shopping into two aspects, one is goal-oriented (for efficiency), and another one is experiential reasons (for hedonic purposes). By contrast, Childers et al. [32] found “hedonic purposes” to be a strong and consistent predictor for people’s attitude towards online shopping. A more joyful online shopping experience makes a more positive impression and attitude to purchase goods online. Similarly, Baltas, Kokkinaki and Loukopoulou [33] attributed one of the most basic reasons influencing consumers' purchase decisions and consumption behaviors to sensorily consummatory affective (hedonic) gratification.

The hedonic purpose and value of the consumer come from the hedonic experience, which is defined as enjoyment or pleasure. Venkatesh and Meamber [34] illustrate that this kind of hedonic experience is a lot stronger aesthetic response and aesthetic experience that arouse people’s multi-sensory reactions, fantasy, and emotions.

Thus, from the perspective of the shopping experience, consumption experience is a phenomenon that focuses on the pursuit of feelings and fun, which makes the products become needed seeking satisfaction and pleasure in the shopping experience [2]. Likewise, according to Klinger [35], the consequences of consumption appear in the hedonic experience that consumers obtain from the product, which provides a stronger aesthetic response and aesthetic experience and the resulting pleasure.

C. The Relationship between Consumers' Aesthetic Taste and Hedonic Purpose

Products can be classified according to two inherent characteristics, utilitarian value and hedonic value. In fact, all products commonly contain the essential properties of functional and hedonic [36]. However, the markets today make it tough to create differentiated goods and services simply by functional value. This increasingly adds affective, symbolic, and hedonic value for products by marketers to realize product differentiation. Further, hedonic properties that cause effective consumer dispositions are decisive for many product categories when purchasing decisions [2]. Combined with these ideas, Dhar and Wertenbroch [37] classified microwaves and personal computers as utilitarian goods. By contrast, in modern society, the functional attributes of clothing are becoming more and more diminished. Instead, clothing is classified as a hedonistic product category because of its symbolic, experiential, and pleasant characteristics [38].

Compared with utilitarian goods, which are considered as featuring instrumental and functional value, hedonic products are described as goods and services that create and provide more experiential as well as emotional values [37]. As Silverstein and Fiske [39] suggested, the market demands much more experiential and emotional values because today’s consumers have a higher level of aesthetic tastes and greater emotional consciousness.

Aesthetic taste is known as manifested preferences and becomes objectified in the consumption of goods and services. Its value primarily is an emotional reaction to the objectives, and the emotional reaction is able to be appreciated by consumers for their intrinsic reason [40]. Hardy, Schmitt, and Simonson [41] show that our daily decisions, including purchasing clothing, are all under the influence and guidance of our tastes.

The hedonic experience consumers enjoy from the hedonic products involves aesthetic taste [41]. Aesthetic taste potentially provides a richer and more comprehensive knowledge of consumer behavior, especially for hedonic products. This viewpoint is consistent with the research which emphasizes the significance of hedonic aspects in consumers’ behavior [42]. Specifically, consumers' aesthetic taste help generates hedonic value for product [2]. Moreover, Hoyer and Stokburger-Sauer [27] further pointed out that a consumer’s aesthetic taste is the primary driver of hedonic value.

D. The Relationship between the Product Appearance Design and Aesthetic Taste

For individuals, There is not necessary for professional training to learn how to appreciate beauty [43]. This is because people are able to form aesthetic views even they make little cognitive effort [44]. Actually, because of inborn biological features [12],

consumers are genetically more like things that have an aesthetically pleasing appearance [45].

However, although consumers tend to prefer good-looking products, their aesthetic taste can be affected by the outside world. Bourdieu [46] further argued that consumer aesthetic taste is externally stimulated and influenced by enhancing or changing the aesthetic information displayed by specific product design and form the appropriate and consistent responses of the individual to the product through vision senses. Consumers who pursue aesthetic taste are considered to have more design preferences [8]. In fact, not limited to those who pursue aesthetic taste, product design should at least elicit a moderate level of aesthetic responses in all consumers. Because consumers can instantaneously perceive visual information when they face aesthetics showed by the products. Consumers' perception and response at this time are very significant [47]. In a general sense, an aesthetic response refers to a person's reaction to a product based on their perception of the product [27]. It includes the engagement of attention and positive emotions.

In more depth, consumers' aesthetic responses come from the products' design and sensory properties rather than products' performance or functional attributes. In other words, the design of a product appearance is more than a mere product attribute. It is inherently appealing to consumers because it evokes consumers' aesthetic responses through consumers' aesthetic taste [8]. Therefore, it can be ensured that the consumers' responses to the products are aesthetically-compatible if its design is based on consumers' aesthetic taste [27].

IV. CONCLUSION

Product attributes mainly contain product appearance design and product quality. Product visual appearance design is the first thing that connects consumers with products. It is an effective way to attract consumers' attention. In addition, it can convey information to consumers and further affect consumers' cognition and emotions. The quality of the clothing product mainly involves aesthetic factor and functional factor (durability and comfortable capability). In the online sales of clothing products, the aesthetic factor of product quality is directly related to product design. From the perspective of functional factors, product appearance design is a significant signal for product quality's physical factor.

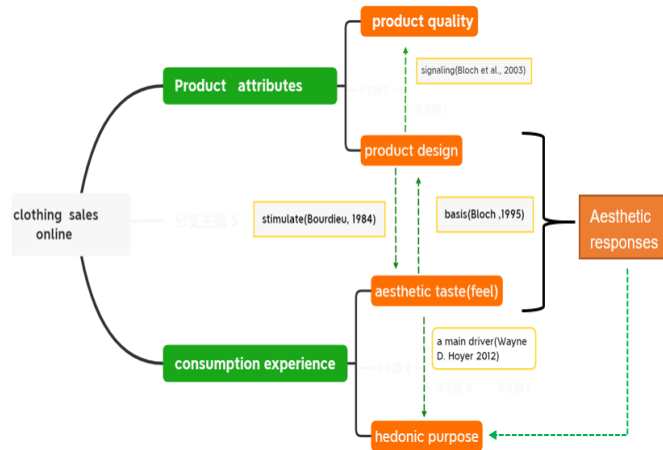


Fig.1. The relationship between clothing product attributes and consumption experience in online sales

In addition to product attributes, consumption experience is becoming more important in online sales, especially for experiential products. It mainly involves consumers' aesthetic taste and hedonic purpose. Actually, all products commonly contain utilitarian value and hedonic value. In modern society, the functional attributes of clothing are becoming more and more diminished. Instead, clothing is classified as a hedonistic product and experience product category because of its symbolic, experiential, and pleasant

characteristics.

Consumers' aesthetic taste is both subjective and objective. When it comes to product design, it reflects the subjective feelings and preferences of consumers. At the same time, it is stimulated and influenced by the objective external society and media on the design of products. Precisely because of these characteristics, the aesthetic taste of consumers can be perceived and measured.

As shown in Fig.1, the relationship between product attributes and consumption experience in online sales of clothing, product appearance design is a significant signal for product quality and it is based on the consumer's aesthetic taste, aesthetic taste is also the main driver for hedonic purposes. In online sales, consumers cannot directly touch the clothing products. Therefore, the appearance design based on the consumer's aesthetic taste is very important. More specifically, clothing products' appearance design arouses consumers' aesthetic responses through consumers' aesthetic tastes, triggers more hedonic values and purposes with more strong aesthetic emotions, and generates consumer buying behavior.

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