

Understanding Consumers' Perceptions and Behaviors: Implications for Denim Jeans Design

Osmud Rahman,
Assistant Professor
School of Fashion,
Ryerson University, Toronto
orahman@ryerson.ca

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to uncover the relative salient of intrinsic and extrinsic cues as determinants of consumers' purchasing intent toward denim jeans. To the best of my knowledge, there is no comprehensive study reporting results from Canadian consumers' perspective regarding their perceptions and behaviors toward denim jeans. A self-administered survey with Likert scale and open-ended questions were used for this study. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the salient factors and the correlation of six intrinsic cues and three extrinsic cues of denim jeans. A total of 380 useable surveys were compiled, analyzed and collated. The results of this study revealed that fit of denim jeans was the most important cue followed by style and quality, whereas brand names and country-of-origin were relatively insignificant. In terms of product cue correlation, fabric was strongly correlated with style, comfort and quality. Intrinsic cues played a more significant role on denim jeans evaluation than extrinsic cues. According to the results of this study, young consumers tended to use various product attributes to fulfill their concrete needs and abstract aspirations.

Keywords: Denim jeans, consumer purchasing, Canadian consumers

Introduction

The symbolic meanings of denim jeans have evolved since the California Gold Rush era of the 1850's. Initially, denim jeans were adopted for utilitarian purposes associated with physical labor and worn predominantly by ranch hands and farmers. During the Second World War, durable work clothes were needed, and denim jeans were declared "essential commodities" (Gordon, 1991) for the national war effort. In the late 1940s, denim jeans came to be associated with the youth culture; and it began to be used as a fashionable

commodity and a means of cultural expression. By the 1950s, jeans became the symbol of teenage rebellion influenced by television programs and movies such as *The Wild One* (1953) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955).

In the late 1970s, denim jeans took a remarkable turn with the emergence of designer brands including *Sergio Valente* (1975), *Calvin Klein Jeans* (1978), and *Gloria Vanderbilt* (1979). Jeans were no longer classified as low-priced fashion products, and it became status symbols for those who wore the most prestigious

designer labels. In 1990's, wide leg jeans for men and low-rise hip hugger jeans for women became popular in the youth market. Today, in the early twenty-first century, the meaning of denim jeans has once again taken on another new dimension. Many new denim brands (e.g., *True Religion*, *Rock and Republic*) are being positioned and targeted in the premium category. According to Cotton Incorporated (2005), the annual growth rate of the premium category increased by 138% from 2004 to 2005. Another study reported by Cotton Incorporated's Retail Monitor™ (2009) on "teens and denim", "In the third quarter of 2009, denim jeans accounted for 15% of teen apparel purchases, up from 12% in the third quarter of 2008. ... On the premium side of the teen denim market, jeans priced at \$70 to over \$100 account for 21% of jeans offered at retail, significantly more than the percentage of jeans offerings for adults in this price range (6%). ... Although the economic downturn has made teen consumers more price conscious and caused a dip in their apparel purchases, their spending is already on the rebound."

With both historical and contemporary perspective, it is evident that fashion consumption is more than just satisfying one's physical needs such as warmth and protection. Consumers often look for multiple attributes and benefits to satisfy their divergent needs. The selection and evaluation process of denim jeans can be rudimentary and complicated at the same time. In general, consumers do not merely seek for a monolithic feature of a product but rather multi-dimensional viewpoint of overall product quality. Many prior studies on consumer behavior (Fiore and Damhorst, 1992) have clearly indicated that perceived quality is a multidimensional construct. However, to the best of my knowledge, there is no comprehensive study reporting results from Canadian consumers perspective regarding their perceptions and behaviors toward this symbolic and publicly consumed product - denim jeans.

In order to understand how modern consumers perceive quality from multidimensional perspectives, it is imperative to uncover and examine what role of product attributes may play on product evaluations and purchasing intent. The objectives of this study are three-fold:

- (1) To explore the underlying motives of consumer's purchasing intent of denim jeans.
- (2) To uncover the relative significant of intrinsic and extrinsic cues as determinants of consumers' purchasing intent.
- (3) To understand the correlation between intrinsic and extrinsic cues.

Literature Review

Concept of product attributes

Attributes have been described as resembling either *features* or *dimensions* (Myers and Shocker, 1981; Tversky, 1977). They can be used to judge and compare a product on different aspects of product alternatives. According to the means-end chain approach, "attributes are the means by which the product offers or generates desired consequences or values; (the ends)" (Claeys *et al.*, 1995; pp. 193). Product attributes have been dichotomized into various typologies encompassing intrinsic and extrinsic (Olson, 1977; Szybillo and Jacoby, 1974), concrete and abstract (Claeys *et al.*, 1995), product-related and non-product-related (Keller, 2003), and tangible and intangible (Friedman, 1986; Hirschman, 1980).

