Chapter 7 Materialism Effect on Apparel Collaborative Consumption Platform Usage: A Research Proposal



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7.1 Introduction

Collaborative consumption (CC) has become a buzzword during the past few years. The total transactions of CC in Europe are valued at €28 billion in 2016 and expected transactions are valued at €570 billion by 2025 (PwC 2017). The upsurge of CC has brought forward new business in many industries, such as in transportation (e.g. Uber) and housing (e.g., Airbnb, HomeAway). In recent years the fashion and apparel industry is witnessing a rapid emergence of CC platforms (e.g. Rent the Runway, and Nolotiro). However, academic researches on CC, in fashion and apparel context, are still limited in comparison to other industries such as travel and transportation (Park and Armstrong 2017)

In fashion and apparel industry context, CC accentuates product usage rather than ownership, through sharing usage of underutilized or unwanted products by renting, swapping, trading, and lending (Botsman and Rogers 2010; Lang and Armstrong 2018)

As the definition of CC—"a peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based

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online service" (Hamari et al. 2016, p. 1)—suggests, the exchange of apparel is expected to happen between private individuals. However, the fashion and apparel retail industry is seeing a phenomenon where an increasing number of retailers are developing business models to provide a platform that facilitates renting or sharing of clothing items between consumers and/or the retailer (Perlacia et al. 2017). For example, some notable companies such as "The Ms. Collection" are providing the consumer with an unlimited assortment of designer dresses and accessories through their rental and swapping services for a rental subscription (Lang and Armstrong 2018). As this business is booming, it is becoming more important for retailers to understand apparel CC customer consumption behavior, what motivates customers to adopt such as models, and more importantly what stops them from using such as services.

In this chapter, our main goal is to explore the factors that drive consumers in collectivist cultures to participate in fashion CC platforms; particularly for consumers who have been reluctant to make use of fashion CC so far.

7.2 Literature Review

The internet has influenced people's daily living significantly. Through the internet, people can achieve different tasks which include searching for and acquiring information by using search engines, trading by using electronic commerce (e-commerce) and communicating with other individuals by using different communication platforms. The fast progress of internet tools has brought more attention to virtual communities and facilitated people virtual interaction through providing convenient applications such as virtual platforms and social media sites (Shiau et al. 2017).

Social media are defined as the "group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0 and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content" (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, p. 61). As its definition suggests, social media applications and platforms are allowing people to effectively interact with one another by commenting on different topics, reviewing different products and services, and even creating content (Harrigan et al. 2017). As a result, social media has led to the development of a new means of communication that involves customer interaction, facilitate value co-creation (Nambisan and Baron 2007; Zwass 2010; Kamboj et al. 2018), and introduce customers as main players in the purchase process.

As more and more people are relying on these platforms to receive recommendations on products and services, and keeping up-to-date with news, and latest trends (Shiau et al. 2017), modern firms started focusing more on understanding how potential customers are engaging in using these systems (Alalwan et al. 2017), and how to formulate a clear idea about the future of their business.

The large number of members participating in social networks and the key role word-of-mouth plays in forming users' behaviour and attitude (Liang and Turban 2011)

have resulted in the emergence of the concept of social commerce as a way to make commercial benefit from social networks such as sharing of commercial information or sales of product/service (Liang et al. 2011).

Social commerce is a form of internet-based activities that depend on peer-to-peer interaction, and it utilizes social media to "support social interactions and user contributions to assist activities in the buying and selling of products and services online and offline" (Wang and Zhang 2012, p. 2). Similarly, Yadav et al. (2013) defined social commerce as an "exchange-related activities that occur in, or are influenced by, an individual's social network in computer-mediated social environments, where the activities correspond to the need recognition, pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase stages of a focal exchange" (Yadav et al. 2013, p. 312).

The definition of social commerce indicates that its exchange-related activities, such as transaction, are performed through a computer-mediated environment and incorporate activities connected to consumer and companies contained under social commerce domain (Huang and Benyoucef 2017).

Taking into consideration social commerce definition and main associations, CC, "an economic system in which assets or services are shared between private individuals, either free or for a fee, typically by means of the Internet" (Oxford 2017), is categorised as a form of social commerce.

7.2.1 Collaborative Consumption

Consumer research witnesses increased attention to a collection of connected business and consumption practices known as "collaborative consumption" (Botsman and Rogers 2010). Hamari and Ukkonen (2015) introduced a general definition of CC as "a peer-to-peer-based activity of obtaining, giving, or sharing the access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online service" (Hamari and Ukkonen 2015, p. 1). Belk (2014) articulated a more business-oriented definition for CC by emphasizing the importance of compensation in the exchange process. In his definition, Belk (2014) stated that CC is represented by "people coordinating the acquisition and distribution of a resource for a fee or other compensation which include, trading, bartering, or swapping activities which involve giving and receiving non-monetary compensation" (Belk 2014, p. 1597).

