

# EFFECTS OF OLDER (55+) FEMALE CONSUMERS' PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL ACTIVITIES ON APPAREL SHOPPING BEHAVIOR

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## **Overview**

The purpose of this study was to explore relationships among older female consumers' participation in social activities, apparel shopping orientations and apparel shopping activities. A mail survey was conducted with 386 older female consumers over age 55. The results of stepwise regression analyses suggested that older female consumers' participation in leisure and formal social activities positively influenced their fashion interest, fashion involvement and apparel shopping enjoyment. Only the older consumers' participation in leisure activities was significantly associated with apparel shopping activities. All apparel shopping orientation variables were significant indicators of apparel shopping activities.



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## ■ Introduction

Population projections indicate that by 2030 there will be 108 million people in the United States over the age of 55, which amounts to about one-third of the projected total population (Moschis, 1996). Within this older population, older women constitute a larger share of the population because women, on average, live longer than men (Cavanaugh, 1997).

Despite the significant number of older consumers, marketers often ignore them due to a misconception that older consumers have low incomes and spend less money. Although it is known that the older population often has lower and less secure economic positions compared to the younger population, the older consumer market has a much higher accumulation of assets due to fewer dependents and, as a result, often a stronger purchasing power than the younger consumer market (Johnson-Hillery and Kang, 1997).

This increase of older consumers, both in numbers and their discretionary income, has contributed to the increased interest in discovering factors that influence older individuals' psychological well-being or life satisfaction. According to activity theory, older individuals' involvement in social activities is considered a key factor in life satisfaction (Atchley, 1993; Havighurst and Albrecht, 1953). In addition to life satisfaction, recent research has found that older people who are involved in more activities live longer than those who are involved in fewer activities (Glass et al., 1999).

Though past studies have addressed the importance of personal appearance in social interaction (Francis, 1992; Gravois, Kelly and Hildreth, 1980), few studies have included the older consumers' apparel shopping behavior in relation to their social activities. According to Ebeling and Rosencranz (1961) and Albet, Kaiser and Binford (1977), clothing can perform an important function in providing individuals with the incentive to remain socially active. Empirical studies have found that wearing fashionable clothing is associated with a positive impression and enhances sociability when interacting with others (Johnson, Nagasawa and Peters, 1977; Workman and Johnson, 1993).

In addition, older consumers often engage in shopping as a form of social and leisure activity. People shop for a variety of reasons; among them, enjoyment and socializing are considered very important. Shopping malls (or centers) often provide places where people meet friends, pass time, watch people and engage in other aspects of social exchange. According to Kowinski (1985), "The shopping mall is a wonderful place for senior citizens with no one in their homes and no place to go. They can see people and be with people" (p. 35). In a study of low-income older

consumers, Mason and Smith (1974) found that older consumers were actively involved in shopping with friends and relatives. Their findings also suggested that for older consumers, "shopping seemed a major part of the lifestyle of the respondents and perhaps more a source of pleasure than a necessary utilitarian chore" (p. 209).

Although previous studies have addressed the importance of clothing in social activities, little attention has been paid specifically to older consumers' apparel shopping behavior in terms of social activities. Thus, this study was designed to examine proposed relationships among older consumers' participation in social activities, apparel shopping orientations and apparel shopping activities.

## ■ Review of Literature

### *Social Activities and Apparel Shopping Orientations*

Shopping orientation concerns general attitudes about shopping (Solomon, 1996). Shopping orientation is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, reflecting not only the consumer's need for products and services, but also his or her life style (Gutman and Mills, 1982). The importance of shopping orientation in explaining shopping behavior has been explicated and well documented (Darden and Ashton, 1974-75; Gutman and Mills, 1982; Stone, 1954).

Although a considerable number of studies have investigated a variety of shopping orientations in general (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Darden and Reynolds, 1971; Stone, 1954) as well as fashion apparel-specific (Francis and Burns, 1992; Gutman and Mills, 1982; Lumpkin and Darden, 1982; Wells and Tigert, 1971), little attention has been paid to older consumers' apparel shopping orientations in terms of social activities. This study under discussion focused on three dimensions of fashion and apparel shopping orientations: Fashion Interest, Fashion Involvement and Apparel Shopping Enjoyment.

