Consumer Decision-Making Styles and The Segmentation of The Apparel Market:

A Chinese Case

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Philosophy

June 1999

Hong Kong Baptist University
ABSTRACT

This study focuses on applying a widely-used Scale – Consumer Style Inventory – to measure the decision-making styles of the Chinese consumers with particular reference to the apparel market. It is significant to study the Chinese consumer behavior because of the giant consumer market in China. However, it is necessary for researchers to examine the cross-cultural differences when any Western theories are applied to the Oriental context. Based on the above argument, two objectives are defined in the research: first, to examine the cross-cultural validity of the US-based Consumer Style Inventory in the Chinese culture; second, to test the applicability of the Inventory to the Chinese consumers in the apparel market.

Two stages of the study are carried out to achieve the objectives. The first part of the study examines the psychometric properties of the Inventory based on a sample of undergraduate students in Guangzhou, China. When comparing the result with the US-based Inventory, it is found that the Inventory is applicable to the Chinese population. The second part of the study deals with the application of the Inventory in the China’s apparel market. The examination of the factor structure of the Inventory shows that it is appropriate for segmenting the real consumers. Therefore, the hybrid segmentation, combining demographic and decision-making styles, is adopted to segment the Chinese consumers. The result shows that older consumers are more quality conscious, fashion conscious, brand conscious, brand loyal and impulsive. Female consumers tend to be recreational and confused-by-overchoice, while males describe themselves as brand loyalers and impulsive shoppers. Married consumers tend to be more quality conscious, confused-by-overchoice, brand conscious, brand loyal and impulsive. Such demographic profiles are significant to marketers which can help to develop appropriate marketing strategies in the apparel business in China.

In conclusion, this research has contributions for both marketing theory and business practice. It is confirmed that the Consumer Style Inventory can apply to the Chinese culture with a focus on the apparel consumers. The Inventory is a suitable device to be used in understanding the Chinese consumer behavior and is a meaningful basis for market segmentation when combined with demographic variables.
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