7.2.2 Collaborative Consumption of Apparel

Apparel business utilizing the CC concept; have begun to arise in recent years. In the apparel business CC activities have two unique systems, in the first system people are paying to access the use of products instead of ownership (renting),

and in the second system people are redistributing unwanted or underused apparel (swapping) (Botsman 2013). In this chapter, our main focus will be on the first system (renting) where retailers are promoting the usage of product over ownership (Chou et al. 2015).

Renting is defined as "a transaction in which one party offers an item to another party for a fixed period in exchange for a fixed amount of money and in which there is no change of ownership" (Durgee and Colarelli O'Connor 1995, p. 90). In the business model using apparel rental CC systems the company is offering customers, who do not necessarily have the financial ability to own designer clothing, the opportunities to temporarily acquire designer clothing or fashion related-accessories to use in daily life. It also allows the rental company to maintain the ownership of these items and generate profit by re-renting them (Pedersen and Netter 2015). Therefore, understanding what motivates customers to subscribe to such as services has great importance for retailers.

7.2.3 Materialism

A number of scholars provided definitions of materialism. Rassuli and Hollander (1986, p. 10) describe materialism as "a mindset, an interest in getting and spending" (Rassuli and Hollander 1986, p. 10). Belk (1984) defines it as "the importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions" Belk (1984, p. 291). Richins and Dawson (1992) define materialism as the importance ascribed to the ownership and acquisition of material goods in achieving major life goals or desired states (Richins and Dawson 1992). In this chapter, we will adopt Richins and Dawson (1992) which indicates that materialism is a representation of the role that ownership plays in individuals' lives. Ellis (1992) proposed that materialism is an important predictor of consumer behavior. Accordingly, it is expected that individuals described as materialists will value ownership of products and will have a positive attitude towards it (Tilikidou and Delistavrou 2004). Usage without ownership is the main pillar in CC business; therefore, it is essential to understand the effect of this variable on adopting CC systems.

7.2.4 Collectivist Cultures

The core component of collectivism is the assumption that individual is interdependent on the group. The individual is seen as part of a more significant group where he/she is expected to follow and obey societies' roles (Oyserman et al. 2002; Frost et al. 2010). Thus, to gain group approval, the individual in collectivist cultures is expected to make sacrifices for the common good and to maintain harmony in the group (Oyserman et al. 2002; Frost et al. 2010).

7.2.5 Collectivist Cultures and Materialism

Materialism influence varies between cultures (Holt 1998). Griffin et al. (2004) suggested that structure and cultural factors influence the relative amounts and influence of materialism between cultures.

Collectivist cultures, which are associated with values such as benevolence, conformity, and universalism, are expected to have a negative relationship with the self-centred materialism (Burroughs and Rindfleisch 2002; Workman and Lee 2011). Although materialism is a socially constructed value and it is expected to be minimally possessed by members of collective oriented cultures, individuals are expected to possess different values, beliefs, and attitudes that are shaped by their distinctive cultures (Workman and Lee 2011).

Richins and Dawson (1992) described materialism as a value that composes three sub-dimensions: acquisition centrality, the role of acquisition in defining individual's success, and acquisition as the pursuit of happiness. This suggests that materialism level affects consumer behavior, how people prioritise acquisition over other values, and how they perceive material well-being as an indication of achievement and social status (Karabati and Cemalcilar 2010). Thus, it is believed that individuals who are described as high materialists are thought to value the opinion of others (Clarke and Micken 2002).

Accordingly, understanding materialism effect on members of collectivist cultures is essential to understanding of individual's behavior towards renting apparel using apparel CC platforms.

7.3 Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis Development

7.3.1 Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

Apparel CC activities are being coordinated through community-based online service (Hamari and Ukkonen 2015) which makes theories that predict adoption of new technologies (e.g. TAM, UTAUT, and UTAUT2) suitable theoretical frameworks to build on. In this chapter, we are focusing on the adoption of apparel renting behavior using CC platforms rather than the adoption of CC as a new technology. Thus, we will use TRA as a theoretical framework.

TRA is one of the three classic models of persuasion that is used to predict how individuals will behave based on their pre-existing attitudes and behavioral intentions (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). TRA states that intention is the primary predictor of the behavior and intention is a function of two factors: attitude towards the behavior—"An individual's positive or negative feelings (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 216)—and subjective norms (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975)—"the perception that most people who are important to the individual think he/she should or should not perform the behavior in question" (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980, p. 19).

