

An empirical study on Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement

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Abstract:

Chinese adolescents are growing up with China's rapid economic growth and they represent the up and coming group of China's fashionistas. The aim of this study is to assess the effectiveness of consumer socialization on Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement. Using the data collected from 169 Chinese adolescents, the research provides empirical results about the impacts of different consumer socialization agents on Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement. The study results reveal the positive and significant impacts of fashion magazines, fashion websites and peers on Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement, but a negative and significant impact of Internet on adolescents' fashion involvement. In addition, parents and TV were found to have no significant impact on Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement. Such empirical research not only deepens our understanding of the nature and strength of the relationships between the consumer socialization agents and Chinese adolescents' fashion consumer behaviour, but also makes a meaningful contribution to improving the consumer socialization framework. We believe these findings will be useful to update current consumer socialization frameworks and make it more relevant and useful for studying the new generation of consumers in the emerging market context.

Keywords: adolescents | China | consumer socialization | fashion | young consumers

Article:

1 INTRODUCTION

Children worldwide represent a strong group that will be the strongest segment of buyers in the near future and they are relentlessly targeted by business advertisers in today's highly commercialized world (Confos & Davis, 2016; De Jans, Hudders, & Cauberghe, 2018; Harradine & Ross, 2007; Sramova & Pavelka, 2019; van Reijmersdal, Boerman, Buijzen, &

Rozendaal, 2017; Williams, Ashill, & Thirkell, 2016). Global trends such as increasing family purchasing power, greater exposure to media and rapidly expanding retail channels contributed to the unprecedented growth of the young consumer market worldwide (Basu & Sondhi, 2014; Confos & Davis, 2016; Haryanto, Moutinho, & Coelho, 2016; Sramova & Pavelka, 2019).

Definitions of adolescence vary in age range, but adolescents are typically youths aged between 10 and 19 years (World Health Organization, 2019). Adolescence has been identified as a period of self-exploration; therefore, self-identity begins to develop and personal appearance and body image are crucial to adolescents (Ceballos & Bejarano, 2018). Previous research highlights the need for investigating adolescent and child consumers in the apparel context because fashion is psychologically central to teenagers in their self-evaluation and fashion facilitates social interaction and self-confidence (Ceballos & Bejarano, 2018; Jürgensen & Guesalaga, 2018). The clothes worn by adolescents are closely bound to their self-concept, and are used both as a means of self-expression and as a way of judging the people and situations they face (Jamison, 2006; Piacentini, 2010; Wooten, 2006). Being a distinct target market, adolescent consumers demonstrate a desire to keep abreast of the latest product and brand trends (Ogle, Hyllegard, Yan, Hyllegard, Yan, & Littrell, 2014). A greater understanding of the self, combined with social pressures to “fit in” and signal group membership, leads adolescents to be more vigilant about the social implications of owning certain fashion brands (Chaplin & John, 2005).

This study focuses on investigating Chinese adolescents' fashion clothing involvement. The number of Chinese adolescents gives a sense of the size of the business opportunity and the priority that deserves to be given to understanding their attitudes. In 2016, the total population in China is 1.37 billion people, however, noticeably the population count in the age group of 11–19 (born between 1997 and 2005) is about 142.4 million people, constituting about 10.4% of China's total population and about 43.9% of the entire U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Chinese adolescents are growing up with China's rapid economic growth, a fact which affects their daily lives (Xi, Sun, & Xiao, 2006). They are feeling the power of economic freedom, and even social freedom, as western values pervade their society through the internet, television and other forms of mass media (Xi et al., 2006). They tend to favour famous brands and enjoy life compared with older generations (McKinsey & Company, April, 2019). Essentially this is the up and coming group of China's fashionistas.

This segment is a lucrative target for many marketers. Most Chinese young people are the only child in their family, and are the recipients of an enormous level of familial support (McKinsey & Company, April, 2019). According to Euromonitor International (2018), China's consumer market recorded strong expansion during the 2012–2017 period; and Chinese aged 40–49 (the parents' of Chinese adolescents) are prominent among the highest income earners in 2017. Chinese children are often a pervasive force in the household decision-making process, as parents and grandparents strive to buy the best that they can afford for their only child (Euromonitor International, 2018). Moreover, Euromonitor International (2018)'s study shows that young Chinese consumers' spending power will rise significantly across their lifespan. In addition, clothing and footwear is forecast to be the best-performing spending category through to 2030 (Euromonitor International, 2018).

