

## Promotional References: An Examination of Product Involvement Effects in the Retail Apparel Setting In Iran

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**Abstract:** *The aim of the current study is to examine the usage of promotional references external to and internal to the retail store setting by selected psychographic characteristics of the retail apparel consumer. A national random sample of 457 male and 170 female consumers participated in the study. Results indicate that product involvement has an effect on the internal and external promotional references used by consumers. Furthermore, results indicate that consumer's use of promotional activities both internal and external to the retail store setting. Questionnaires were distributed with simple random sampling method Data were analyzed based on Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, V. 21). The author recommends future researchers examine the relations of the research in studies focusing on gender and another promotional reference*

**Keywords:** *Retail promotion (Internal and external promotional references); Involvement, Consumer behavior*

### INTRODUCTION

Spending on consumer sales promotions continues to be a large part of the marketing communication expenditures for many companies. These promotions are used to enhance consumer perceptions of value and can assume several forms. Communication and promotion decisions are a critical element of retailer customer experience management strategy. There is an extensive literature on marketing communication and promotion, consisting of both analytical and empirical models. On the other hand, an area of great importance in the field of retailing deals with strategic positioning of retail stores. The retailer's strategic objective is to develop an integrated marketing program encompassing a wide range of marketing elements to create a market position within the dynamic competitive environment. To establish a market position, the retailer strives to develop a store image which is analytically determined and designed to appeal to the store's target customers. The store's image is the product of a set of attributes that are salient in determining customer patronage. Various approaches to measuring retail consumers' perceptions have been discussed in the literature, including such methods as semantic differential scaling (McDougall, 1974-75; Menezes and Elbert, 1979), Stapel scaling (Menezes and Elbert, 1979) and, more recently, multi-dimensional scaling (Doyle and Fenwick, 1974-75; Green, 1975; Green and Rao, 1972; Singson, 1975).

So, every morning millions of people spend time thinking about what they need to wear for that particular day. Several useful reviews summarize what we know about this very broad and important area, primarily from a manufacturer's standpoint Consumer motivation has been a fairly popular theme in retail research during the

past several years. With industry downsizing a prevalent phenomenon, marketers must "narrowcast" rather than "broadcast" marketing efforts by directing promotional activities to specific groups of people (Sellers, 1993). When retailers can identify the influence that convinces their target customer to make a purchase, they are better able to reach those consumers through effective promotional programs and thus enhance company profits (Dhalla and Mahatoo, 1976; Piiro, 1990; Del Vecchio, 1991).

Promotional avenues that a retailer might pursue can be classified as either internal to the retail store or external to the retail store. Internal promotional avenues would include in-store and window display and personal selling assistance on the sales floor. External promotional activities would include various forms of advertising (including newspaper, television, and billboard), catalogs, and publicity (including product presentation in magazines, television programs, and videos). , thereby dictating different promotional avenues for products carried. Darden and Ashton (1975) and Goldsmith et al., Stith (1987) suggest that identification of deferent consumer groups by isolation of certain individual demographic characteristics such as age or sex might not be as reliable as simultaneous consideration of various demographic and psychographic variables. A more multi-dimensional profile allows the marketer to predict better how consumers will respond to the marketing mix or conversely how the marketing mix can be altered to reach the target consumer in different retail settings (Engel et al., 1986). Personal characteristics can further predict the types of information used in making purchase decisions (Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1992). On the other hand, Store promotion is a way life for retailers. Indeed, an intensive promotional activity allows the store to maintain/increase its turnover by achieving a higher

penetration rate in the market area. An increase in the frequency of visit and / or increase in the average amount spent in the store. Despite high fixed costs (e.g., organization, communication), promotions are a source of additional margins, thanks to the financial support of producers, and the speculative stocks that are constituted during the promotional periods (Volle, 2001)

In this regard, the purpose of this study is to examine the usage of promotional references external to and internal to the retail store. Specifically, this study examines what effects, if any, product category involvement have on consumer's use of internal and external promotional activities in the retail clothing setting. Apparel was chosen as the research vehicle because of its personal nature, visible psychological risk. Engel et al. (1986) further justify clothing as an appropriate vehicle because it is one of few products that maintains a varied level of personal relevance but is still perceived as a reflection of one's self-image.

