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RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN OPTIMUM STIMULATION LEVEL AND WILLINGNESS TO USE MASS CUSTOMIZATION OPTIONS

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Significance

Today's consumer desires individual expression, choice, customer service, and a stimulating shopping experience (Yoh & Gaskill, 1999), which may be served by consumer-driven mass customization (Pine, 1993). Mass customization, defined as the mass production of individually customized goods and services, aims at providing products and services that better meet the needs or desires of today's fragmented consumer markets. Mass customizers should identify how needs or desires of the fragmented market shape the customization of not just the product and service but also the mass customization experience. Towards this end, we examined whether an individual's preferred level for environmental stimulation, defined as optimum stimulation level (OSL), was associated with the types of products, services, and experiences desired from mass customization of apparel. We examined responses to body scanning and co-design options of mass customization.

Method

Sample: One hundred thirty one students (103 female and 28 male), representing a variety of majors at a midwestern university, allowed us to explore the theoretical propositions of the study. Whereas the age of the university subjects limits generalizability of results to all consumers, these subjects are experienced with using technology, which is an important factor in the acceptance of mass customization. Use of these subjects furthers research-based understanding of this target market's response to mass customization.

Instrument and Procedure: We used the reliable and valid 40-item Arousal Seeking Tendency Scale (AST; Mehrabian & Russell, 1974) to measure OSL. To determine which product types subjects would most want to customize, we used a priori categories of experiential and utilitarian products for analysis. To assess desired services and experiences regarding mass customization options, we provided short descriptions of body scanning and co-design options, each followed by items tapping reasons for trying mass customization options (e.g., as an exciting experience; for better fitting garments).

Results and Implications

Cronbach's alpha coefficients show that each of the multi-item measures used in the study had internal consistency. Indiscriminate factor loadings of items for the 12 AST factors with eigenvalues greater than one suggested that one factor would be the best solution for the present study. As we hypothesized, OSL had significant positive correlations ($p<.05$) with willingness to use co-design services to create an unique design, trying co-design as an exciting experience, overall commitment to using co-design, and trying body scanning as an exciting experience. As expected, OSL did not have significant correlations with the more banal willingness to use body scanning services for better fitting products or overall commitment to using body-scanning. There was also a significant positive correlation between OSL and interest in customizing experiential products, but not between OSL and customizing utilitarian products. Implications for the industry include considering experiential aspects and environmental stimulation when developing a mass customization program for certain target markets and products.

References

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