A decade ago, O'Cass and Choy (2008) recognized the importance of Chinese young consumers. Given the vibrant retail environment in China, Chinese young consumers are considered one of the most important market segments for fashion products (O'Cass & Choy, 2008) and thus exploring their fashion clothing involvement and consumption behaviour is important. As Lopez and Rodriguez (2018) argued, today's children are tomorrow's consumers, so it is important for firms to start building the relationship with them now. Young consumers serve as influential fashion trendsetters and innovators; and they have noteworthy purchasing power on fashion products (Ceballos & Bejarano, 2018). Moreover, their brand loyalties are in the process of formation; therefore, they have the ability to influence the future of retailing and fashion industry. However, research studies on Chinese adolescents and their fashion consumer behaviour are lacking even though China is the most populated country in the world and Chinese young consumer market has remained strong during the last decade and is capturing increasing global marketers' attention. This research study aims to bridge such gap by utilizing the theory of consumer socialization and the perspectives of brand–consumer relationship and fashion clothing involvement in the context of China's adolescents. Specifically, this study empirically investigates the factors affecting Chinese adolescents' fashion clothing involvement.

The paper is organized as follows. We first review the literature on young consumers' brand–consumer relationship, fashion involvement and the theory of consumer socialization which provides the theoretical framework for this study. Then the methodology used is explained followed by the analysis of empirical results. Finally, a discussion of the findings is presented, and the managerial implications are drawn.

2 LITRATURE REVIEW

2.1 Young consumers' brand–consumer relationship

Belk's (1988) theory of the “extended self” helps understand the relationship between brands and consumer. Belk (1988) maintained that “possessions are a major contributor to and reflection of our identities” (p. 139). Possessions, and fashion clothing brands in particular, are important to consumers and are used to communicate their identities and self-concepts to others, as well as signal group membership and impress important others (Albrecht, Stokburger-Sauer, Sprott, & Lehmann, 2017). Because people are constantly engaged in building their identities, the symbolic qualities of products are often the primary reasons for their purchase (Solomon, 1983). Specifically, research demonstrates that consumers use products as social signals or classify themselves in relation to relevant others (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Holt, 1995); thus, fashion brands can serve as a means of self-expression that communicates about consumers' identities, statuses and aspirations (Phau & Lau, 2001).

Ji (2008) defined child–brand relationship as “a voluntary or imposed bond between a child and a brand characterized by a unique history of interactions and is intended to serve developmental and social-emotional goals in the child's life” (p. 605). Children understand the symbolism associated with consumption, as shown by the stereotypes conveyed by some brands, allowing them to attribute status to brands and their owners (Rodhain & Aurier, 2016). Fitting in by having the right brands and possessions is a leading motive driving young consumers' consumption preference (Albrecht et al., 2017; Lopez & Rodriguez, 2018). The right brands and

possessions do not necessarily mean the most expensive ones; they could be any socially desired brand(s). Young consumers are highly aware of and easily affected by the communicational power of fashion brands (Albrecht et al., 2017), such as logoed Nike t-shirts to signal coolness, Vans shoes to signal aspirational affiliation with skateboarders, latest Zara fashion clothing to signal trendiness and Apple products to signal tech-savviness.

2.2 Fashion involvement

Product category involvement represents a consumer's interest in and attachment to a specific product category and has been shown to be positively related to an interest in acquiring product information and a greater perception of differences among brands (Ferreira & Coelho, 2015). Relevant to this study is the view that fashion involvement may be understood via consumer–fashion clothing attachment and consumer–brand relationship. Fashion involvement refers to the degree to which individuals believe fashion consumption to be a central part of their life and a meaningful and engaging activity (O'Cass, 2004; Ogle et al., 2014). Fashion involvement occurs when and because a product is seen to satisfy valuable utilitarian and hedonic goals, and generate interest, enthusiasm and excitement (Khare, Mishra, & Parveen, 2012). Consumers vary in the extent to which they are involved in fashion consumption, and younger consumers tend to demonstrate a higher level of fashion involvement than do older consumers (O'Cass, 2004). Consumers with a high level of fashion involvement view fashion consumption as highly relevant to their sense of self and often are fashion innovators or opinion leaders among their peers (O'Cass, 2000; Ogle, Hyllegard, & Yan, 2014). Clothing functions as a means of self-expression and an essential social tool for the young, even it is regarded as a second skin due to its importance in defining the self (Belk, 1988; Ceballos & Bejarano, 2018). There is a general consensus among researchers that fashion clothing is a high-involvement product category (Naderi, 2013; O'Cass, 2004). The symbolic, expressive or emotional meaning that is associated with clothing makes its purchase and usage important (Miller-Spillman, Reilly, & Hunt-Hurst, 2012; O'Cass, 2000).