#### **RETAIL PROMOTION TYPE PRODUCT CATEGORY INVOLVEMENT**

There is no gainsaying that retailers need to constantly encourage customers to patronize their store, particularly in environments where competition is intense. Advertisements announcing store promotional offers of various sorts dot the media and store flyers make up a significant part of this advertising avalanche. In the developed world retailers regularly spend anywhere between one-third to one-half of their marketing budgets on promotions advertised on store flyers (Bodapati, 1999; Volle, 1997; Arnold et al., 2001). What is important in retail strategy formulation is the effect of involvement on the relationship between discrepant communication and attitude change. The theory of involvement states that for a person who is highly involved if the anchor (a person's personal initial position) is near, the will be message perceived to be more similar to the recipient's own position than it actually is- assimilation effect. Analogously, if the anchor is far away, the very is message perceived to be more discrepant from the recipient's view than it actually is-contrast effect (Freedman, 1964; Sheriff and Hovland, 1961). Thus, regardless of the level of discrepancy, a highly involved consumer is more difficult to persuade. Also implied in the concept of involvement is the notion that those who are highly involved in certain issues have more extensive concerns about them than those low in involvement. Translated in the area of retailing, this notion that those suggests high in involvement will be concerned about a number of attributes; the greater high involvement individuals will also attach a greater degree of importance to each of these attributes (Rothschild and Houston, 1977). Consumer involvement refers to the feelings of interest and enthusiasm consumers hold

toward product categories. This concept plays an important role in the development of theories of consumer search behavior, information processing, and decision making (Mowen, 1990). Involvement originates from social psychology and the notion of 'ego involvement,' which refers to the relationship between an individual, an issue or object (Michaelidou and Dibb, 2006). This conceptualization has been the basis for applying involvement in consumer behavior. The involvement construct became linked to marketing and consumer behavior following Krugman (1965)'s conceptualization of involvement with advertising (Krugman, 1965). Involvement generally refers to a person's perceived relevance of the focal object based on inherent needs, values and interests ( Zaichkowsky, 1994). Traylor (1981) defines involvement as a consumer's understanding or recognition of a specific product. The higher level the consumer consideration of the product is called high involvement and the lower level, low involvement. Zaichkowsky (1985) calls involvement personal demand, conception, and interest in the product. Engel et al. (1995) report involvement as, under a specific environment, a consumer is stimulated by personal recognition and/or interest in the product. Flugel (1929) proposed that some individuals gain extreme pleasure from their clothes or even from thinking about them. The idea that a product provides differing amounts of individual utility has been termed product involvement. The construct of product involvement is closely related to the perceived importance and hedonic value (emotional appeal) provided by the product (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985). When examining the concept of product category involvement in the retail clothing setting, the terms "fashion sense" or "clothing interest" are usually applied.

In studies designed to measure impression formation, both Paek (1986) and Bell (1991) found that persons with a high clothing interest rated strangers who were dressed in a conservative, formal, or daring manner more positively than they rated strangers more casually dressed. Bell (1991) found the subjects with higher clothing interest rated the formally dressed male stranger most favorably. Those with less clothing interest rated a casually dressed male stranger more favorably. Paek (1986) found that a female stranger dressed in a daring style of clothing was rated more favorably by subjects with high clothing interest.

Studies concerning the clothing interest of men have found the level of clothing interest related to attitudes toward professionalism and clothing itself. In a study by Adams (1971), a majority of men were found to regard appearance as important to one's job success. Similarly, Shim and Kotsiopoulos (1991) found that big and tall males who were highly involved in their clothing purchase decisions believed that clothing was important

for impression and career management. This group of male consumers also exhibited a high clothing interest. Early studies found that college men believed being well dressed important (Fournier, 1969), as did career women (Rabolt and Drake, 1985). Kwon and Drayton (1987) found that females were more sensitive to clothing needs and possessed a greater degree of clothing awareness than did males. Similarly, Kang-Park and DeLong (1991) found that females who were found to be highly involved in the purchase of clothing exhibited a higher level of satisfaction with clothing choices.

As for retailers, empirical evidence indicates that store flyers build store traffic (Burton et al., 1999; Volle, 2001; Gijbrecchts et al., 2003; Miranda and Konya, 2007), increase purchases of advertised and unadvertised products, and increase the amount consumers spend on these products (Burton et al., 1999), which implies a favorable effect on profits and margins (Volle, 2001). Moreover, store flyers offer a flexible means to convey a good price positioning, which is a key attribute of the retailer's store image in price-sensitive settings (Volle, 2001). Store flyers also help retailers communicate about the variety present in their store assortment (Arnold et al., 2001). Finally, retailers rely on store flyers as a source of income, earned from the fees charged to manufacturers to appear in them (Gijbrecchts et al., 2003; Pieters et al., 2007)

Product involvement, termed clothing interest above, will generally result in extended problem-solving behavior on the part of the retail clothing consumer (Block et al., 1986; Mittal, 1989). This study proposes that highly involved consumers will engage in such extended problem solving and that it will manifest in the form of increased use of both external and internal promotional references. Such a contention is grounded in the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) developed by Petty and Cacioppo (1986). The elaboration likelihood model states that highly involved consumers will elaborate to a greater extent than less involved consumers on brand choice decisions. Such elaboration will result in consumer's voluntary attention to all promotional information related to a product category. On this basis, the following hypotheses have been developed:

H1: Consumers who exhibit greater amounts of product involvement make greater use of promotional activities internal to the store than consumers exhibiting lesser amounts of product involvement.

H2: Consumers who exhibit greater amounts of product involvement make greater use of promotional activities external to the store than consumers exhibiting lesser amounts of product involvement.

