



ACCEPTANCE OF MASS CUSTOMIZATION OF APPAREL: MERCHANDISING ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH PREFERENCE FOR PRODUCT, PROCESS, AND PLACE

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The purpose of this study was to examine apparel merchandising issues associated with mass customization from the perspective of college students. Discussion of review of literature by the research team resulted in identification of three factors: (1) product (product types and features that consumers preferred to customize), (2) process (consumer preferences for interaction between humans and technology for body scanning and co-design), and (3) place (preferred shopping outlets where body scanning and co-design could be possible). For this study, Glock and Kunz's (2000) model of Behavioral Theory of the Apparel Firm (BTAF) provided the conceptual framework for understanding the role of merchandisers and their customers in the mass customization process. A questionnaire was developed related to product, place, and process. It was pre-tested, revised, and administered to a convenience sample of 131 college students. Statistical analyses included within-subject ANOVA, Bonferroni multiple comparisons, t-test, and descriptive statistics.

Results showed that the subjects have greater interests in customizing jeans than other product types. Customizing product fit to one's body shape was a high priority. Results also indicated that subjects want to customize different product features depending on product types.

Subjects identified preferred customizing processes. They were more likely to use body scanning with trained sales persons, wearing their underwear or street clothes, and spending 6 to 10 minutes for that process. They also preferred that body measurement information be stored in a central database to be used by any company that could potentially create custom garments for them. Subjects were more likely to use co-design with specialized sales persons who are experienced with fashion design lending suggestions for appropriate selections. To enhance their ability to make decisions related to style during the co-design process, they preferred to use ready-to-wear samples to try on or computer images showing the customized product design on a photograph of their own body. For designing fabric as part of customizing the product, they preferred having a computer system that would let them create their own surface designs.

Subjects were interested in both body scanning and co-design. The willingness to use body scanning was positively correlated with the willingness to use co-design; therefore, subjects who had more willingness for body scanning also had more willingness to co-design. However, subjects had significantly more willingness to use body scanning than to use co-design.



Subjects also identified their preferred place for the customizing process. For both body scanning and co-design processes, they most preferred to go to a local specialty store and least preferred to go to a local discount store. For co-design, they also preferred to go to a regional mall.

These results suggested successful mass customization of apparel at retail is dependent on identification of appropriate dimensions of product, place, and process. The implications address merchandising issues, particularly reduction of uncertainty related to assortment and volume error.

Reference

Glock, R. E., & Kunz, G. I. (2000). Apparel manufacturing: Sewn product analysis (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.