Adolescents represent the group that grants the greatest interest in clothing (Miller-Spillman et al., 2012; Nelson & McLeod, 2005). Indeed, clothing plays a particularly important role for teenagers as they feel their behaviour and physical appearance being watched by an imaginary audience and thus they act as if they were “on stage” (Lachance, Beaudoin, & Robitaille, 2003). Fashion is conceptualized as both an object and a behavioural process (Vieira, 2009). Fashion clothing helps adolescents negotiate certain qualities they might want to possess or endorse (Miller-Spillman et al., 2012). As such, how involved adolescents become in their clothes provides a deep understanding of the dynamics of consumer behaviour and the nature and role of fashion clothing in society (O'Cass, 2004).

2.3 Theoretical framework and research hypotheses

Theory of consumer socialization (John, 1999; Ward, 1974) offers theoretical support for the study. Consumer socialization has been defined as the process by which individuals learn consumer-related skills, knowledge and attitudes (Ward, 1974). During child development, a child passes through different phases where new consumer skills are learned (Vanwesenbeeck, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2017). These phases are based on children's cognitive development and each

phase takes place within a certain age range (John, 1999). Therefore, age has been seen as an important predictor of children's consumer socialization (John, 1999; Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2017).

Adolescence, referred as being a reflective stage (John, 1999), is the most crucial time in socialization (Thaichon, 2017). Adolescents ostensibly develop sophisticated information processing skills, which can assist them in becoming more aware of the views of other people, as well as developing a more nuanced knowledge of the commercial landscape (Lawlor, Dunne, & Rowley, 2016). From a consumer socialization perspective, the emergence of this understanding helps children to navigate the commercial world (John, 1999; Lawlor et al., 2016; Ward, 1974).

The concept of consumer socialization is fundamentally concerned with the attitudes, knowledge and skills that children and adolescents acquire as well as how they are acquired and how they change over time (Ogle et al., 2014). Since a basic component of children's learning about the marketplace is the knowledge of sources of information about products, socialization agents are identified as the sources of influence that transfer norms, attitudes, motivations and behaviours to children (Basu & Sondhi, 2014; Beaudoin & Lachance, 2006; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Thaichon, 2017). From that perspective, consumer behaviours or attitudes, such as fashion involvement are seen as the results of learning acquired through interaction between the consumer (the learner) and the socialization agents. In particular, through consumer socialization, adolescents gain product and brand knowledge and develop attitudes towards advertising. Adolescents' learning of attitudes, knowledge and skills may occur through formal or informal learning (e.g., teaching, observation or imitating) as a result of exposure to and interaction with a variety of socialization agents, such as parents, siblings, peers and media (Ogle et al., 2014; Thaichon, 2017). During adolescence, parents/family, peers and media are recognized as representing the major sources of interaction when it comes to consumer behaviour related to clothing, although their respective influences are different in nature and relative importance (Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, & Michelman, 2005; Lachance et al., 2003; Miller-Spillman et al., 2012).

2.3.1 Parents

Family is one of the most important social agents that affect the process of consumer socialization (Basu & Sondhi, 2014; Thaichon, 2017; Ward, 1974). Parents as key agents of socialization influence children's decision-making style, marketplace and transaction knowledge, attitude towards advertising, materialism, consumption autonomy and participation in the family purchase process (Kim, Yang, & Lee, 2015). Parents play the role of mentors in children's experiential learning or act as consumer role models shaping children's consumption-related knowledge and behaviour (Basu & Sondhi, 2014). One key method of socialization is co-shopping with parents where children can observe and learn from their parents' shopping experiences (Thaichon, 2017).

Parents' influence in consumer socialization not only is directed towards instrumental aspects of consumer behaviour (e.g., comparing quality and prices), but also influences the expressive or social motivations of consumption, such as style and brand preference (John, 1999; Moschis, 1985). In the clothing area, adolescents actively interact with their parents, who are

perceived as actual influences on their clothing choices. Ogle et al. (2014)'s study provided support for the consumer socialization perspective, and in particular, the notion that parents may transmit apparel product knowledge and purchase decision-making skills to their children. Therefore, parents' influence could be positively related to Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement. According to this line of reasoning, the following hypotheses are developed:

Hypothesis 1. Mother has a significant positive impact on adolescent's fashion involvement.

Hypothesis 2. Father has a significant positive impact on adolescent's fashion involvement.

