THE ROLE OF PRODUCT TYPE AND CONSUMER FASHION INVOLVEMENT IN CLOTHING SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to analyze the effects of two expectation antecedents, product type and fashion involvement, on product expectations and clothing satisfaction. Another objective was to identify clothing satisfaction paths according to product type. The sample consisted of 71 customers of a national chain store who completed one questionnaire before product use and another after product use. In the overall analysis of clothing satisfaction, both product type and consumer fashion involvement had significant but small effects on expectations; the antecedents also had only a small impact on satisfaction. Individual analysis by product type suggested that the clothing satisfaction process for convenience goods is different from that for shopping goods. In terms of total effect, expectations had more of an impact on satisfaction with the convenience good than satisfaction with the shopping good. On the other hand, consumer fashion involvement had a significant effect on satisfaction with the shopping good but not with the convenience good.

INTRODUCTION

A generally accepted tenet in the marketing literature is that companies should follow the marketing concept to be successful. In other words, they should deliver satisfaction to consumers and obtain profits in return (Yi, 1993). Therefore, it is critical to determine what conditions lead to consumer satisfaction.

Although consumer satisfaction has been studied from several points of view, the most generally accepted model is the disconfirmation paradigm. According to the disconfirmation paradigm, consumer satisfaction is hypothesized to result from a process of comparison of prepurchase expectations with product performance. Clothing satisfaction, like satisfaction with other products, has been explained by the disconfirmation paradigm; that is, consumers judge satisfaction with a clothing product in terms of performance relative to their expectations about performance (Francis and Davis, 1989; Hong and Rhee, 1992a).

Several studies suggest that product characteristics help determine which consumer satisfaction model will be most appropriate in a given situation. These product characteristics include durability, ambiguity and brand status.

Churchill and Surprenant (1982) found that there are different satisfaction models for a non-durable (hybrid plant) and a durable (video disc player) product. Expectations, performance and disconfirmation all affected satisfaction with the non-durable product while performance alone determined satisfaction with the durable product.

Yi (1993) suggested that ambiguity is another product characteristic that affects consumer satisfaction. When products are ambiguous, consumers' satisfaction is determined largely by their prior expectations. On the other hand, for products that are unambiguous or easy to evaluate, consumers' satisfaction judgements are determined primarily by product performance.

Research by Hong and Rhee (1992a) indicated that brand status affected expectations. The higher the status of the brand, the higher the consumer's expectations. Moreover, normative expectations (outcomes from the product in relation to cost and effort) showed a contrast effect on performance and normative disconfirmation for the high-priced brands. In other words, when performance is worse than expected, consumers are more likely to magnify the difference and experience a relatively high level of dissatisfaction if the brand is high in status.

These results suggest that durability, ambiguity and brand status all affect the satisfaction model. However, the exact nature of the effects of these characteristics is not always clear. Interpretation is complicated by the fact that some of the variables may be confounded. For example, most non-durable products are also unambiguous.

Another reason for inconclusive findings about product attributes may be that, at least in some cases, product categories are over-simplifications. Clothing is a good example of a product that may not fall neatly into any one category. A

comparison of jackets and pantyhose illustrates this point. Jackets and pantyhose have different product characteristics, different buying practices and different consuming patterns associated with them. Most people expend a good deal of effort in decision making at the point of purchase when they buy a jacket, because a jacket is a relatively durable and high-priced product. On the other hand, consumers are apt to engage in low effort or habitual decision-making behavior for pantyhose because it is frequently purchased, non-durable and available at a relatively low cost. (See Lewison and Delozier, 1982, for a similar categorization of pantyhose as convenience goods versus shoes and suits as shopping goods. For empirical evidence that expectations may develop differently for different types of apparel, refer to Gardner, 1971). In the past, pantyhose could also be distinguished from jackets in terms of fashionability with pantyhose being a more basic garment. Nowadays, however, this distinction is less tenable; both jackets and pantyhose can range from very basic to very fashionable.

Although there is less information on the effects of consumer variables as antecedents to expectations, there is some evidence that overall involvement with a product class may be important. Hong and Rhee (1992a,b) found that expectations were influenced by overall level of the consumer's clothing involvement, in addition to brand levels, although the explanatory power of consumer involvement was weak. This finding may have been due to limited variation in clothing involvement scores in their work. Therefore, a reexamination of this relationship is warranted.