## METHODOLOGY DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This research based on applied goals and information is a correlation research. In this statistical research description and descriptive subject were used. Statistical population according to many researchers including all real or presumptive members that we are interested in extent their research findings (Delaware, 2006); a collection of individuals is called Society which they have one or more traits in common, and this trait or traits is researchers favorite.

Of the 779 delivered surveys to male consumers, 457 were returned, of which 440 were usable. One hundred and seventy of the 397 delivered surveys to female consumers, were returned to the researcher, all of which were usable.

**Reliability and Validity Analysis:** To assess the reliability of questionnaire, Cronbach's value was applied. The overall values of Cronbach Alpha are ( $\alpha = 0.874$ ). To examine that, a pre- test was carried out on the sample with 55 respondents, and 50 practical questionnaires were collected. The conclusion shows that Cronbach's value of each variable was more than 0/7. The least significant reliability for research *questionnaires is 0/7; thus, this questionnaire was recognized reliable.*

## Measurement

To assess consumer use of promotional activities internal to the retail setting, subjects were asked to indicate their frequency of use of store and window displays, store imagery, and sales associate information. In a similar fashion, consumer use of promotional activities external to the retail setting was assessed using the frequency of use of billboard, television, and catalog advertisements and television and magazine features. In total, nine items, anchored by 5="always" and 1="never," were utilized in measuring consumer use of promotional activities internal and external to the retail setting. Product category involvement was measured using eight, Likert-type items relating to the personal relevance that clothing maintains in the individual consumer's lifestyle. Items were anchored by 5="strongly agree" and 1="strongly disagree." Respondents were classified as either high clothing involvement (cluster center"3.50) or low clothing involvement (cluster center"2.23) by means of a hierarchical cluster analysis.

## Analysis and results

We test and run the model by Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, V. 21). Analysis of variance was used to assess effects of product involvement on the use of promotional activities internal and external to the retail setting. Initial analysis focused on the interaction



term associated with involvement. Interaction effects were not hypothesized, and their existence would confound examination of the main effects.

Examination of the main effects for product category involvement reveal that a significant relationship exists ( $F=37.18$ , sig. of  $F=0.00$ ) Further examination of the univariate analysis indicates that use of both promotional activities internal ( $F=43.67$ , sig. of  $F=0.00$ ) and external ( $F=57.44$ , sig. of  $F=0.00$ ) to the retail setting are affected by consumer's level of involvement with clothing items. Examination of individual means presented in Table 3 indicates that support exists for H1 and H2.

**Table 1** Means and standard deviations<sup>a</sup>

	Promotional Activities Internal to the Retail Store	Promotional Activities External to the Retail Store
Low clothing involvement	2.61 (0.69)	1.97 (0.65)
High clothing involvement	3.07 (0.74)	2.50 (0.74)
Total sample	2.76 (0.74)	2.14 (0.72)

<sup>a</sup>Standard deviations in parentheses.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects that product category involvement have on the use of promotional references internal and external to the retail store setting. Results indicate that Participants use both internal and external promotional references equally. However, differences in the use of internal and external promotional references in the retail setting were found to exist between individuals exhibiting higher and lower levels of clothing interest or product involvement. High involvement individuals use window displays, store imagery and sales associate advice to a greater extent than consumers who exhibit lower levels of involvement. Similarly, high involvement individuals use advertising and other non-personal sources of information to a greater degree than consumers with a lower clothing interest.

The findings of this study have implications for three primary constituencies including retailers, promotional firms, and theoreticians. First, retailers must think innovatively about newspaper, magazine, and audio media, and consider using these media to sell directly to the customer as they evolve into the computer age (Sellers, 1993). Any promotional material, whether internal or external to the retail setting, should stimulate consumer thought and evaluation of the product (in this case clothing).

The need for in-store merchandising attention is getting attention in the popular press (Bartles, 1993). Corwin (1993, p. 51) states that "presentation is more important today than ever before because we feel that the real battlefield of the nineties is at the point-of-purchase." Such a contention holds true especially for consumers who are highly involved in a particular product category. Promotional material that includes shopping information, product and feature availability, discount information, and sales comparison data may be used to guide the consumer to a particular retail clothing outlet, but highly involved consumers will also seek the opinions of sales persons before making a purchase. Consequently, retailers must ensure sales persons are well informed and willing to provide highly involved consumers with the necessary assistance.

Understanding consumer's use of idea sources (references) for product purchase can aid promotional firms in targeting customers. While the current study found a relationship between levels of product category involvement and promotional references are extremely important in promotional message formulation. For highly involved consumers, cognitive and affective responses to any clothing related promotional theme should focus on the message, not the media. "What you say" is more important than how you say it. The converse is also true. For clothing consumers with lower levels of involvement, "how you say it" is more important than the actual message

In this regard, Marketers should consider another variable such as the effect of gender in this context or atmosphere of the retail setting and use price in promotional references.

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