2.3.2 Media

The role of media is largely expressive, affecting such aspects as the desire for products, brand preferences and learning of fashion brand names (Beaudoin & Lachance, 2006; Cotton Incorporated, 2019; Lachance et al., 2003). Adolescents are active receivers of fashion information and they are media-literate considering the easy access of information technology. TV, mobile phone, computer and internet are so common in today's everyday life. These factors combine to make adolescents positively aware of products and brands, resulting in their desire for fashion products and brands (Cotton Incorporated, 2019). The meaning of fashion is often transmitted to others via various marketing communication channels and various types of mass media; for example, advertising often gives the impression that having specific brands leads to positive social consequences, such as group acceptance. Since adolescents strive for acceptance, appreciation and esteem by their peer group (often to build or maintain a social identity), they pay more attention to TV, Internet and magazine advertisements and become more aware of symbolic brand meaning (Albrecht et al., 2017).

Fashion-related media create edgy, artistic and fashion forward-thinking for the Chinese market and they provide a wide variety of information, including latest fashion trends, products and brands and fashion celebrities' lifestyles. Magazines remains the important sources for entertainment and shopping activities, while the television retains importance for news and current affairs (Chan & Fang, 2007). In addition, Internet is an important socialization agent due to its ability to establish two-way communications in the online environment, allowing adolescents to be involved in learning through interaction, discovery and construction, creation and play (Confos & Davis, 2016; Jones & Glynn, 2019; Thaichon, 2017). Up to June 2018, of Chinese Internet users, 18.2% aged 10–19 (China Internet Network Information Center, 2019). For Chinese young people, the internet was the preferred media choice for information and entertainment-driven activities. They use Internet for information (e.g., news) or study (e.g., using online tutoring services). They also use Internet for communication with friends and parents (e.g., instant messaging, social networking apps/sites), entertainment (e.g., online gaming, online short video) and so forth. Moreover, being digital natives, adolescents have high online self-efficacy, which enables them to have skills in performing online tasks, such as searching for product information and making online purchases (Sramova & Pavelka, 2019). Thus, media exposure could enhance Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement. The following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3. TV has a significant positive impact on adolescent's fashion involvement.

Hypothesis 4. Internet has a significant positive impact on adolescent's fashion involvement.

Hypothesis 5. Fashion magazines have a significant positive impact on adolescent's fashion involvement.

Hypothesis 6. Fashion websites have a significant positive impact on adolescent's fashion involvement.

2.3.3 Peers

As adolescents develop their information processing skills and social learning processes, they gain a more sophisticated comprehension of the marketplace, and become more aware of others' perspectives (Albrecht et al., 2017; Kobia & Liu, 2016; Nairn & Spotswood, 2015). During adolescence, friendships are often formed, and behaviours adopted based on peer influence and selection processes, which are among the most significant predictors of fashion consumption. At the same time, they experience a need to shape their own identities and to conform to group expectations, which, in turn, heightens the attention they pay to the social aspects of consumption (John, 1999). Additionally, although parents are often considered to be the most influential socialization agents of children, as children mature, they start to look beyond their parents for information (Ogle et al., 2014). A child's peers significantly influence the formation of his or her interpersonal relationships and behaviours. Peers are usually at a similar age as well as a similar learning stage; thus peers share mutual knowledge and life experience and serve as a comparison or reference to each other (Seock & Merritt, 2013; Thaichon, 2017). In some instances, adolescents may favour peers over parents, particularly for fashion products where peer acceptance is an important consideration (Moschis, 1985). Moreover, participating in social media has become more prevalent among adolescents (Confos & Davis, 2016; Jones & Glynn, 2019; Thaichon, 2017). Peers and friends on social networking sites can also be considered as a source of influence and can considerably affect the consumer socialization process.

Peer influence has been studied by researchers in consumer socialization and fashion diffusion (Beaudoin & Lachance, 2006; Kobia & Liu, 2016). Adolescents' conformity to clothing patterns occurs as part of social interactions and represents a significant factor in peer acceptance (Kaiser, 1997; Kobia & Liu, 2016; Miller-Spillman et al., 2012). Peers are found to influence children and adolescents' clothing purchases, choices and satisfaction (Lachance et al., 2003; Workman & Studak, 2006). Moreover, those adolescents who talk more with peers about consumption matters are more likely to consider fashion brands as an important criterion of choice (Lueg, Ponder, Beatty, & Capella, 2006; Shim & Koh, 1997). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 7. Peers have a significant positive impact on adolescent's fashion involvement.

Figure 1 illustrates the research conceptual model and the above seven hypotheses. The research model is based on the linkages between the agents of consumer socialization and adolescents' fashion involvement.