To summarize, it can be argued that prediction of clothing satisfaction could be improved by dividing the product class of clothing into types (i.e., convenience versus shopping goods). Also consumers' clothing involvement merits further study as a predictor of satisfaction with a clothing purchase. Furthermore, there may be an interaction between product type and consumer fashion involvement that should be considered in model development.

This study is designed to discover the relative influence of product type and fashion involvement on clothing satisfaction. A second objective is to determine the influence of product type and consumer involvement on the intermediate variable

of product expectations. A third objective is to identify clothing satisfaction paths according to product type (jackets vs pantyhose).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Disconfirmation Paradigm

Since the early 1970's, several theories which try to identify the factors contributing to consumer satisfaction have been developed and tested. As noted earlier, the disconfirmation paradigm has been the most popular model in the satisfaction literature. According to the disconfirmation paradigm, satisfaction is a result of the cognitive process of comparing performance to expectation (Oliver, 1980; Swan, 1988). Positive disconfirmation occurs when perceived performance exceeds prior expectations, and negative disconfirmation occurs when perceived performance is less than prior expectations. Confirmation is the case when perceived performance is equal to prior expectations. Satisfaction is thought to occur when confirmation is obtained and it is expected to increase as positive disconfirmation increases. Two general types of research questions continue to be addressed in the disconfirmation paradigm literature. One is how many independent variables are needed to adequately describe a given consumer satisfaction process (e.g., expectations, performance and/or disconfirmation) and what are the direct versus indirect effects of expectations on consumer satisfaction.

Clothing Satisfaction

Prior clothing satisfaction research has generally taken one of three approaches. The first approach is to investigate consumers' complaints about physical attributes of clothing products. In those studies, it is assumed that the consumer is satisfied if there are no expressed complaints about clothing products (Ryan, 1966). The second approach is to identify clothing attributes that lead to consumer satisfaction (Ryan, 1966; Conklyn, 1971; Swan and Combs, 1976). This method involves asking the consumer directly, "What happened to make you satisfied (or dissatisfied) with this item?" The third approach examines the

consumer characteristics that relate to clothing satisfaction.

Clothing researchers such as Francis and Davis (1989) and Shim and Bickle (1993) agree that clothing satisfaction is a comparative process in which expectations are compared with product performance; even though clothing performance is good, if the standards of comparison (or expectations) exceed the level of performance, the consumer may not be satisfied. However, little consideration has been given to the variables that affect expectations. Therefore Hong and Rhee (1992a,b) suggested a clothing satisfaction model that included three types of expectation antecedents: product characteristics, situation characteristics and consumer characteristics (see Figure 1).

In empirical work derived from a modification of the expectation antecedents model, Hong and Rhee (1992a,b) investigated brand level as a product characteristic and clothing involvement as a consumer characteristic. Situation effects were held constant by specifying one particular situation. Results of the study indicated that clothing satisfaction can be explained by three constructs: expectations, perceived performance and disconfirmation. Expectations in turn are affected by expectation antecedents. Expectations are shown to affect clothing satisfaction only

indirectly through perceived performance and disconfirmation. Also, both perceived performance and disconfirmation affect clothing satisfaction, with performance having more of an effect than disconfirmation. These results differ from findings in two other studies (Churchill and Surprenant, 1982; Yi, 1993) but (excluding analysis of the indirect effect of expectations on satisfaction) are consistent with results of Patterson's study (1993).

Product Type

As pointed out by Granbois (1993), there is growing recognition in both satisfaction research and "mainstream" consumer behavior work that product differences should be considered in developing models. He suggested that there is a need for even further conceptualization of products as independent variables and the development of product classification schema for use in hypothesis testing. This is as true for clothing as it is for other product classes.

The range of clothing products is broad, from coats and jackets to hosiery. These types of items are similar in some respects such as importance to the consumer of aesthetic as well as physical attributes, and how they coordinate with other items. However, as representatives of convenience