According to Olson and Reynolds (1983), concrete attributes refer to the product that can be represented as a "distinct" material form, whereas abstract attributes refer to the product that can be represented for its "indistinct" qualities. Normally, "distinct" product qualities and features can be easily observed, dissected, engaged and understood by the consumers (e.g. pocket) while "indistinct" product

qualities are less tangible and cannot be easily dissected and understood. For example, consumers may describe a dress to be elegant, sophisticated or romantic; however, they may not be able to point to the exact elements in order to support their views. In other words, concrete/intrinsic attributes (e.g., color, fabric) are much easier to understand and comprehend than abstract attributes. Abstract attributes are often evaluated by subjective and emotional reasons rather than rational and utilitarian reasons. Bech-Larsen and Nielsen (1999) defined concrete attributes as the visible characteristics of the product including extrinsic cues (e.g. price, brand names), whereas abstract attributes were defined as characteristics that cannot be judged prior to experiential use of the product (e.g. taste and sensory pleasure). Additionally, abstract attributes are often highly correlated to “psychological” consequences such as social status and self-identity while concrete attributes are more related to “functional” consequences such as performance (Reynolds *et al.*, 1995).

The distinction of each typology of attributes was not the key premise of this study. The primary focus was placed on the intrinsic and extrinsic product cues of denim jeans. However, this article did touch upon on several areas of concrete and abstract dimensions. For this reason, a brief description of various attributes in the preceding sections was deemed necessary.

Cue utilization theory - intrinsic and extrinsic cues

Based on the literature review (Appendix 1), six intrinsic cues (quality, style, color, comfort, fit and fabric) and three extrinsic cues (price, brand name, and country-of-origin) were identified for this study and denim jeans was deliberately selected as a vehicle to discover consumer’s perceptions toward denim jeans.

According to cue utilization theory, products consist of intrinsic and extrinsic cues that serve as surrogate indicators of quality (Cox, 1967; Olson and Jacoby, 1972). Consumers tend to use both cues concurrently when assessing product quality. Intrinsic cues are higher-level cues inherent to the physical composition of a product, such as fabric, style, color, and fit. Extrinsic cues are lower-level cues that can be changed without changing the physical product, such as price, brand name, country-of-origin (COO), warranty and seals of approval. These cues can be considered as a “true” cue or a “perceived” cue to quality (Hatch and Roberts, 1985). A seal of certification is a “true” extrinsic cue because the quality of a product has met certain standards set by the manufacturers or international organizations (e.g., International Standards Organization - ISO). Price is a “perceived” cue because it may or may not serve as a good indicator of product quality. In the marketing and consumer fields, many researchers (Aqueveque, 2006; Olson, 1977) express that intrinsic cues are more significant in product evaluations because they have higher “predictive” values than extrinsic cues.

J
T
A
T
M
Intrinsic cues

Many consumers had expressed that comfort and fit were important in judging satisfaction with apparel products (Zhang *et al.*, 2002). In defining “comfort”, it is evident that physiological and psychological factors play a significant role. These include a garment’s thermal effects (e.g. warmth, breathability); sensory characteristics (e.g. tactile feeling/hand) and mobility (e.g. ease of movement).

Fit can be defined as the conformance of a garment to an individual’s body type or size. According to previous research (Zhang *et al.*, 2002), fit attributes were often considered as one of the most salient evaluative criteria for jeans and pants purchases. Additionally, this cue often deals

with shifting notions of aesthetic and psychological values. Well-fitting clothing is generally shaped by personal taste, fashion trend and physical comfort. According to a study on denim jeans (Wu and DeLong, 2006), comfort and fit were the two most salient criteria for purchasing decisions. With this perspective, the following hypotheses were developed:

H1: Fit is an important evaluative cue for denim jeans consumption.

H2: Comfort is an important evaluative cue for denim jeans consumption.

Aesthetic characteristics such as color, style and fabric also play a vital role when judging the quality of denim jeans. In many cases, the sensorial pleasures (e.g., vision, tactile feel) may drive or stimulate a consumer's interest to try on and purchase an apparel product. According to a study conducted by Fiore and Damhorst (1992), the appearance, hand and weight of fabric were useful in describing quality. It is evident that fabric plays a significant role on judging the quality of denim jeans. Thus the following hypothesis was developed:

H3: Fabric and quality are positively correlated.

Many prior studies (Schmitt and Simonson 1997) reported that younger consumers often choose a product based on aesthetic value and distinctiveness of design in order to construct their identity and self-image. In other words, denim jeans can be used as a social signifier to maintain or elevate an individual's image. Likewise, color has often been considered as one of the important and visible cues of many apparel products (Rasband, 2001). It elicits specific emotional responses and plays a significant role on the aesthetic appeal to the consumer. Thus, based upon the above literature review, the following hypotheses were developed:

H4: Style is an important evaluative cue for denim jeans consumption.

H5: Color is an important evaluative cue for denim jeans consumption.

Extrinsic cues

Brand names can serve as a device to indicate overall quality (Kirmani and Rao, 2000), develop associations (Escalas and Bettman, 2005), and reduce risk and shopping effort (Gardner and Levy, 1995). However, many studies have indicated that consumers tend to rely on intrinsic cues such as physical quality and style to guide their judgment. For example, a study conducted in China and South Korea (Forsythe *et al.*, 1999) reported that consumers in both countries did not appear to use brand name to evaluate the overall quality of a jacket, and according to Rahman *et al.* (2008a), Hong Kong consumers ranked brand name and country of origin relatively insignificant for evaluating denim jeans. It is evident that the importance of brand name is being challenged and questioned in today's consumer market. Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed:

H6: Brand name is not an important evaluative cue for denim jeans consumption.

