

Apparel Fashion for Niche Market: Profiles of African American Consumers

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Abstract

African Americans, the second largest minority group in US, have great potential to be promising apparel consumers with their unique clothing shopping behaviors caused by highly oriented clothing involvement. Those high involved consumers usually choose clothing that makes them look good with the fit and style to follow the latest fashion trends and dynamic clothing style. The satisfaction with clothing fits of African-Americans is strongly affected by their self-esteem related to generous attitudes toward their actual body shapes, leading to preference for tight fit clothing. Interestingly, African American women differently perceive their body shapes from their actual ones, suggesting that clothing fit preferences should be understood with consideration of both physically and psychologically inconsistent body shapes.

Keywords: Clothing Involvement; Body Measurements; Body Shapes; Clothing Fit

Motivation

Apparel is one of the largest market segments in terms of the size of its economy such as employment, investment and revenues in global industry. The volume of the apparel market in US is continuously growing up to \$390 billion in 2025 Statistic Research Department [1]. The annual growth rate of apparel market is 2% from 2015. The average spending on clothing in US adults was \$161.00 per month. Depending on the household income and family size, consumers show different spending patterns on clothing. The average budget for clothing in household is around 4% of income after tax. As one of the fast-growing market segments, apparel products become very promising ones with higher purchasing power in the future. The target consumers in apparel market are continuously shifting in diversity, such as age, gender, and ethnicity. The African Americans are the second largest minority population (more than 13%) in the US. The purchasing and market power of African Americans in US is greatly increasing with their higher education and income [2]. In shopping habits, the African Americans highly spend their money on clothing, which was one of top expenditure items. According to the market research, the African Americans annually spend around \$26 billion for their apparel purchase in 2017 Research and Markets [3]. Hence, the apparel market for the African Americans in the US can be one of the great potential business areas. Such growing apparel market for African American more and more demands empirical research on their apparel shopping behaviors.

Discussion and Future Study

The concept of clothing involvement is the important research subject to understand the consumers' clothing shopping behaviors, store preferences, clothing benefits sought, purchasing intention, and brand commitment in marketing and retailing fields. Previous studies find that consumers with a high-clothing involvement are likely to be heavier clothing shoppers than consumers with a low-clothing involvement [4-8]. Those high-involvement consumers more sensitively consider the newest styles and current trend of fashion rather than the price of the clothing. Interestingly, the recent research [9] demonstrates that African American consumers have higher mean scores of clothing involvement than the other ethnic consumer groups, suggesting that they are very promising potential consumers with considerable purchasing power in the clothing market. Such highly involved African American consumers are very sensitive to the latest fashion trends and dynamic styles in order to create their better personal image with best-fitting clothing [9,10].

Fitting issues in ready-to-wear (RTW) clothing have been long debated since mass production of clothing based on the standardization was introduced. These fitting issues were

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always brought up when people wear their clothing in many different purposes such as protection from hazardous environments or self-expression of their personality, identity, mood, and more. According to 1000 female survey, many consumers face the loose (33%) and tight (24%) fit problems in their RTW clothing [11]. The return rate of clothing is high (more than 12%) in retail categories [12], the main reason of which comes from size and fit issues. Current RTW clothing is based on the standardization such as the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) for body measurements published almost decade ago [13]. This standardization makes it possible for different shaped consumers to find their own relatively well-fitted clothing. However, the recent study Seo & Namwamba [14] established that the standardization should include the consideration of other factors as well as body measurements: one of them is the uniqueness of each ethnic group. According to this research, African-American women prefer to wear tight-fitting RTW clothing without uncomfortable feeling. This can be understood from the previous studies [15,16] which explained that African American women have less stress to lose weight than other ethnic groups and more generous with their heavy body weight owing to their higher levels of self-esteem and positive attitudes toward body image. Therefore, the standardization of clothing fit for African American women should be relatively different from the current ASTM in order to provide more comfortable clothing fits to them.

African Americans, as highly potential apparel consumers, exhibit unique apparel shopping behaviors, resulting from their higher clothing involvement characteristics than other ethnic groups. African American women who is highly involved with clothing product prefer to create their better personal image with best-fitting and fashionable clothing fit. Such clothing fit issue in African American is strongly affected by their high self-esteem related to positive attitudes toward their actual body shapes. The recent report [17] discussed this clothing fit issue in African American women based on their actual body measurements, but also suggested that the approach to clothing fit issues with the perceived body shapes has been limited to the real satisfaction with a clothing fit based on the actual body shapes. In fact, the perceived body shapes as well as the actual body shapes are very important factors to decide the clothing fit preference, but the perceived body shapes are not sometimes consistent with the actual body shapes. Therefore, further research needs to be conducted to determine the clothing fit preference by deeply studying on the psychological approach to the perceived body shapes of African American consumers. Furthermore, the clothing fit preference is seriously affected by both actual and perceived body shapes because it strongly has a great impact on how consumers feel about their body shapes after wearing it. Hence, future research needs to find out the best clothing fit preference through harmonious combination of both physically and psychologically inconsistent body shapes. These efforts make it possible for the apparel manufactures to reduce the

clothing return rate and fit problems, so that they can create the best marketing strategies for the African American consumers.

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