Figure 1
Hypothesized Clothing Satisfaction Model - Hong and Rhee, 1992
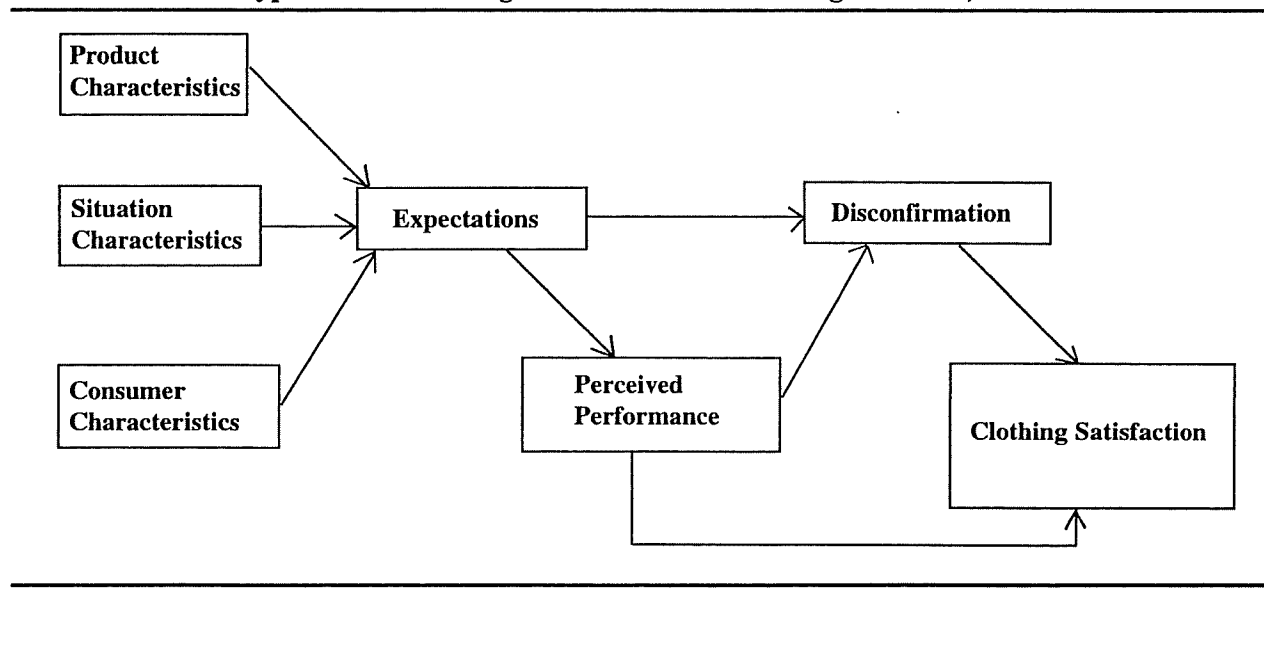
versus shopping goods, they may differ in evaluative criteria or clothing attributes used in the conceptualization of expectations, perceived performance and clothing satisfaction.

Consumer Fashion Involvement

As discussed earlier, consumers tend to differ in terms of overall involvement with a given product class (Antil, 1984). Richins and Bloch (1988) commented on the importance of consumer involvement with respect to post-purchase product evaluation. Because highly involved consumers spend more time thinking about a purchase and have greater knowledge about a product class, they can be very motivated to avoid or reduce post-purchase dissonance. From the perspective of managers, highly involved consumers are a very important market segment and they are often heavy users of the product class as well as opinion leaders. Therefore their satisfaction is important to a product's success. According to Zaichkowsky (1985), another characteristic of people who are highly involved in a product class is that they are likely to perceive differences with respect to product attributes, and therefore are more likely to

have a most preferred brand in the product category.

A person who is more fashion-oriented is more involved in the purchase of a garment regardless of its type. As noted previously, there is some evidence that fashion involvement may be a mediating variable in the prediction of clothing satisfaction.

Research Model

Previous research, especially the work of Hong and Rhee (1992a,b) was used to develop the model for this study. Product type (i.e., convenience versus shopping goods) was chosen as the product characteristic and consumer fashion involvement was chosen as the consumer characteristic. (see Figure 2)

Jackets were used to represent high involvement shopping goods. According to Churchill and Surprenant (1982) and Patterson (1993), we can suppose that product performance will have a relatively high degree of influence on high involvement product satisfaction. In comparison, pantyhose were chosen to represent low involvement convenience goods. For low