The effects of country of origin (COO) are not identical across product categories. COO has been found to be more salient with expensive, sophisticated, and high-end products rather than basic, "run-of-the-mill" ordinary goods (Rahman *et al.*, 2008b). In addition, COO has even less effect if consumers are familiar with the product (Han and Terpstra, 1988), or when multiple cues are being used in a study (Zhang, 1996). With this perspective, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H7: COO is not an important evaluative cue for denim jeans consumption.

Price is one of the most investigated extrinsic cues, and has been discussed extensively in marketing and consumer research literature. Consumers use price to infer quality, especially when other cues are

not available (Olson, 1977). Other studies also indicate that there is not enough evidence to support the notion of “the higher the price, the higher the quality” (Szybillo and Jacoby, 1974). For example, a study on denim jeans (Chowdhary, 2002) reported that the most expensive jeans did not offer the best performance quality (e.g., tensile strength and seam strength). Therefore, the price cue was anticipated to be less significant if a set of multiple cues were used to measure the salient determinant of purchase intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed:

H8: Price is not an important evaluative cue for denim jeans consumption.

Research Method

According to Trendex (2005) and Statistics Canada (2010), Toronto ranked the highest in the consumption of apparel and clothing goods among all metropolitan cities in Canada. For the year 2005 alone, the total expenditure on apparel by young Canadian women (15 to 24 years old) was 13.8 percent (Trendex, 2006). In order to understand women’s perceptions towards denim jeans in Canada, multiple-cue method was adopted, and Toronto was deliberately chosen for this particular research topic.

All participants were female, and the vast majority of them had current or recent experiences of wearing denim jeans. They were recruited from a major university in Toronto either at the campus, or via email, being personally contacted by the researcher and research assistant. The reasons why females were solicited for the present study is because of their high involvement with fashion (Auty and Elliott, 1998), and their greater sensitivity to clothing cues than men.

Moreover, women tend to buy symbolic and self-expressive products to enhance their appearance and emotional aspects of self (Dittmar *et al.*, 1995). A total of 386 questionnaires were collected. Six of them were eliminated from the data set due to incomplete or improper responses, leaving a total of 380 useable questionnaires.

Instrument

A total of 15 pre-tests were conducted to assess the applicability and efficacy of the measuring instrument for denim jeans. Based on the results and observations of the pre-test, minor revisions were made and visual stimuli added. The final version of self-administered questionnaire was developed and organized into two sections. In section one, questions were employed to collect respondent’s demographic and behavioral information such as “Do you like denim jeans?”, and followed by an open-ended question “Why?”, “How many pairs of denim jeans do you currently own?”, “How frequent do you wear denim jeans?”, “Have you spent more than \$150 (in Canadian dollar) on a pair of denim jeans?”, and followed by a question “Why?”. In section two, questions were adopted to understand consumer’s preferences and perceptions towards denim jeans, five-point Likert scale questions (anchored from strongly agree =10, 8, 6, 4 to strongly disagree =2) were used to measure the relative significance of six intrinsic cues and three extrinsic cues. In addition, specific product-related questions and visual stimuli were also developed to further investigate and explore their underpinning preferences. For example, questions relating to favorite silhouette/fit, favorite waistline/rise, leg opening, and pocket preference, were adopted in this study (see Table I).

J
T
A
T
M

Design Features / Physical Attributes	Visual Stimuli	Number of Variations	Description
Silhouette/fit	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	Loose, straight, slim, Stretch (form fitting)
Waistline/Rise	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	Ultra low-rise, low-rise, regular, high rise
Leg Opening	<input type="checkbox"/>	4	Boot-cut, flared leg, tapered leg, wide leg
Back Pocket Embellishment	<input type="checkbox"/>	6	6 different designs from various current brands

Table I Description of Visual Stimuli and Number of Variations

It is noteworthy to point out that open-ended questions were deliberately employed in this questionnaire survey as it allows participants to use their own words to express their views, describe their experiences and explain their motives in regards to denim jeans. For an instance, simple questions such as “Why?” or “Why is that your favorite?” were used to extract additional information, and explore the underlying reasons seen within a participant’s purchasing intentions.

Results and Discussion

respondents were students (73.7 percent, n=280), and a large majority of this group fell in the age range of 18 to 24 (n=249). The mean age of subjects was 22.77 years. According to the results, 96.1 percent (n=365) of the respondents had a favorable opinion towards denim jeans. The finding also revealed that over fifty percent wore denim jeans on a daily basis, or almost every other day, as shown in Table II. On average, the respondents owned about 9 to 10 pairs of denim jeans (n=370, \bar{X} =9.7). They shopped for clothing approximately 4 to 5 times per month (n=321, \bar{X} =4.43).