Several studies (i.e., Rayan, 1952; Stone and Form, 1955; Williams and Eicher, 1966) have addressed the effects of clothing on social participation. Francis (1992) found that clothing had a significant effect on social participation when studying the effects of perceived clothing deprivation on social participation. In a study of how clothing style differences relate to the formation of the sociability impressions, Johnson, Nagasawa and Peters (1977) discovered that wearing fashionable clothing was associated with a positive impression of sociability. Another study done by Workman and Johnson (1993) discovered that older consumers who wore fashionable clothing were rated as more sociable than ones who

wore unfashionable clothing. Hoffman (1970) also suggested that clothing for older women could be an important source of ego support and enhancement of the self-image as well as a basis for social acceptability and expression of personality.

Research by Gravois, Kelly and Hildreth (1980) found that socially active elderly people were more interested in clothing and personal appearance. French and Fox (1985) suggested that older consumers who were involved in a greater number of social activities saw themselves as being younger than other members of their chronological age. Consequently, they preferred to identify themselves with middle-aged individuals and tended to retain great interest in fashionable apparel. Miller and Cox (1982) discovered that women who were concerned about their appearance and thus tended to apply fashion products, such as makeup and clothing, believed that applying fashion products made them attractive and enhanced their interaction with others.

Although it has been suggested that fashion-oriented consumers actively participated in society (King, 1965; Tatzel, 1982), little empirical research has been conducted on the relationship between participation in social activities and apparel shopping orientations specifically regarding fashion interest, fashion involvement and apparel shopping enjoyment. In a study of recreational shoppers, Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980) found that consumers who enjoyed shopping tended to be actively involved in social and outdoor activities such as entertaining guests, hiking, camping and attending sports events. Similar to the findings of Bellenger and Korgaonkar's study, an earlier study by Bellenger, Robertson and Greenberg (1977) also found that consumers who enjoyed shopping tended to be actively involved in social and leisure activities.

### *Social Activities and Apparel Shopping Activities*

Shopping is an activity that includes either actual purchasing or non-purchasing of product or services, including browsing, window-shopping, searching for information and social interaction. Although there are a considerable number of studies focusing on apparel shopping behavior in terms of apparel expenditures, shopping motivations and patronage behavior, little attention has been paid to shopping activities in relation to social activities.

It has been suggested that people shop for clothing that will have a direct effect on their perceived appearance. The clothes they select enhance their appearance as well as social roles (Tatzel, 1982). Although several studies have addressed the importance of clothing in social interaction (Neal, Schwenk and Courtless, 1990; Shim and Bickle, 1993), few

studies have investigated the relationship between participation in social activities and apparel shopping.

Crask and Reynolds (1978) investigated department store shoppers' lifestyles and found that consumers who actively participated in shopping in department stores also actively participated in social and leisure activities such as communities, volunteerism, travel and sports. The active shoppers were interested in fashion and emphasized an individualized and fashionable appearance. Similar to Crask and Reynolds' findings, a study of elderly consumers' shopping behavior by Lumpkin (1985) also found that older people who actively participated in social activities, including community life, enjoyed and were more actively involved in apparel shopping. However, in a catalog study, Jasper and Lan (1992) found a negative relationship between activity participation and catalog shopping when they examined consumers' lifestyles and frequencies of catalog shopping.

### ***Apparel Shopping Orientations and Apparel Shopping Activities***

Studies have addressed the relationship between consumers' apparel shopping activities and fashion interest (Darden and Perreault, 1976; Shim and Mahoney, 1992). In a mail-order catalog study, Shim and Mahoney (1992) examined shopping orientations, catalog shopping attitudes and lifestyles using older consumers over 55 years of age who were heavy mail-order catalog users for fashion products. Findings indicated that fashion-oriented consumers were more involved in catalog shopping and enjoyed shopping in general. Also, consumers who were interested in fashion and enjoyed browsing through catalogs tended to be heavy catalog users.

Darden and Perreault (1976) investigated shopping orientations focusing on consumers who shopped outside their hometowns (also called outshoppers). Personal interviews were conducted on middle class suburban housewives and results indicated that consumers who had fashion interest were actively engaged in shopping outside their hometown.