Figure 2
Hypothesized Clothing Satisfaction Model - Current Study
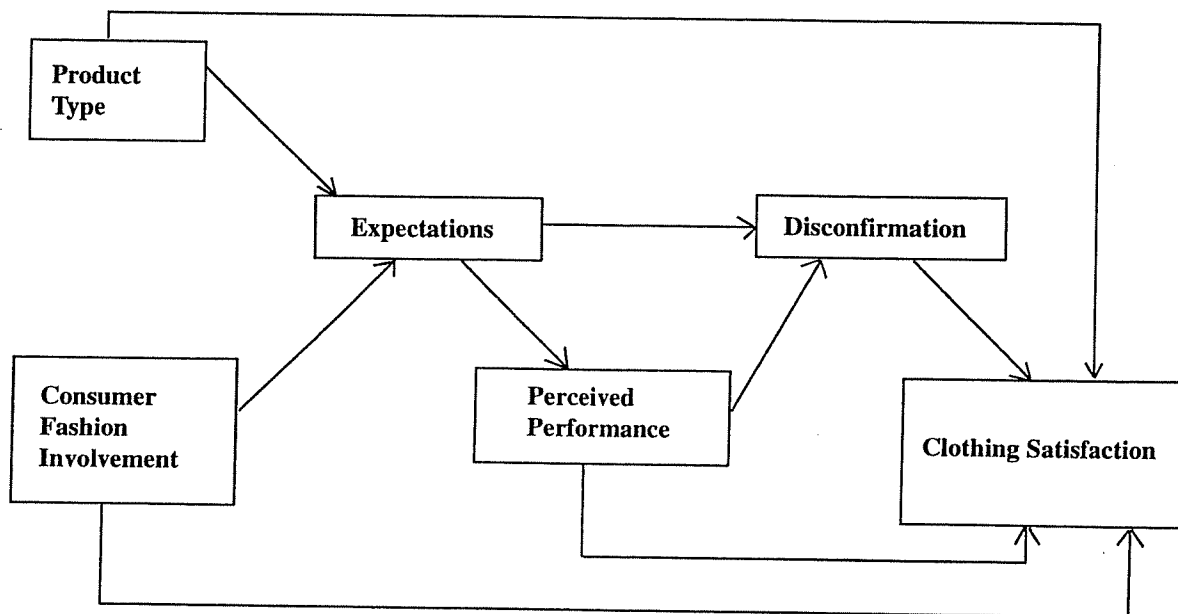
involvement products, expectations are relatively low and disconfirmation rather than performance may have a relatively high impact on satisfaction.

However, it should be noted that these general tendencies may not be the same for all consumers; level of involvement in clothing fashions is apt to affect consumers' responses. Even though the expectations of pantyhose are low, some people who are sensitive to fashion can be highly involved in the purchase of pantyhose and they may be concerned about aesthetics as well as quality (e.g., color, texture, harmony with other items). Therefore, this study was designed to consider consumers' overall clothing involvement levels and product type simultaneously.

Since research on expectation antecedents is still relatively exploratory in nature, the research model was designed to test for both direct and indirect effects of the antecedents. The model for this study follows.

METHOD

Instruments

Two questionnaires were designed to collect data for this study. The first questionnaire, distributed at the point of purchase (p.o.p.), was designed to be completed before the product was used. This questionnaire was divided into three sections; variables related to the clothing purchase (product type, brand name, prior purchases of the brand, date of purchase, price, and store satisfaction at p.o.p.), product expectations, and demographic variables (age, education, marital status, ethnicity, occupation, and income). There was also a section for the respondent's address so that the second questionnaire could be delivered by mail. Expectations were measured by asking, "What were your expectations and opinions about the following clothing attributes when you bought the jacket (or pantyhose)?". Respondents were instructed to circle one number on a five-point Likert scale that best represented their expectations regarding each of 20 attributes. These attributes were culled from the work of Abraham-Murali and Littrell (1995), Hong and Rhee (1992a) and Cassill and Drake (1987). Some of the attribute items asked for assessments of functional attributes (e.g., the fabric is colorfast) while others were more

social/psychological or aesthetic in nature (e.g., the item conveys high status, the style of the item is unique).