A significant majority of the

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Mostly weekdays	32	8.4	8.7	8.7
	Daily	49	12.9	13.3	22.0
	Almost every day	214	56.3	58.2	80.2
	Mostly weekend	47	12.4	12.8	92.9
	Occasionally	18	4.7	4.9	97.8
	Never	8	2.1	2.2	100.0
	Total	368	96.8	100.0	
Missing	System	12	3.2		
Total		380	100.0		

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Mostly weekdays	32	8.4	8.7	8.7
	Daily	49	12.9	13.3	22.0
	Almost every day	214	56.3	58.2	80.2
	Mostly weekend	47	12.4	12.8	92.9
	Occasionally	18	4.7	4.9	97.8
	Never	8	2.1	2.2	100.0
	Total	368	96.8	100.0	
Missing	System	12	3.2		
Total		380	100.0		

Table II Frequency of Denim Jeans Use

Perceptions and preferences of product cues

The relative significance of each product cue was measured in average score. As indicated in Table III, the higher the mean score, the more salient the product cue for respondents. According to the ranking of the mean scores, fit was the most important cue (n=371, \bar{X} =7.81), followed by style, quality and comfort. Therefore, hypotheses 1, 2 and 4 were supported. In total, 49.3 percent (n=183) of respondents cited the fit of denim jeans as the most important evaluative cue. This finding was consistent with previous surveys conducted by Woods (2004) on denim jeans, and Hsu and Burns (2002) on clothing. However, color did not

consider as an important cue in the present study. Thus, hypothesis 5 was not supported.

It is evident that the fit of denim jeans play a critical role on the success or failure of a product. The perception of good fit can be determined and judged by a number of factors including physical benefits (e.g. ease of the garment, figure flaw compensation), psychological benefits (e.g. body-cathexis, sex appeal) and sensory pleasure (e.g. aesthetic pleasure). Many consumers will not be satisfied with an article of clothing if the fit does not conform to their body. This has been an on-going challenge for manufacturers to produce perfectly fitting denim jeans to satisfy consumer's aspirations and needs.

J
T
A

Product Attribute	n	Missing	Mean	S.D.
Fit	371	9	7.81	1.618
Style	370	10	7.29	1.784
Quality	368	12	6.43	2.071
Comfort	369	11	6.41	2.115
Price	369	11	5.99	2.156
Color	368	12	5.30	2.108
Fabric	365	15	4.65	2.216
Brand	370	10	3.42	2.270
Country-of-origin	369	11	1.81	1.614

Table III Rankings of Importance of Product Cues

In order to understand what constitutes a well-fitted pair of jeans, specific product-related questions (i.e.,

waistline, fabric, shape/cut) were analyzed to uncover the underlying factors. According to the results, most of the respondents

preferred low-rise waistline (68.2 percent, n=259), stretch denim fabric (56.6 percent, n=215), and a form-fitted style/cut (43.4 percent, n=165). Interestingly enough, it appears that the reasons for choosing these specific product features were closely related to the fit attribute. In total, 212 key word and phrase frequencies related to fit were drawn from the open-ended questions of “Why is that your favorite?” (i.e., low-rise waistline, stretch fabric, and form-fitted fit/cut). Based on the responses, the frequencies were then semantically clustered and reduced. For example, “look the best on me”; “more flattering”, “most attractive”, “figure-flattering”, “more flattering to my body” were all grounded into the semantic cluster of “aesthetic”. As a result, five clusters of key benefits (both concrete and abstract) were identified: (1) aesthetic: flattering and accentuation of the most attractive body features, (2) comfort and performance: adaptability, flexibility and expandability to body movements (3) function: coverage and concealment of an imperfect physique, (4) self-image: appearance of greater slenderness, femininity, or sex appeal, and (5) relevancy: relevance to the respondent’s age/lifestyle.

Other than fit attribute, price was a relatively less important product cue for evaluating denim jeans. This finding was similar with other prior research studies, consumers often use price to infer quality when other cues are not available (Hsu and Burns, 2002; Olson, 1977; Wu and Delong, 2006; Zhang *et al.*, 2002). However, if other cues are present at the same time, price becomes less convincing. Thus, hypothesis 9 was supported.

Brand name and country-of-origin were ranked relatively insignificant among all the product cues. The result is somehow consistent with a prior study on clothing conducted in Taiwan and the United States (Hsu and Burns, 2002); brand name and location of manufacturer were ranked the

two least important among twelve different product cues. Another study on denim jeans conducted in China by Wu and Delong (2006) also echoed similar results, brand name and country-of-origin were ranked relatively insignificant as compared with other product cues. Therefore, hypotheses 7 and 8 were supported.

The correlations of product cues

In terms of the correlations of product cues, a number of correlation tests were carried out on both extrinsic and intrinsic cues as indicated in Table IV. Although fabric ranked relatively low among other product cues in Table III, the Pearson’s correlation coefficient (r) of fabric and many other product cues were strong and positive: fabric and COO ($r=0.329$), fabric and color ($r=0.301$), fabric and quality ($r=0.279$; hypothesis 3 was supported), fabric and style ($r=0.217$), and fabric and comfort ($r=0.167$). These findings were in line with a study conducted by Hatch and Roberts (1985) where fabric was the most important compositional feature (i.e. appearance, construction, fabric, color, style and weight) in judging the quality of socks. Direct involvement such as touching the fabric of a garment is a natural tendency when shopping. Many consumers like to touch, feel or try on the garment before they make the final purchasing decisions. Peck and Wiggins (2006) also suggest that touch can create an effective response - influencing customer attitudes and purchasing intents, and increasing confidence in product evaluations.