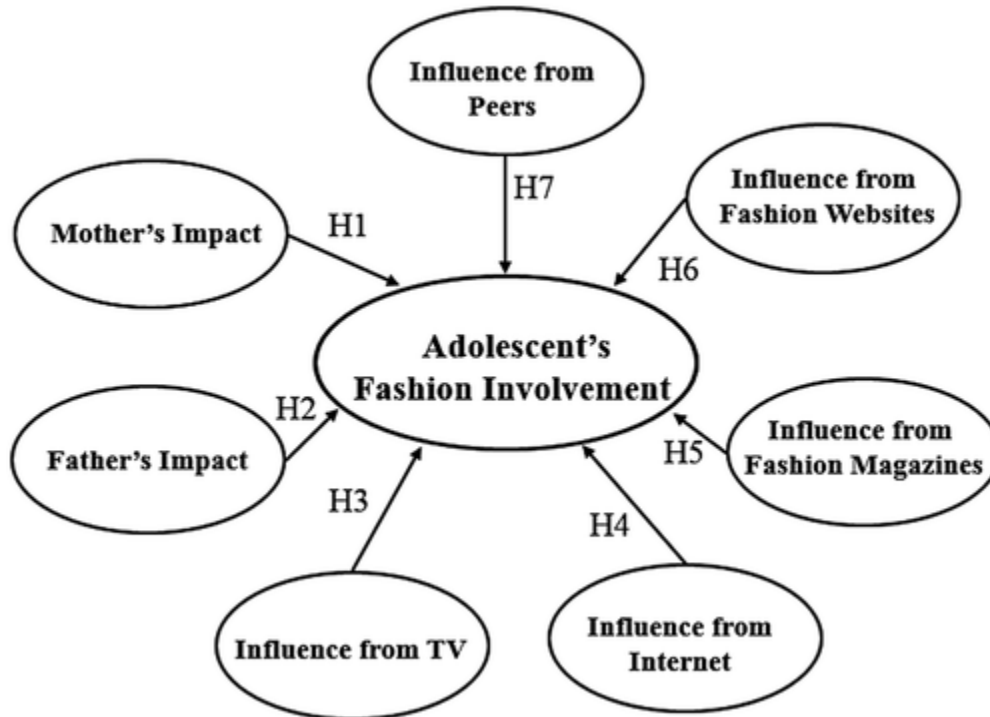


Figure 1. Research model

3 RESEARCH METHOD

Empirical survey-based research method was used to investigate the relationships in the model (Figure 1). Survey items measuring the eight constructs were developed based on literature review (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989; Beaudoin & Lachance, 2006; Dotson & Hyatt, 2005; Lachance et al., 2003; O'Cass, 2000; O'Cass, 2004). All the items were measured using a 5-point Likert-type scale (5—strongly agree; 1—strongly disagree). Translation and back-translation of the questionnaire were performed by two Chinese scholars who are fluent in both English and Chinese languages. In the development of the survey, six Chinese middle school students (four girls and two boys) were interviewed to ensure the appropriateness of the survey questions. The survey was pre-tested by 16 Chinese middle school students prior to the data collection to enable the refinement of the measurement scales and the checking for any ambiguous questions. An online survey was developed using Qualtrics software. A snowball sampling approach was used in the data collection. Thirty Chinese parents who have children in middle school or high school, 5 middle school teachers and 3 high school teachers were contacted by the researchers. The online survey was first distributed to select parents and teachers for approval; then the parents distributed the survey to their children; and the teachers helped distribute the survey to the parents of their middle/high school students. Consent letters briefly describing the purpose of the research and the method that would be used were issued to all parents and teachers. If parents would allow their children to participate, they could distribute the online survey questionnaire to

their children. Like their parents, children were informed that the study was about children's fashion involvement and that each questionnaire would take 15 min to complete. Both parents and children were reminded that participation was voluntary and anonymous, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The study was granted IRB approval.

Data were collected mainly from Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Chengdu, which are the major urban areas in China. A total of 243 responses were collected and 169 responses are valid for data analysis. Ages in the sample ranged from 12 to 19, with an average age of 15. Females constituted 55% of the sample and males constituted 45%.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Reliability and validity of measures

First, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were used to examine the internal consistency of the items, retaining items with adequate Cronbach's alphas for the scales. The value of Cronbach's alpha for all constructs met the recommended cut-off value of 0.70. As a result, all of the constructs were acceptable and a total of 39 items were retained for the eight latent variables in the study. The detailed results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Confirmatory factor analysis for the constructs