The second questionnaire was mailed to each consumer who completed the first questionnaire. The second questionnaire was divided into five parts; variables related to clothing use (frequencies of wearing and washing), perceived product performance on the 20 attributes used in the first questionnaire, overall product performance, satisfaction with the garment and consumer fashion involvement. Following the work of other researchers, one subjective disconfirmation measure was used for the path analysis, instead of inferred disconfirmation over individual attributes (Oliver, 1977, 1980; Swan, 1988; Halstead, 1989). This measure asked respondents to rate performance compared to expectations on a five-point scale ranging from much better than expected (1) to much worse than expected (5). The satisfaction scale was adapted from Richins and Bloch (1988) and consisted of three items to measure satisfaction: the Delighted-Terrible scale, an 11-point percentage satisfaction scale (0%-100% satisfied), and a 5-point decision regret scale. The index developed by Tigert, Ring and King (1976), or the TRK index, was used to measure fashion involvement. This index consists of five items based on five dimensions of fashion involvement drawn from fashion segmentation research (Sproles and King, 1973). The dimensions include innovativeness, interpersonal communication, interest, knowledgeability and awareness. Tigert and his colleagues validated the index against an independent fashion involvement factor and also demonstrated that scores on the index were significantly related to fashion buying behavior. Fairhurst, Good and Gentry (1989) conducted a study to compare the TRK index to the Personal Involvement Index (PII) developed by Zaichkowsky (1985) and a lifestyle fashion consciousness (FC) measure adapted by the senior author from an instrument created by Wells and Tigert (1971). The authors found significant correlations among all three measures of involvement and satisfactory Cronbach's alpha values for the TRK index (.64 for a customer sample and .78 for a student sample). In addition, they noted that the TRK index is short relative to the 20-item PII. Therefore, the TRK index may

be more appropriate for multiple measure studies in which respondent fatigue could be a problem.

Sample

The sampling frame included all female customers of a major national chain who bought either a jacket or pantyhose at one of two locations in northern California during Spring 1994. (Coats and cardigan sweaters were included in the jacket category and tights were included in the pantyhose category.) Store managers at the two locations cooperated in the study by asking sales associates to distribute the questionnaires with attached self-addressed stamped envelopes to shoppers who met our criteria. The questionnaires were placed in boxes by cash registers in the areas where jackets and pantyhose were sold. Bright pink signs on the boxes were designed to attract shoppers' attention and prompt them to ask for a questionnaire in cases where the sales associate failed to offer one. This method of data collection had the advantage of relatively low interference with business activities but the disadvantage of making it difficult to obtain an exact indication of the refusal rate.

A cover letter clipped to the questionnaire informed respondents that after receiving their first questionnaire, we would mail them the second questionnaire. A cookie coupon worth $2.50 was used as an incentive for participation in the study. The second questionnaire was mailed within two weeks to the pantyhose purchasers to ensure the product had not been discarded and forgotten. The same time line was used for the jacket customers for the sake of consistency. The total number of subjects who completed both questionnaires was 71 including 30 purchasers of jackets and 41 purchasers of pantyhose; this number represents a reduction of 33 from the original sample of 104 due to incomplete returns and returns from ineligible people.

Analysis

Given the potential existence of a set of direct and indirect relationships in the disconfirmation paradigm, causal path analysis is considered appropriate for investigating the impact of relevant variables on satisfaction. As Patterson (1993) said, this technique also facilitates in the interpretation of linear relationships among a structured set of variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The causal model for the total sample is shown in Figure 3. Note that product type is treated as a dummy variable with jacket assigned 1 and pantyhose assigned 0.

Results are similar to the findings of Hong and Rhee (1992a,b). Clothing satisfaction is affected directly by disconfirmation, product performance, and consumer involvement, and is affected indirectly by expectations. These variables explain 54.2% of the variation in clothing satisfaction. It is especially noteworthy that the explanatory power of perceived performance is far larger than that of disconfirmation. This result indicates that to achieve clothing satisfaction, it is necessary to increase both perceived performance and positive disconfirmation. However, it is the performance of clothing that largely determines clothing satisfaction. Expectations combine with performance to affect disconfirmation and clothing satisfaction indirectly.

Consumer fashion involvement has a negative effect on clothing satisfaction which is small but statistically significant. Both product type and consumer fashion involvement influence expectations. That is, when the consumer buys a jacket and is involved in fashion, her expectations are relatively higher than when she buys pantyhose. If the consumer's expectations are high and the perceived performance is good, she is satisfied. Generally, a consumer who has a high level of fashion involvement knows the product well, so her standards regarding product performance are apt to be high. According to Oliver and Bearden (1983), high involvement increases consumers' sensitivity to outcomes; a consumer who has a high level of fashion involvement is apt to react more intensely to product imperfections.