A review of literature suggested that socially active consumers were interested in fashion and clothing and actively engaged in shopping. Consumers who had higher levels of apparel shopping orientations actively participated in apparel shopping activities. Although the elderly are often engaged in shopping as social and leisure activities, little attention has been paid to older female consumers' apparel shopping behavior regarding social activities; thus, the following hypotheses were developed for this study.

- H1 Participation of older female consumers in social activities will positively influence the following apparel shopping orientations: (a) *Fashion Involvement*, (b) *Fashion Interest* and (c) *Apparel Shopping Enjoyment*.
- H2 Participation of older female consumers in social activities will positively influence their apparel shopping activities.
- H3 Older female consumers' apparel shopping orientations will positively influence participation in their apparel shopping activities.

## ■ Data Collection

A self-administered questionnaire was mailed in 2001 to a random list of 1,000 older females who were aged 55 and older living in a Midwestern state. A modified version of Salant and Dillman's (1994) total design method was followed for data collection. Of 1,000 mailed questionnaires, 412 were returned, and from these 386 were used in this study resulting in a 38.6% rate of response.

The sample consisted of 190 older female consumers aged 55–64 years, 108 aged 65–74 and 88 aged 75 and older. The majority of the sample was married (63.7%), white or European in ethnicity (86.5%) and retired (51.3%). Approximately 48% of the women lived in urban communities of the state while the other 52% were located in rural communities with less than 10,000 in population. A summary of the demographic findings is presented in Table 1.

## *Research Instrument*

Questions were designed to capture older female consumers' levels of activities, apparel shopping orientations, apparel shopping activities and demographics. A mix of categorical, open-ended and continuous formatted questions was used in the survey.

The degree of participation in activities was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale with "1" as "Very Infrequently" and "5" as "Very Frequently." Twenty-four items addressing a variety of activities such as volunteer organizations, community activities and outdoor activities were adopted from prior research (Lemon, Bengtson and Peterson, 1972; Reitzes, Mutran and Verrill, 1995). Principal components factor analysis, using varimax rotation, suggested three factors or three groups of activities: Leisure Activity (six items,  $\alpha = 0.73$ ), Informal Social Activity (seven items,  $\alpha = 0.70$ ) and Formal Social Activity (four items,  $\alpha = 0.70$ ). Items loaded on each factor were summed to create factor scores.

Apparel shopping orientations were measured using a 5-point

**TABLE 1. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF OLDER FEMALE CONSUMERS (N = 386)**

|                              | Freq. (%)  |   | Freq. (%)  |
|------------------------------|------------|---|------------|
| Age                          |            | Education                                   |            |
| 55-64                        | 190 (49.2) | Less than high school                       | 33 (8.8)   |
| 65-74                        | 108 (27.9) | Completed high school                       | 150 (38.9) |
| 75+                          | 88 (22.8)  | Some college/vocational or technical school | 105 (27.2) |
| Marital Status               |            | Undergraduate college degree                | 33 (8.5)   |
| Never married                | 14 (3.6)   | Some graduate school                        | 16 (4.1)   |
| Married                      | 246 (63.7) | Graduate degree                             | 43 (11.1)  |
| Divorced/separated           | 37 (9.6)   | Occupational Status                         |            |
| Widowed                      | 84 (21.8)  | Working full time, paid                     | 98 (25.4)  |
| Living together, not married | 4 (1.0)    | Working part time, paid                     | 45 (11.7)  |
| Ethnicity                    |            | Working full time, unpaid                   | 6 (1.6)    |
| White or European            | 334 (86.5) | Working part time, unpaid                   | 4 (1.0)    |
| Black or African             | 6 (1.6)    | Retired                                     | 198 (51.3) |
| Native American              | 35 (9.1)   | Other                                       | 21 (5.4)   |
| Others                       | 4 (1.1)    | Years since retirement                      |            |
| Income                       |            | Less than 5                                 | 46 (11.9)  |
| Less than \$10,000           | 22 (5.7)   | 5-9   | 40 (10.4)  |
| \$10,000 to \$24,999         | 79 (20.4)  | 10-14                                       | 38 (9.8)   |
| \$25,000 to \$49,999         | 128 (33.2) | 15-19                                       | 33 (8.5)   |
| \$50,000 to \$74,999         | 47 (12.2)  | 20 or more                                  | 36 (8.9)   |
| \$75,000 to \$99,999         | 14 (3.6)   | Location                                    |            |
| Over \$100,000               | 18 (4.7)   | Urban (<50,000)                             | 184 (47.7) |
| Don't know                   | 7 (1.8)    | Rural (>10,000)                             | 199 (51.6) |