Latent variables and observed indicators	Standardized factor loading	t Value
<i>Influence from mother ($\alpha = .77$, $CR = 0.78$, $AVE = 0.81$)</i>		
1. It is important to my mother to wear brand name clothes	0.81	–
2. Brand names on the clothes my mother wears are very important to her	0.77	6.63
<i>Influence from father ($\alpha = .85$, $CR = 0.85$, $AVE = 0.87$)</i>		
1. It is important to my father to wear brand name clothes	0.89	–
2. Brand names on the clothes my father wears are very important to him	0.82	7.19
<i>Influence from TV ($\alpha = .78$, $CR = 0.80$, $AVE = 0.57$)</i>		
1. Most TV ads are cool	0.59	–
2. Watching TV is fun	0.75	6.93
3. Watching TV is an important part of my life	0.74	5.79
4. I learn a lot from watching TV	0.61	6.12
5. TV ads tell the truth about products	0.62	6.21
<i>Influence from Internet ($\alpha = .75$, $CR = 0.76$, $AVE = 0.59$)</i>		
1. I always surf the web after school	0.56	–
2. Searching the internet is fun	0.75	6.43
3. Surfing the web is an important part of my life	0.78	6.53
4. I learn a lot from the internet	0.61	5.76
<i>Influence from fashion websites ($\alpha = .87$, $CR = 0.85$, $AVE = 0.60$)</i>		
1. I always get fashion information online	0.86	–
2. Most fashion online ads are cool	0.72	10.99
3. Reading fashion news and trends online is fun	0.84	13.82
4. Using internet for fashion information and purchase is an important part of my life	0.62	8.87
5. I learn a lot from browsing fashion websites	0.76	11.59
6. Fashion websites' ads and fashion online stores tell the truth about products	0.60	7.33
<i>Influence from fashion magazines ($\alpha = .92$, $CR = 0.91$, $AVE = 0.72$)</i>		

Latent variables and observed indicators	Standardized factor loading	<i>t</i> Value
1. I always read fashion magazine after school	0.70	–
2. Most fashion magazine ads are cool	0.79	9.88
3. Reading fashion magazine is fun	0.92	11.17
4. Reading fashion magazine is an important part of my life	0.84	13.40
5. I learn a lot from reading fashion magazine	0.88	10.75
6. Fashion magazine ads tell the truth about products	0.71	8.74
<i>Influence from peers</i> ($\alpha = .90$, $CR = 0.89$, $AVE = 0.59$)		
1. If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy	0.60	–
2. It is important that others like the products and brands I buy	0.78	7.89
3. I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them	0.64	6.82
4. I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase	0.73	7.61
5. When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of	0.77	7.85
6. I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others	0.71	7.42
7. If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand they expect me to buy	0.85	8.25
8. I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase	0.77	7.69
<i>Fashion Involvement</i> ($\alpha = .95$, $CR = 0.94$, $AVE = 0.79$)		
1. Fashion clothing means a lot to me	0.85	–
2. For me personally fashion clothing is an important product	0.87	20.31
3. I am interested in fashion clothing	0.84	13.58
4. Fashion clothing is important to me	0.91	15.81
5. I am very much involved in/with fashion clothing	0.85	12.87
6. I find fashion clothing a very relevant product in my life	0.87	14.69

Notes. α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted; “–” means the path parameter was set to 1, therefore, no *t* value was given; all loadings are significant at .001 level.

Next, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed for the measurement model using Amos 24.0. The goodness-of-fit statistics indicated that all criteria met the recommended values in the measurement model: $(\chi^2)/df = 1.49$ ($p < .00$); CFI = 0.93; GFI = 0.85; AGFI = 0.80; RMR = 0.07; and RMSEA = 0.05.

All factor loadings were significant, and varied from 0.56 to 0.92, satisfying the convergent validity criteria. The unidimensionality and convergent validity of the constructs were assessed by the composite reliability measure and the average variance extracted (AVE), respectively. The composite reliability varied from 0.76 to 0.94, satisfying the criteria of 0.6. The average variance extracted varied from 0.57 to 0.87, thus satisfying the criteria of 0.50. Table 1 shows the factor loadings, composite reliability and average variance extracted. In addition, the discriminant validity of the scales was evaluated for all possible paired combinations of the constructs and all χ^2 differences were significant, demonstrating good discriminant validity of all scales.

4.2 Structural model

A structural equation model was built to assess the statistical significance of the proposed relationships among the variables in this study (see Figure 1). The seven agents of consumer socialization were taken as the exogenous variables, and adolescents' fashion involvement as the endogenous variable.