Table 1 summarizes the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables on clothing satisfaction. As shown in this table, the perceived performance variable has a total effect of .750, whereas the impact of disconfirmation is only .210 and the impact of expectations is .546 via its indirect effect. The total effect of clothing fashion

Figure 3
Causal Model of Clothing Satisfaction
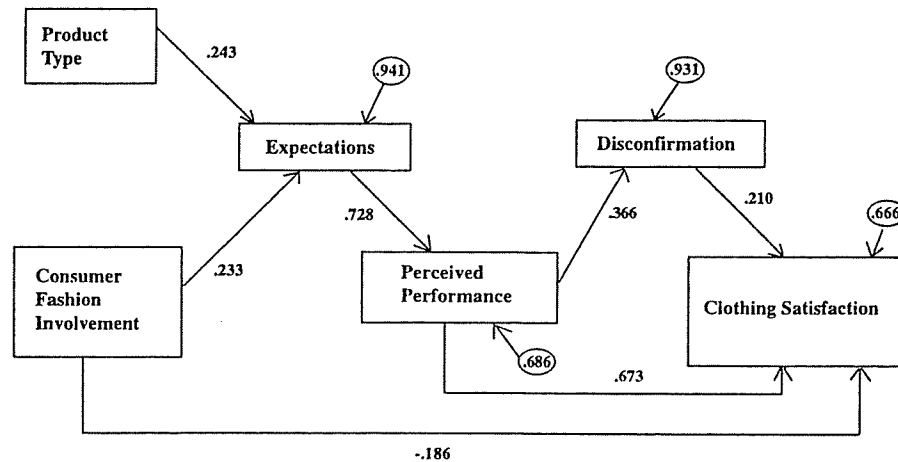
Note 1: Path coefficients are standardized (beta) coefficients. Circled numbers are residual coefficients; they represent the unexplained variability in the path model.

Note 2: All path coefficients are significant at $p < .05$.

involvement is the smallest of all five variables.

Table 1
Effects of Independent Variables on Clothing Satisfaction

| Variables	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Product type	--	.133	.133
Consumer fashion involvement	-.186	.127	-.059
Expectations	--	.546	.546
Perceived performance	.673	.077	.750
Disconfirmation	.210	--	.210

Next, the causal clothing satisfaction paths were calculated according to product type. The causal model for jackets is shown in Figure 4 and the causal model for pantyhose is shown in Figure 5.

Table 2 summarizes the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables on satisfaction with jackets. For jackets, consumer fashion involvement, expectations, and perceived performance explain 69.6% of clothing satisfaction. This result is different from the findings of Hong and Rhee (1992a) and Patterson (1993). Rather, it is similar to the model of Churchill and Surprenant (1982) for video disc players in which disconfirmation has little effect on product satisfaction and performance is the major determinant of satisfaction. The direct effect for expectations is negative. The more the consumer expects that the performance of the jacket will be good, the less she is satisfied.

The high negative direct effect of expectations on jacket satisfaction is reduced by the high positive indirect effect, so the total effect is relatively small. Therefore, for jackets, perceived performance determines most of the consumer's satisfaction. We can interpret this result in terms
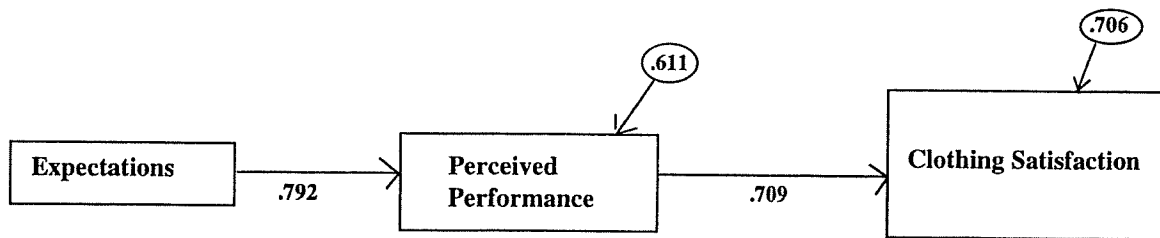
Figure 4
Causal Model for Jackets
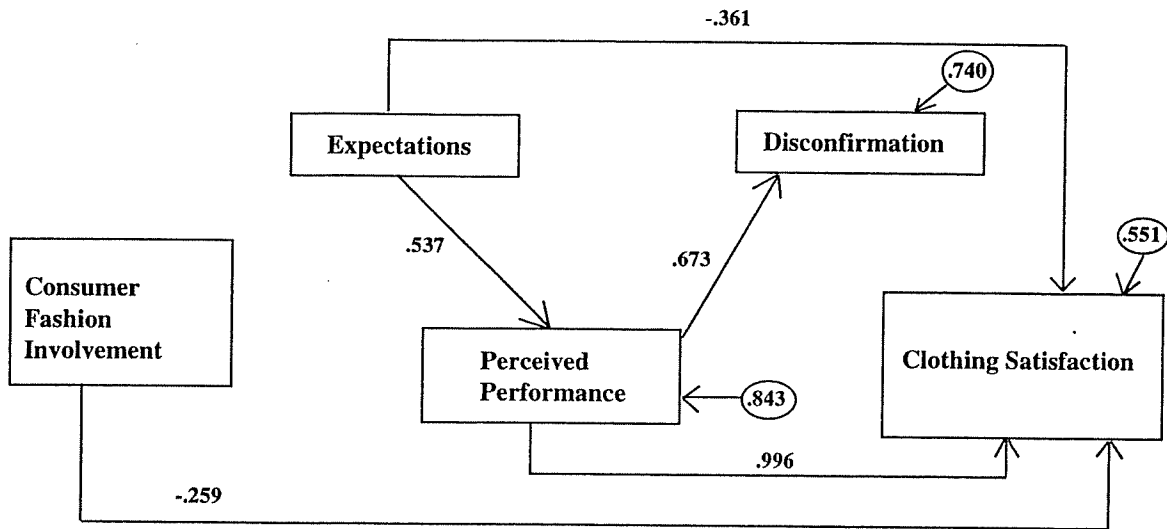
Note 1: Path coefficients are standardized (beta) coefficients. Circled numbers are residual coefficients; they represent the unexplained variability in the path model.