Other than fabric, the results also displayed a positive correlation between brand name and fit ($r=0.159$), and brand name and style ($r=0.168$). Some respondents preferred certain brand names because these combined factors (i.e., good fit, innovative style) could be found in a single pair of jeans.

J
T
A
T
M

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Fit	1	0.084	0.016	0.124	-0.013	0.147*	-0.124	0.159*	0.090
2. Fabric	0.084	1	0.279*	0.167*	0.217*	0.301*	0.077	-0.017	0.329*
3. Quality	0.016	0.279*	1	0.145*	-0.47	0.087	0.106	0.015	0.171*
4. Comfort	0.124	0.167*	0.145*	1	-0.105	0.137*	0.122	-0.068	0.40
5. Style	-0.013	0.217*	-0.047	-0.105	1	0.291*	-0.027	0.168*	0.039
6. Color	0.147*	0.301*	0.087	0.137*	0.291*	1	-0.111	0.097	0.150*
7. Price	-0.124	0.077	0.106	0.122	-0.027	0.111	1	-0.167*	0.093
8. Brand	0.159*	-0.017	0.015	-0.068	0.168*	0.097	0.167*	1	0.072
9. Country-of-origin	0.090	0.329*	0.171*	0.040	0.039	0.150*	0.093	0.072	1

Table IV Correlation Matrix of Extrinsic and Intrinsic Cues

Note: *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

This survey also indicated that the majority of the respondents spent \$100 or less on a pair of jeans (66.1 percent). Although over sixty percent of the respondents spent less than \$100 for a pair of jeans on average, 38.4 percent of them stated that they had some experience in spending over \$150 in the past. Some respondents expressed that they were compelled to spend such a high price because of the fit, innovative style, high quality and prestigious brand name. However, the majority who had never purchased a pair of jeans over \$150 had many reasons for not doing so. They either had a limited budget to spend on clothing, didn't believe higher price meant better value, could feel guilt for spending so much money, or believed they could find something similar for less money.

Conclusions

According to the results of this survey, fit was the most significant and frequently mentioned attribute. Over the last five years it is apparent that this particular attribute has become increasingly more important than brand name. In today's denim jeans market, consumers often use the quality of 'fit' as a yardstick to measure and differentiate a product/brand from one another. Some respondents preferred certain

brand names and were willing to pay a premium price for them because of their satisfaction with the fit, while other brand names were disliked for the exact same reason.

According to a survey conducted by nVision in the United Kingdom, designer labels are losing their appeal among young people, with 35 percent saying brand names should not be seen on apparel products (WGSN, 2004). In essence, today's consumers, particularly among the young, are more sophisticated in fashion consumption. They seldom base on one monolithic feature or single attribute such as brand name to evaluate a product. They often assess a product with multiple criteria.

To conclude, there are three major findings that can be drawn from this study. First, intrinsic cues were relatively more important than extrinsic cues. Secondly, the fit attribute was ranked as the most significant cue for denim jeans consumption. And last, many product cues were strongly correlated and they could provide multiple benefits and values to consumers. In this respect, some contributions as well as implications related to the fit and perceived quality of denim jeans are summarized as follows.

Self-enhancement and Aesthetic Improvement

In general, individuals are concerned about their personal attractiveness and how others might see them in public. They use different means (including fashion) to enhance and elevate their overall image, appearance and identity. In this study, denim jeans were used as a signifier or enhancer to physically accentuate an important part of the wearer's body, or to conceal its' flaws. If an individual had a short waist and long legs, low-rise "pencil" jeans could create an illusion of a longer torso and slimmer silhouette. On the other hand, if one's hips/buttocks were shapeless, a hip-enhancing/derriere-lifting style (e.g., offered by *Blue Cult* and *Fiorucci*) might be preferred to give a more curvaceous shape. Simply, individuals want to be more visually pleasing, and to feel good about their outward appearance and image.

'Fit' for every consumer

Many ordinary consumers do not have the slim body type possessed by fashion's ultra-thin super models, and realistically, not everyone would look attractive in a pair of tight-fitting "skinny jeans". However, many respondents indicated that finding a pair of denim jeans that fit well could be problematic. In this study, many incidences revealed that a number of major fitting problems were experienced - such as length being too long or too short, gaping at the back, and/or too tight at hips. Simply, current denim styles did not fit their specific body type. In light of these findings, a variety of styles/fit for different customers is essential. Denim jeans companies should offer a wider range of styles/fit and size assortments (e.g., more sizes in waist and inseam) to accommodate different body types and needs.

In addition, fashion practitioners should also look into new textile materials to create innovative styles for comfort and freedom of movement. Over the years,

denim jeans brands such as *Rock and Republic* and *Lee Cooper* have already adopted four-way stretch *Xfit Lycra* (ability to stretch from 360 different angles) to create form-fitting models such as "skinny jeans" for their customers. Other brand names such as *Fiorucci*, and *Blue Cult* have incorporated derriere-enhancing techniques (i.e., similar to the push-up concept seen in *Wonder-Bra*) to lift, contour and reshape a wearer's silhouettes.