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7.3.2 Intention to Use Apparel CC Platform Services

Chen (2007) introduced intention as the "anticipated or planned future behavior of individuals and is also an immediate determinant of a behavior" (Chen 2007, p. 110–11). In this chapter, intention refers to individual anticipation to use apparel CC platform services.

Most of the behavior predicting models such as the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1985) and TAM (Davis 1989) reported a significant and robust link between behavioral intention and targeted behavior (Van der Heijden et al. 2003). As apparel CC is still not that popular among the targeted sample and customers' usage of this service is primitive, intention will form an indication of actual usage.

7.3.3 Subjective Norm and Intention

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) defined subjective norms as "person's perception that most people who are important to him think he should or should not perform the behavior in question" (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975, p. 320). TRA links subjective norms directly to behavior intention and suggests that it has a significant effect on a motivating individual's behavior (Ajzen 1975). We thus hypothesize that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between subjective norms towards renting apparel using apparel CC platforms and intention to rent apparel using apparel CC platforms.

7.3.4 Attitude and Intention

Most of the behavior predicting models such as the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1985) and TAM (Davis 1989) presents attitude as a strong predictor of intention. A positive relationship between attitude and intention was reported in many technology consumption contexts such as fashion retailing and e-banking (e.g. Hanafizadeh et al. 2014). We thus hypothesize that:

H2: There is a positive relationship between attitudes towards renting apparel using apparel CC platforms and intention to rent apparel using apparel CC platforms.

7.3.5 Subjective Norms and Attitude

Fishbein and Ajzen connected subjective norms to normative beliefs that individuals are expected to meet the expectations of other society members, such as family, friends, supervisor, or society at large (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975). The need to

comply with social rules is expected to be more prominent in collectivist cultures, where a person's degree of separation from a group is meagre. Thus, a person's positive or negative feelings towards adopting a specific behavior (i.e. attitude) are expected to be significantly affected by its community. We thus hypothesise that:

H3: There is a positive relationship between subjective norms towards renting apparel using apparel CC platforms and attitude to rent apparel using apparel CC platforms.

7.3.6 Materialism and Attitude

Materialism represents an individual's perception of how important it is to possess material and the role material possessions plays in his/her life (Richins 2004). Naturally, individuals holding a high level of materialism are expected to prefer ownership of products over temporary use. Belk (1987) stated that materialistic customer satisfaction is a result of ownership, which indicates that lack of ownership will result in a negative feeling towards the behavior. Apparel CC renting service is based on the concept of temporary possession of items (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2010). Accordingly, the degree of perceived materialism is a crucial predictor of consumer behavior towards this service. Thus we hypothesis:

H4a: There is a negative relationship between perceived materialism and intention to rent apparel using apparel CC platforms.

H4b: There is a negative relationship between materialism and attitude to renting apparel using apparel CC platforms (Fig. 7.1).

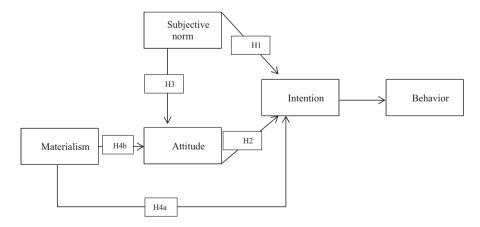


Fig. 7.1 Conceptual model

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7.4 Proposed Research Methodology

As discussed above, the current study model and research hypotheses were proposed based on TRA. The targeted sample of this study will be potential and current customers of apparel renting CC platforms in collectivist cultures. Therefore, we are proposing developing a survey-based quantitative research. Factors will be measured using scale items adopted from previous studies. Once the data is collected, structural equation modelling (SEM) analysis will be conducted to validate the conceptual model and verify the significance of the hypothesis.

7.5 Conclusion

The emergence of collaborative consumption (CC) has resulted in creating different business opportunities in many industries, including, but not limited to, fashion and apparel industry.

Fashion retailers have started using the CC concept through promoting the usage of products over ownership (Chou et al. 2015). To achieve their goals retailors have created fashion and apparel CC platforms that offer renting services.

Due to the increased number of fashion and apparel CC platforms (e.g. Rent the Runway, and Nolotiro) and the significant public interest in using these platforms; it is becoming important for business and academics to understand what affects customers decision to use fashion and apparel CC platforms. In this conceptual chapter we focus on exploring factors that prevent fashion and apparel CC platforms potential customers who are coming from collectivist cultures from using these platforms.

Materialism was introduced in this model as a potential variable that discourages the adoption of fashion and apparel CC platforms in collectivist cultures. Accordingly, understanding materialism effect on members of collectivist cultures is essential to understand an individual's behavior towards renting apparel using apparel CC platforms.

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