Benefits of mass customized products: moderating role of product involvement and fashion innovativeness

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore impacts and benefits of mass customized products on emotional product attachment, favorable attitudes toward a mass customization program, and the ongoing effect on loyalty intentions. This study further investigated how benefits, attachment, attitudes, and loyalty intentions differed as a function of involvement and fashion innovativeness. 290 female online shoppers in South Korea participated in an online survey. Results of this study revealed that perceived benefits positively influenced emotional product attachment and attitudes toward a mass customization program. In addition, attachment positively influenced attitudes, which in turn affected loyalty intentions. This study also found that benefits, attachment, attitudes, and loyalty intentions were all higher in highly involved consumers (high fashion innovators) than those in less involved consumers (low fashion innovators). This study concludes with theoretical and practical implications for mass customization programs.

Keywords: Psychology, Information science
1. Introduction

Mass customization refers to the development, production, marketing, and delivery of a customized product or service that offers various customizing options, enabling an individual to find exactly what they need at a reasonable price (Pine, 1993). Mass customization is a useful marketing solution for acquiring and retaining consumers and building long term relationships with them. As consumers and retailers co-create new products, consumers gain an opportunity to purchase more favorable products, and their willingness to pay extra costs increases. Moreover, when consumers engage in a mass customization program, retailers obtain information regarding different levels of customers’ preferences. Consequently, they are able to offer a highly personalized shopping experience (Endo and Kincade, 2008).

Today’s Internet technology allows retailers to collect and exchange important information more rapidly and efficiently than ever before, thus reducing lead time, as well as facilitating more design variations and greater flexibility during production (Wall Street Journal, 2015). As customization can become a tactical tool that provides extra benefits to consumers, customization has been adopted in various industries, including computers (e.g., Dell), apparel (e.g., Brooks Brothers), home furnishing (e.g., Pottery Barn), shoes (e.g., Nike), handbags (e.g., Longchamp), and cars (e.g., Toyota). Luxury brands (e.g., Louis Vuitton and Burberry) that were slow in launching e-commerce now offer customization programs through online to provide personalized design and connect with their customers (Quartz, 2016). However, even with these advantages, some programs have been successful (e.g., those operated by Lands’ End and Nike), while others have faced serious difficulties (e.g., Levi Strauss) (Franke and Piller, 2004). Reasons for such disparity suggested by scholars include consumers’ extensive participation, their preference for default option, and their inability to recognize the existence of a mass customization program (Franke et al., 2009; Simonson, 2005). Empirical research on the effect of customization on consumer responses has also shown somewhat inconsistent results. For example, in Franke and Schreier (2008)’s study, consumers exhibited higher willingness to pay for a customized product than for a standard product. However, although consumers in Schoder et al. (2006)’s study preferred customized newspapers, their willingness to pay for a customized version was not higher than that for a regular newspaper. To ensure the long-term success of a mass customization offering, generating increased benefits for consumers can be a competitive advantage (Franke et al., 2009), and there is a compelling need for a deeper analysis of consumer benefit.

Practitioners and scholars have paid growing attention to mass customization for online retailing such as customer value (Franke et al., 2009), effects of program features such as toolkits, design options on consumer responses (Dellaert and Stremersch, 2005), and value of quick response supply chain strategy (Choi and Guo, 2017).
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