Function and Fashion - Stylish but Not Revealing

Due to visual and practical reasons, the majority of the respondents chose low-rise denim jeans as their most favorite waistline. In general, they found them to be fashionable, comfortable and appealing at the waist rather than the ultra low-rise and high-rise jeans. According to the present study, only 13.2 percent and 2.6 percent of the respondents respectively rated the ultra low-rise and high-rise styles as their most favorite waistline. While ultra low-rise jeans were perceived to be fashionable, many respondents felt that the waistline was far too low and the jeans kept slipping off from the hips. They were afraid to bend over to expose back cleavage or underwear; or reveal tummy overflow at the top of the waistband (i.e., "muffin top shape"). They also felt their legs looked too short or their torso looked too long when wearing this particular style.

Respondents did not prefer the high-rise jeans because they were not fashionable; with some stating that they were "not trendy", "boyish/an old man's style" or "styles for older women". A few expressed not wanting to "dress like their grandmother". As for comfort, many respondents criticized them as "hard to breathe in", "irritates my stomach" and "I always have to undo my button when I eat". It is evident that both aesthetic and functional attributes can play a critical role on the consumption of denim jeans.

J
T
A
T
M

As mentioned earlier, today's consumers do not only seek a single attribute when selecting a pair of denim jeans, and they often consider multiple values within the product to satisfy their changing tastes and desires. It is a complex interplay that encompasses utilitarianism, sensory/aesthetics, self-relevancy, pleasurable experience, and emotional enhancement factors. Therefore, fashion designers must pay attention to these diverse dimensional values rather than merely the concrete or physical aspects of a product. Marketers should also investigate and identify those elements that could impact a consumer's cognitive and affective response toward denim jeans.

Limitations and Further Research

Although open-ended questions were used in this survey, further investigation of the emotional and psychological benefits to the consumer is needed. Simply, there were limitations of the current open-ended question survey – with some respondents failing to give sufficient or enough specific information as to their preferences for certain product attributes over other alternatives. In order to understand how consumers translate product attributes into meaningful associations, the “laddering” interview method could be adopted in future studies to uncover the means-end relationship between key perceptual

elements (Reynolds and Gutman, 2001). Additionally, denim jeans' sizing systems, specific body type and fit models should be investigated to explore and understand the pivotal relationship among these three components. Other than the aforementioned limitations, this current sample mainly focused on younger age groups, therefore, this study may not represent the behaviors of the Canadian women as a whole. To strengthen its' external validity and to avoid potential bias, future studies on this topic should expand the focus to include male consumer, different age group and geographic location.

Although this study has several limitations as many other studies have, the findings from this research can provide important contributions to academic scholars as well as to fashion practitioners on future product design and marketing strategies for denim jeans. There is ample evidence that today's Canadian consumers are no longer content with a product that offers only a monolithic attribute. They constantly search for multi-dimensional values and benefits in the products they buy. In order to present a desirable pair of denim jeans to the Canadian market, fashion practitioners should pay attention not only to price and quality but also to the sensorial pleasures, experiential values and psychological benefits that this product could also offer.

J
T
A
T
M

Appendix 1: Prior Studies on Consumer's Behavior and Apparel Product Cues

<i>Author</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Journal</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Sample/Subject</i>	<i>Product Type</i>	<i>Product Attribute</i>
Bergeron and Carver	1988	JCSHE	U.S.A.	n = 190 (college students, 91% female)	Clothing	Country-of-manufacture: domestic-made or imported apparel
Hsiao and Dickerson	1995	JCSHE	Taiwan & U.S.A.	n = (105 Taiwanese and 126 U.S. college students)	Leisurewear	Price, style, brand, fabrication, size/fit, media exposure, color, country-of-origin, quality
Hines and Swinker	2001	IJCS	U.S.A.	n = 71 students (pre-test) n = 65 students (post-test)	Clothing	Brand, care instruction, closures, color, country-of-origin, fashionable, fibre content, fit, garment will hold shape, how long it will last, how fabric feels, interfacings, length of stitch, lining, plaids/stripes matched, price, seam width, store, style details, style good for my figure, thread matches, type of fabric, type of seam, width of hem
DeLong <i>et al.</i>	2002	CTRJ	South Korea & U.S.A.	n = 34 (Korean university students) n = 32 (US university students)	Jeans	Color, style/design, brand name, fit of rise, tactile quality, details, price, fabric quality, comfort, fit
Herbst and Burger	2002	JFECS	South Africa	n = 213 (81 male and 132 female high school students)	Jeans	Brand, style (cut/fit), place of purchase (store), price
Hsu and Burns	2002	CTRJ	Taiwan & U.S.A.	n = 119M Taiwanese and 84 U.S. college women)	Clothing	Fabric, comfort, size/fit, quality, location of manufacturer, color, how pleasing it was to others, brand name, appropriateness for campus wear, price, style and coordination with other clothing
Zhang <i>et al.</i>	2002	JFMM	China	n = 3,534 respondents	Casual wear	Fit, comfort, style, color, workmanship, price, permeability, fabric softness, trendiness, durability, easy care, brand, fibre content, warmth, fabric thickness
Bye and Reiley	2003	PMS	U.S.A.	n = 85 (95% female & 5% male college	Clothing: jeans, T-shirt,	Fibre content, care instruction, garment dimensions, fabric: hand & weight, fit, country-of-origin,