All of the fit measures indicated that the structural model was acceptable ($(\chi^2/df) = 1.46$ ($p < .00$); GFI = 0.85; AGFI = 0.80; CFI = 0.93; RMR = 0.07; and RMSEA = 0.05). Apart from the model's general fit for the data, its parameters were tested to decide whether to accept the proposed relationships between exogenous and endogenous constructs (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Based on the estimations from the structural model, three of seven hypotheses were supported ($p < .05$) (Table 2). The results provided strong support for *Hypotheses 5–7*, which indicated that fashion magazines, fashion websites and peers had positive and significant impacts on fashion involvement of Chinese adolescents. These results confirm a strong influence of fashion-related media and peers on Chinese adolescents' fashion interests and buying behaviours. Surprisingly, the Internet's effect on this group of young consumers' fashion involvement was negative (*Hypothesis 4*). This implies that Chinese adolescents who spend more times on the internet are less interested in fashion and fashion clothing products. However, parents and TV were found to have no significant influence on Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement (*Hypothesis 1–3*) (Table 2).

Table 2. Structural model estimates

Hypotheses	From	To	Standardized coefficient	T Value	P Value	Results
Hypothesis 1	Mother's impact	Fashion involvement	0.11	1.45	>0.05	Not support
Hypothesis 2	Father's impact	Fashion involvement	-0.01	-0.12	>0.05	Not support
Hypothesis 3	Influence from TV	Fashion involvement	0.01	0.11	>0.05	Not support
Hypothesis 4	Influence from Internet	Fashion involvement	-0.18	-2.26	<0.05	Not support
Hypothesis 5	Influence from fashion magazines	Fashion involvement	0.34	3.34	<0.001	Support
Hypothesis 6	Influence from fashion websites	Fashion involvement	0.46	4.58	<0.001	Support
Hypothesis 7	Influence from peers	Fashion involvement	0.15	1.96	≤0.05	Support

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 Theoretical contributions

Grounded on existing theories and aiming to fill the gap in literature, the study assessed the effectiveness of consumer socialization on Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement from consumer socialization process and the brand–consumer relationship perspective. Survey-based empirical research method was used to examine the impacts of different consumer socialization agents on Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement. Such empirical research not only deepens our understanding of the nature and strength of the relationships between the consumer socialization agents and Chinese adolescents' fashion consumer behaviour, but also makes a meaningful contribution to improving the consumer socialization framework. Previous consumer socialization research mainly focused on the positive impact of socialization agents and few studies have focused on the new generation (the Generation Z). Our findings reveal that the negative impact of Internet heavy use among young adults is becoming an increasingly concerning issue for consumer socialization because it can reduce their interest in consumption of some essential consumer goods such as clothing and fashion. In addition, the findings from this study suggest that the influence of traditional socialization agents (such as parents and television) is not as important to Generation Z as it is to other generations, who mainly relies on their networks of friends and authoritative sources for product-related information. We believe these findings will be useful to update current consumer socialization frameworks and make it

more relevant and useful for studying the new generation of consumers in the emerging market context.

5.2 Empirical implications

First, the analyses revealed that fashion-related media such as fashion magazines and fashion websites affect Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement significantly. It confirms the findings from a recent report by Deloitte: fashion magazines and a brand's own website are the most important for Chinese young people (Deloitte, 2017). It shows that even though Chinese young people live and breathe social media, when it comes to the authority of fashion, brands and publications are still in the leading position (Deloitte, 2017). Past research generally found that exposure to commercial media contributes to children's increased consumption-oriented attitudes and behaviours (De Jans et al., 2018; Nelson & McLeod, 2005; van Reijmersdal et al., 2017). Due to the increasing popularity of Western pop culture and Western brands in the Chinese market, Chinese consumers are becoming aware of foreign fashion brands and are obsessed with a youth culture. Moreover, since 2005, there has been an influx of the Korean pop culture and fashion products, also known as the "Korean Wave" in China, which significantly stimulated the Chinese consumer's interest in fashion (Farrar, 2010; Tai, 2017). Korean pop culture and fashion products seduce Chinese consumers by combining the enticing images of Westernized modernity with just the right amount of Asian sentimentality (Jang & Paik, 2012). Chinese young generation is surrounded by Japanese magazines, Korean pop music, Hollywood movie stars and various foreign brands (Ngai & Cho, 2012). Fashion-related media are of prime importance in alerting young consumers to new types and brands of products, as well as presenting inviting images of new lifestyles, with projected promises of social success associated with purchasing and consumption. The role of fashion media is largely expressive, affecting such aspects as the desire for products, brand preferences and learning of fashion brand names. Adolescents discover lifestyles and trends from fashion media and appear more receptive to advertisements in fashion magazines and on fashion websites. Fashion-related media really attract adolescents' interest and give them a chance to familiarize themselves with fashion brand collections and labels.