Likert-type format, ranging from "1" as "Strongly Disagree" to "5" as "Strongly Agree." Sixteen items were adopted from a variety of existing fashion and apparel shopping orientation scales (Gutman and Mills, 1982; Wells and Tigert, 1971; Lumpkin and Darden, 1982; Wilkes, 1992; Francis and Burns, 1992). Principal components factor analysis suggested three factors or three groups of Fashion Involvement (4 items,  $\alpha = 0.84$ ), Fashion Interest (5 items,  $\alpha = 0.79$ ) and Apparel Shopping Enjoyment (4 items,  $\alpha = 0.84$ ).

Apparel shopping activities were measured by a mixture of categorical and continuous questions. Twenty-two items representing six different apparel shopping activity topics were generated from previous research (Strutten and Lumpkin, 1992) and the researcher included types of shopping locations, hours spent on apparel shopping for a month, frequency of apparel shopping for a month, number of apparel purchases for a month, amount of money spent on apparel and frequency of apparel shopping information source seeking. Principal components factor analy-

sis with varimax rotation suggested a single factor, Apparel Shopping Activity (16 items,  $\alpha = 0.76$ ).

## ■ Results

Stepwise multiple regression procedures were employed to test the three research hypotheses. The results are summarized in Table 2. With significant set at the 0.05 level, hypotheses H1a – H1c suggesting older female consumers' participation in social activities would influence fashion involvement (H1a), fashion interest (H1b) and apparel shopping enjoyment (H1c) were partially supported. The stepwise regression procedures included only leisure and formal social activities as influencing all three apparel shopping orientation variables. The results of Fashion Involvement (H1a) showed  $R^2 = 0.15$  ( $F(2, 362) = 33.97, p < 0.001$ ); Fashion Interest (H1b) indicated  $R^2 = 0.15$  ( $F(2, 360) = 33.97, p < 0.001$ ); and Apparel Shopping Enjoyment (H1c) suggested  $R^2 = 0.20$  ( $F(2, 360) = 44.76, p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, older female consumers' leisure and formal social activities were positive in their influence on fashion involvement, fashion interest and apparel shopping enjoyment.

Hypothesis 2, predicting participation of older female consumers in social activities would positively influence apparel shopping activities, was partially supported. Although the overall regression model was significant ( $F(1, 364) = 63.57, p < 0.001$ ) and explained 15% of the variance in apparel shopping activities, the stepwise procedure included only leisure activities, but did not include formal and informal social activities. Older female consumers' participation in leisure activities significantly affected apparel shopping activities.

Significance was found in the third hypothesis in that  $R^2 = 0.35$  ( $F(3, 374) = 64.14, p < 0.001$ ). The stepwise regression model included all three apparel shopping orientation variables: fashion involvement, fashion interest and apparel shopping enjoyment. Therefore, the results supported H3 in that older female consumers' fashion involvement, fashion interest and apparel shopping enjoyment positively influenced apparel shopping activities.

## ■ Conclusions and Implications

This study explored relationships among older female consumers' levels of participation in social activities, apparel shopping orientations and apparel shopping activities. The results of stepwise multiple regression