				students)	lingerie, dresses	color accuracy, size charts, customer service
Swinker and Hines	2006	IJCS	U.S.A.	n = 146 (93% female & 7% male college students)	Clothing	Style/fit, price, fashionability, color, fabric feels, design features, brand name, wrinkle properties, durability, pilling, dimensional stability of fabric
Wang and Heitmeyer	2006	IJCS	Taiwan	n = 485 (344 female and 141 male consumers)	Apparel	Care instruction, brand name, quality, fiber content, comfort color, attractiveness, fashionableness, good fit, good price, ease of care, suitability, appropriate for occasion, overall attitude
Wu and Delong	2006	JFMM	China	n = 219 (shoppers wearing jeans)	Denim Jeans	Comfort, fit/shape, design/cut, fashion, quality, durability, casualness, good, price, fabric, care, style, workmanship, brand, character, versatility, country-of-brand-origin, authenticity/classic, various feelings

Abbreviations of Cited Journal	
CTRJ	- Clothing and Textiles Research Journal
IJCS	- International Journal of Consumer Studies
JCSHE	- Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics *
JFECS	- Journal of Family Ecology and Consumer Studies
JFMM	- Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management
PMS	- Perceptual and Motor Skills

Note: * This journal has changed its name from “Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics” to “International Journal of Consumer Studies”.

References

- Aqueveque, C. (2006). Extrinsic cues and perceived risk: The influence of consumption situation, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 23(5): 237-247.
- Auty, S. and Elliott, R. (1998). Fashion involvement, self-monitoring and the meaning of brands, *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 7(2): 109-123.
- Bech-Larsen, T. and Nielsen N.A. (1999). A comparison of five elicitation techniques for elicitation of attributes of low involvement products, *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 20(3): 315-341.
- Bergeron, D.P. and Carver, M.N. (1988). Student preferences for domestic-made or imported apparel as influenced by shopping habits, *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics*, 12: 87-94.

- Bye, E.K. and Reiley, K. (2003). Comparison of information about the quality of apparel in three retail formats, *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 96(3): 839-846.
- Chowdhary, U. (2002). Does price reflect emotional, structural or performance quality? *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 26(2): 128-133.
- Claeys, C., Swinnen, A. and Abeele, P.V. (1995). Consumers' means-end chains for 'think' and 'feel' products, *Research in Marketing*, 12: 193-208.
- Cotton Incorporated (2005, September 12). Premium denim: Fit to be tried, *Cotton Incorporated*, Retrieved December 9, 2009, from <http://www.cottoninc.com/pressreleases/?articleID=351>.
- Cotton Incorporated (2009, October). Insights: The teen apparel market: Bouncing back, *Cotton Incorporated*, Retrieved August 15, 2010, from <http://www.cottoninc.com/SupplyChainInsights/Teen-Apparel-Market/Teen-Apparel-Market.pdf>
- Cox, D.F. (1967). The sorting rule model of the consumer product evaluation process, in Cox, D.F. (ed.), *Risk Taking and Information Handling in Consumer Behavior*, Division of Research, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, Boston, MA. DeLong, M., LaBat, K., Nelson, N., Koh, A. and Kim Y. (2002). Global products, global markets: Jeans in Korea and the United States, *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 20(4): 238-245.
- Dittmar, H., Beattie, J. and Friese, S. (1995). Gender identity and material symbols: Objects and decision considerations in impulse purchases, *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 15: 391-511.
- Dornoff, R.J., Tankersly, C.B. and White, G.P. (1974). Consumer perceptions of imports, *Akron Business and Economic Review*, Summer, 26-29.
- Escalas, J.E. and Bettman, J.R. (2005). Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(3): 378-389.
- Fiore, A.M. and Damhorst, M.L., (1992). Intrinsic cues as predictors of perceived quality of apparel, *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, and Complaining Behavior*, 5: 168-178.
- Forsythe, S., Kim, J.O., and Peter, T. (1999). Product cue usage in two Asian markets: A cross-cultural comparison, *Asian Pacific Journal of Management*, 16: 275-292.
- Friedman, R. (1986). Psychological meaning of products: Identification and marketing applications, *Psychology and Marketing*, 3(1): 1-15.
- Gardner, B.B., and Levy, S.J. (1995). The product and the brand, *Harvard Business Review*, 33-39.
- Gordon, B. (1991). American denim: Blue jeans and their multiple layers of meaning, in *Dress and Popular Culture*, Cunningham, P.A. and Voso Lab, S. (Ed.), Bowling Green State University Popular Press.
- Han, C.M. and Terpstra, V. (1988). Country-of-origin effects for uni-national and bi-national products, *Journal of International Business Studies*, 19: 535-555.
- Herbst, F. and Burger C. (2002). Attributes used by young consumers when assessing a fashion products: A conjoint analysis approach, *Journal of Family Ecology and Consumer Studies*, 30: 40-45.
- Hines, J.D. and O'Neal, G.S. (1995). Underlying determinants of clothing quality: The consumers' perspective, *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 13(4): 227-233.
- Hines, J.D. and Swinker, M.E. (2001). Knowledge: A variable in evaluating clothing quality, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 25(1): 72-76.