Note 2: All path coefficients are significant at $p < .05$.

Figure 5
Causal Model for Pantyhose

Note 1: Path coefficients are standardized (beta) coefficients. Circled numbers are residual coefficients; they represent the unexplained variability in the path model.

Note 2: All path coefficients are significant at $p < .05$.

of the characteristics of this product type. For jackets, the product life is long, so performance is

Table 2
Effects of Independent Variables on Satisfaction with Jackets

Variables	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Consumer fashion involvement	-.259	--	-.259
Expectations	-.361	.535	.174
Perceived performance	.996	--	.996
Disconfirmation	--	--	--

more important than expectations at point of purchase.

Table 3 summarizes the direct and indirect effects of the independent variables on satisfaction with pantyhose. In contrast to the model for jackets, for pantyhose only expectations and perceived performance influence clothing satisfaction, and the variance explained is 50.2%. Because pantyhose are non-durable and cheap, the expectations of consumers are low. After using the product, only perceived performance directly determines clothing satisfaction, and expectations influence clothing satisfaction indirectly through perceived performance. For pantyhose, effects of both expectations and perceived performance are

Table 3
Effects of Independent Variables on Satisfaction with Pantyhose

Variables	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Expectations	--	.562	.562
Perceived performance	.709	--	.709

important. When expectations are high and performance is good, the consumer is satisfied. Thus, it appears that marketers should create high

expectations through advertising for a product with a short life cycle.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study suggests that perceived performance is the most powerful determinant of clothing satisfaction. Disconfirmation of expectations affects clothing satisfaction very little. Expectations affect clothing satisfaction indirectly through perceived performance.

Second, the findings suggest that the nature of the clothing satisfaction process varies across product type. In terms of total effect, the role of expectations for pantyhose is more important than for jackets; for jackets, the negative direct effect tends to cancel much of the positive indirect effect. On the other hand, consumer fashion involvement has a significant direct effect on satisfaction with jackets but not with pantyhose.

Third, for the total sample the impact of product type and clothing fashion involvement as expectation antecedents is significant but small. Clothing fashion involvement affects clothing satisfaction both directly and indirectly through expectations whereas product type affects satisfaction only indirectly through expectations.

The major focus for clothing producers and distributors needs to be on perceptions of product performance. First of all, manufacturers should strive to improve the quality of clothing and then improve expectations through promotions, whatever the product type is. Moreover, expectations affect clothing satisfaction indirectly. To increase the expectations to a certain point helps to improve satisfaction, especially in pantyhose.

Some limitations of the present study should be noted. As discussed earlier, sales associates were asked to distribute the questionnaires; as a consequence, it was not possible to obtain an exact indication of the refusal rate. Furthermore, the sample size was small. Moreover, consumer fashion involvement was low and the perceived fashionability of products purchased was also low. In spite of these limitations, however, the results suggest that expectation antecedents deserve continued attention in clothing satisfaction model building.

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