TABLE 2. RESULTS OF REGRESSION ANALYSES

|     | Independent Variable          | Dependent Variable             | B    | Beta | t-value (p-value) | F               | Adj. R <sup>2</sup> |
|-----|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|------|------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| H1a | Leisure Activity              | Fashion Involvement            | 0.31 | 0.29 | 5.60 (0.000)*     | 33.79 (<0.0001) | 0.15                |
|     | Formal Social Activity        |                                | 0.15 | 0.19 | 3.65 (0.000)*     |                 |                     |
|     | Informal Social Activity      |                                |      |      | 0.34 (0.737)      |                 |                     |
| H1b | Leisure Activity              | Fashion Interest               | 0.38 | 0.35 | 6.73 (0.000)*     | 33.97 (<0.0001) | 0.15                |
|     | Formal Social Activity        |                                | 0.09 | 0.11 | 2.16 (0.032)*     |                 |                     |
|     | Informal Social Activity      |                                |      |      | 1.30 (0.196)      |                 |                     |
| H1c | Leisure Activity              | Apparel Shopping<br>Enjoyment  | 0.51 | 0.37 | 7.43 (0.000)*     | 44.76 (<0.0001) | 0.20                |
|     | Formal Social Activity        |                                | 0.15 | 0.15 | 2.95 (0.003)*     |                 |                     |
|     | Informal Social Activity      |                                |      |      | 1.92 (0.056)      |                 |                     |
| H2  | Leisure Activity              | Apparel Shopping<br>Activities | 0.58 | 0.39 | 7.97 (0.000)*     | 63.57 (<0.0001) | 0.15                |
|     | Formal Social Activity        |                                |      |      | 1.06 (0.291)      |                 |                     |
|     | Informal Social Activity      |                                |      |      | 0.86 (0.388)      |                 |                     |
| H3  | Fashion Involvement           | Apparel Shopping<br>Activities | 0.51 | 0.46 | 9.08 (0.000)*     | 67.14 (<0.0001) | 0.35                |
|     | Fashion Interest              |                                | 0.15 | 0.11 | 2.07 (0.039)*     |                 |                     |
|     | Apparel Shopping<br>Enjoyment |                                | 0.15 | 0.11 | 2.14 (0.000)*     |                 |                     |

\*Text needed to explain asterisk.

\*p &lt; 0.05

analyses suggested that older female consumers' degree of participation in leisure and formal social activities positively influenced fashion involvement, fashion interest and apparel shopping enjoyment while only leisure activities significantly influenced apparel shopping activities. Older female consumers' degree of apparel shopping orientation was a significant indicator of apparel shopping activities.

This study offers important contributions to marketing, retailing and consumer behavior research. Although many researchers have examined older consumers' apparel expenditures and patronage behavior, their research has offered little insight into the linkage between older consumers' participation in social activities and apparel shopping orientations with their apparel shopping activities. The results of this study shed light on how older female consumers' activities in general relate to apparel shopping orientations and apparel shopping activities, but more research is needed to identify the specifics.

The results of this study also have implications for marketers. Older female consumers who actively participated in leisure and formal social activities were involved in fashion, were interested in fashion and enjoyed apparel shopping. Knowing this can help retailers and apparel industries. Shopping center developers would be wise to include senior apparel stores and retailers should provide and display fashionable apparel for seniors. Also, the apparel industry could access new market segments by designing updated leisure and formal wear for older female consumers.

Although the findings of this study provided a significant contribution to the understanding of older consumers' apparel shopping behavior, this research has limitations and offers suggestions for future research. First, since the sample of this study was older female consumers aged over 55 living in urban and rural areas of a Midwestern state, the results may limit generalizability to other regions of the U.S. Future studies should include older consumers in other geographic areas of the U.S. as well as internationally to generalize more external valid results. Male consumers could also be included in future studies.

Further, the measurement of apparel shopping orientation was limited to three dimensions: fashion interest, fashion involvement and apparel shopping enjoyment. Although it was believed that the three dimensions were identified as those most often used in apparel shopping orientation studies (Francis and Burns, 1992; Gutman and Mills, 1982; Lumpkin and Draden, 1982; Wells and Tigert, 1971), they did not fully represent the multidimensional nature of apparel shopping orientations and thus the explanatory power of these three variables was somewhat limited. Future studies may include other dimensions of apparel shopping orientations such as fashion innovativeness, leadership and possibly antifashion.

Finally, it should be noted that although the measurement of apparel shopping activities reflected a variety of apparel shopping activities, there are as yet undiscovered dimensions of shopping activities. Future studies are warranted for development of a systematic scale for apparel shopping activities.

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