J
T
A
T
M

- Hirschman, E.C. (1980). Attributes of attributes and layers of meaning, in *Advances in Consumer Research*, ed., Olson, J.C. and Abor, A.: Association for Consumer Research, 7: 7-12.
- Hsiao, C.F. and Dickerson, K. (1995). Evaluative criteria for purchasing leisurewear: Taiwanese and U.S. students in a U.S. university, *Journal of Consumer Studies and Home Economics*, 19: 145-153.
- Hsu, H.J. and Burns L.D. (2002). Clothing evaluative criteria: A cross-national comparison of Taiwanese and United States consumers, *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 20(4): 246-252.
- Keller, K.L. (2003). *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring, and Managing Brand Equity* (2nd Ed.), Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kirmani, A. and Rao, A.R. (2000). No pain, no gain: A critical review of the literature on signalling unobservable product quality, *Journal of Marketing*, 64(2): 66-79.
- Myers, J.H. and Shocker, A.D. (1981). The nature of product-related attributes, *Research in Marketing*, 5: 211-236.
- Olson, J.C. (1977). Price as an information cue: Effects in product evaluation, in *Consumer and Industrial Buying Behavior*, Woodside, A.G., Sheth, J.N., and Bennet, P.D. (eds.), New York: North Holland Publishing Company, 267-86.
- Olson, J.C. and Jacoby, J. (1972). Cue utilization in the quality perception process, in *Proceedings of the Third Annual Conference of the Association for Consumer Research*, Association for Consumer Research, 167-179.
- Olson, J.C. and Reynolds, T.J. (1983). Understanding consumers cognitive structures: Implications for advertising strategy, in *Advertising and Consumer Psychology*, Larry Percy and Arch Woodside (eds.), Vol. 1, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Peck, J. and Wiggins, J. (2006). It just feels good: Customers' affective response to touch and its influence on persuasion, *Journal of Marketing*, 70(4): 56-69.
- Rahman, O., Yan, J. and Liu, W.-S. (2008a). Clothing evaluative criteria: A perspective of fashion design and consumer's aspiration, *86th Textile Institute World Conference Proceedings*, Hong Kong, China, 1415-1429.
- Rahman, O., Zhu, X. and Liu, W.-S. (2008b). A study of the pyjamas purchasing behavior of Chinese consumers in Hangzhou, China, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 12(2): 217-231.
- Rasband, J. (2001), *Art Essentials in Color*, Fairchild, New York, NY.
- Reynolds, T.J., Gengler, C.E. and Howard, D.J., (1995). A means-end analysis of brand persuasion through advertising, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 12(3): 257-266.
- Schmitt, B.H. and Simonson, A. (1997). *Marketing Aesthetics: The Strategic Management of Brands, Identity and Image*, New York: Free Press.
- Statistics Canada (2010). Retail Trade, *Statistics Canada*, Retrieved August 15, 2010 from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html>
- Swinker, M.E. and Hines, J.D. (2006). Understanding consumers' perception of clothing quality: A multidimensional approach, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 30(2): 218-223.
- Szybillo, G.J. and Jacoby, J. (1974). Intrinsic versus extrinsic cues as determinants of perceived product quality, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 59(1): 74-78.
- Trendex (2005). Trendex's Canadian apparel charts of the week: Total Canadian jeans market, *Trendex North America*. Retrieved December 9, 2009 from

J
T
A
T
M

- http://www.trendexna.com/images/COTW/6-20/COTW_620.htm.
- Trendex (2006). Consumer apparel expenditures, *Trendex North America*. Retrieved December 9, 2009, from <http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/inapparelvetements.nsf/en/ap03289e.html>
- Tversky, A. (1977). Features of similarity, *Psychological Review*, 84: 327-352.
- Wang, Y. and Heitmeyer, J. (2006). Consumer attitude toward US versus domestic apparel in Taiwan, *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 30(1): 64-74.
- WGSN (2004, June 11). Luxury market trends, *WGSN News Service*, June 11. Retrieved December 9, 2009, from <http://www.wgsn-edu.com/edu/edu-members/>
- Wood, L.M. (2004). "Dimensions of brand purchasing behavior: Consumers in the 18-24 age group," *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 4(1): 9-25.
- Wu, J., Delong M. (2006). Chinese perceptions of western-branded denim jeans: A Shanghai case study, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 10(2): 238-250.
- Zhang, Y. (1996). Chinese consumers' evaluation of foreign products: the influence of culture, product types and product presentation format, *European Journal of Marketing*, 30(12): 50-68.
- Zhang, Z., Li, Y., Gong, C. and Wu, H. (2002). Casual wear product attributes: A Chinese consumers' perspective, *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, 6(1): 53-62.

J
T
A
T
M