Second, the confirmation of the influence from peers on adolescents' fashion involvement shows that peers positively and strongly affect Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement. Peers provide three major types of influence including informational influence (as a credible source of information), comparative influence (as models to follow) and normative influence (as conformity pressure in peer acceptance) (Beaudoin & Lachance, 2006). The result reflects the vast influence of peers on adolescents' behaviours, particularly fashion involvement which is related to appearance at that age. Adolescents emphasize social acceptance attributes in their apparel consumption behaviours. Individuals desiring greater acceptance in groups are active in understanding and gathering information about latest fashion cues and they are motivated to seek the "cues" which ensure group acceptance and avoid the "wrong" cues which associate them with undesirable groups (Khare et al., 2012).

Third, the surprising but interesting result of the nonsignificant effect of the parents on adolescents' fashion involvement indicates that parents' influence in this study does not significantly affect Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement. This finding is interesting as it conflicts with previous studies. Previous studies demonstrated parental influence on children's

materialism and other consumption-related attitudes and behaviours although adolescents do not like to think that they are affected by parents (Nelson & McLeod, 2005). It is generally believed that the perceived brand consciousness of parents contributed to the adolescents' assessments of their own brand consciousness. Traditionally, Chinese parents possess the decision power on almost everything for their children (Hwang, 2000; Zhao et al., 2015). Child development in traditional Chinese culture is known as a process of learning to satisfy parental and societal expectations instead of personal needs and desires and to maintain interdependence in the parent–adolescent relationship (Hwang, 2000; Zhao et al., 2015). However, in the current Chinese society, Chinese young people are more independent and they seek to establish their own individual personality and form their own behaviour patterns, attitudes and values (Duveau & Dumenil, 2018). Moreover, during the period of adolescence, as they seek greater independence, they often come into conflict with their parents (Zhao et al., 2015). Therefore, unlike previous generations, the Chinese adolescents nowadays are more open to different opinions and values and they are not easily affected by their parents.

Fourth, it turns out that the relationship between influence from TV and Chinese adolescents' fashion involvement is not strongly supported by the data. This is not consistent with previous research as previous studies demonstrated the role of TV on children's clothing consumption behaviour. One possible reason could be that the TV is not a major communication channel that strongly impacts current Chinese adolescents. Chinese adolescents' exposure to TV programs is limited due to their busy school schedule. Competition to gain entry to higher education schools is intense in China. Chinese adolescents are busy with a lot of school works, tutoring lessons and other enrichment programs; therefore, they rarely have time to watch TV. Another reason could be adolescents are more likely to get fashion information from fashion websites, fashion social media, fashion magazines or peers; thus, TV is not the source of fashion information for most of Chinese adolescents.

Fifth, this study shows that Internet's effect on this young group of consumers' fashion involvement was negative, which is a somewhat surprising finding. It implies that Chinese adolescents who spend more time on the Internet are less interested in fashion. It is probably because many adolescents have limited time to spend online due to their heavy school work; when they have time, they are more likely to spend their online time in other activities such as playing games, watching videos or chatting with friends on social media sites, which are not related to fashion. Their time spent on online chatting and playing games distracts their attention and interest in fashion. Adolescents who engage in excessive use of online social media and excessive online gaming have less time out socializing, which leads to reduced social interactions; thus, they may have less interest and involvement in fashion. This research offers helpful guidelines for organizations that are interested in Chinese young people's fashion consumer behaviour. Chinese adolescents are the up and coming group of China's fashionistas.

6 LIMITATIONS

This present study has several limitations to be addressed. First, generalization of the research findings is limited because of the use of a convenience sample within limited geographical locations. Caution should be used in generalizing the findings to the Chinese adolescents' population as a whole. Future research may use a random sample that is more heterogeneous in

terms of geographic location to confirm the findings. Second, the study was conducted in China and was limited to Chinese adolescents. Future study could be extended to other countries to investigate how adolescents in other countries develop their fashion consumption behaviour. Cross-cultural research is desirable for young consumer behaviour research. Third, other consumer socialization agents, such as retail stores and other forms of media such as social media and outdoor media could be influential sources that transfer norms, attitudes, motivations and behaviours to Chinese young consumers; thus, they should be studied in future research. Fourth, in order to obtain more in-depth reasoning behind Chinese adolescents' consumer behaviour for the fashion apparel products, focus group interviews would be alternative approaches to explore in future research.

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