

# The Social Values of Fashion Innovators

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## Abstract

*This study compared importance ratings of social values between fashion innovators and non-innovators. The data came from a survey of 607 middle class consumers who rated the nine social values comprising the List of Values (Kahle and Kennedy 1989). As hypothesized, 70 fashion innovators rated the value of excitement more highly than 536 non-innovators, even when chronological age was held constant. This finding was similar for men and women, African-Americans and whites, demonstrating its robustness. The value of fun & enjoyment was also more highly rated by the fashion innovators.*

## Introduction

Values represent desired end states of existence or modes of living and hence form part of the motivational base underlying many consumer purchases. Consumers may allocate a portion of their purchase time and money to express their values and achieve valued lifestyles (Kahle and Kennedy 1989). Consequently, an understanding of the value preferences of consumers should improve our understanding of the motivations of buyer behavior and provide specific guidelines for marketing strategy. The purpose of the present study is to examine the social values of fashion innovators, the earliest buyers of new clothing fashions. These findings should extend our knowledge of this specific category of market behavior. They should also contribute to the study of values as an important concept in explaining consumer behavior. Finally, clothing marketers should find this additional knowledge about an important segment of their market helpful in designing marketing, promotional, and retailing strategies.

Fashion innovativeness was selected as the specific consumer behavior to study because it is common to many demographic groups in society (thus facilitating sampling), a large literature devoted to the topic provides a wealth of background information, and fashion purchase is rich in emotional and psychosocial connotations (O'Shaughnessy 1987, pp. 136-139), making it an ideal area in which to study the influence of values. The List of Values (LOV) developed by Kahle and his colleagues (1983) was used to measure social values because this instrument is more suited to the study of values in consumer behavior than Rokeach's (Beatty et al. 1985; Kahle and Kennedy 1989).

## Background and Hypotheses

### The Characteristics of Fashion Innovators

Three hypotheses based on past research are proposed. Confirmation should support the validity of the measure of fashion innovativeness used in the present study and provide support for these generalizations from earlier research.

The most consistent demographic finding in fashion research is that age is negatively associated with fashion leadership. Summers (1970) found age negatively correlated with fashion opinion leadership. In a study of college women, Mason and Bellenger (1973-74) found single, younger women to have a high fashion interest. Similarly, Horridge and Richards (1984) found high fashion awareness in consumers in the 25-34 age category, while the 35-44-year-olds showed lower fashion awareness. Goldsmith, Stith, and White (1987) also found age negatively related to fashion consciousness, fashion innovativeness, and fashion opinion leadership. Thus we propose that younger age will be associated with fashion innovativeness.

Hypothesis 1: Fashion innovativeness is negatively associated with age.

Another unequivocal finding across many fashion studies is that fashion innovators are very likely to serve as fashion opinion leaders (e.g., Darden and Reynolds 1974; Greenberg, Lumpkin, and Bruner 1982; Summers 1971). Our second hypothesis is that fashion innovativeness is positively associated with fashion opinion leadership.

**Hypothesis 2:** Fashion innovativeness is positively associated with fashion opinion leadership.

A consistent finding in studies of innovative behavior is that innovators are likely to own more products or spend more in a category than non-innovators (Gatignon and Robertson 1985). This generalization is certainly true for clothing (Baumgarten 1975; Lumpkin, Allen, and Greenberg 1981). We propose that fashion innovators will report spending more on new fashions than non-innovators.

**Hypothesis 3:** Fashion innovativeness is positively associated with new fashion spending.

### Fashion Innovativeness and Social Values

Although the LOV has been used in only a few studies of consumer behavior, some initial findings suggest that relationships between fashion leadership and the LOV items can be hypothesized. According to Beatty et al. (1985), consumers who more highly endorse the value "excitement" are likely to be younger than consumers who endorse this value less highly. Since fashion innovators are likely to be younger, we might expect them to place more importance on excitement than non-innovators. In addition, buying new fashions "includes an intrinsic dimension of excitement" (King and Summers 1967, p. 65). Few women, however, desire to experience excitement this way, preferring to stick to familiar clothing styles rather than risking failure and embarrassment caused by poor fashion choice (King and Summers 1967). Consequently, we can surmise that fashion leaders are more open to the excitement of buying new fashions and enjoy the process because of the excitement it affords. Because fashion leadership seems to be unambiguously linked to younger age, and new product trial brings a measure of excitement to the trier, the following hypothesis is proposed.

**Hypothesis 4:** Fashion innovators place proportionally more importance on the value of excitement than non-leaders.

### **Method**

#### Data Collection

To enhance the validity and generalizability of the findings we purchased a mailing list from Best Mailing List company. We surveyed consumers in four states (California, Georgia, Massachusetts, and Ohio) and the District of Columbia to give national dispersion to our sample. Our list contained a random sample of adults with household incomes between \$20,000 and \$70,000 per year, representing the middle and upper-middle class market segment. This was done because the middle and upper-middle class market is important to

the fashion industry and because of the well known non-response of lower income and education groups to mail surveys (Kanuk and Berenson 1975). The mailing list contained 2500 white households and 2645 African-American households. We oversampled African-Americans in order to get sufficient responses from these households for an additional analysis unrelated to the present study.

We wanted to make a strong effort to enhance response to the questionnaire, so we followed the Total Design Method of Dillman (1978). The first mailing consisted of the questionnaire, a cover letter, and a postage pre-paid return envelope. Approximately 10 days later a reminder post card was mailed to households who had not yet returned the questionnaire. Responses were solicited in the cover letter from the male head of household in half the questionnaires and from female head of household in the other half. If the specified head of household was not available, the questionnaire was to be completed by the other household head.

#### Questionnaire

Three graduate students personally distributed 180 copies of a preliminary version of the questionnaire to neighborhoods with socioeconomic characteristics similar to the sample. One-hundred and two (57%) completed pretest questionnaires were recovered. We worked with our three interviewers, who had received comments from several of the pretest respondents, to revise the questionnaire. We did this to ensure that the questions were understandable and non-objectionable to respondents. In addition, the pretest data was analyzed prior to revising and printing the final version of the questionnaire to ensure that all items performed as desired.

The demographic section of the questionnaire asked respondents to record their sex, age, and race. Income was measured by an 8-point scale ranging from "less than \$10,000" to "over \$70,000." Education was measured by a 10-point scale ranging from "no formal education" to "a graduate degree." The respondents were asked to list their present occupation. These were coded into one of 13 categories described by Mitchell (1983, pp. 276-277) as indicators of socioeconomic status for the VALS paradigm. The categories ranged from "student/self-employed" to "professional."

The importance of social values was measured by listing the nine values comprising the List of Values: Being Well-Respected, Security, Sense of Belonging, Excitement, Self-Respect, A Sense of Accomplishment, Fun and Enjoyment in Life, Self-Fulfillment, and Warm Relationships with Others. Each value was rated by a 9-point rating scale (1 = Of No Importance and 9 = Extremely Important). This is the preferred method of

measuring the importance of social values when the LOV is used (Kahle and Kennedy 1989).

Fashion innovativeness was measured by two<sup>1</sup> self-report items used by Hirschman (1980): (1) "Are you willing to try new ideas about clothing fashion? How often?" and (2) "Do you try something new in the next season's fashions? How often?" Her 4-point response format was used (4 = often, 3 = sometimes, 2 = seldom, 1 = never, and 0 = don't know). We analyzed the data using each item separately with identical results, so we combined the two items to form a short scale of fashion innovativeness. Responses to these two items were correlated .56 ( $p < .001$ ), indicating reliability. We used the sum of the responses to these two items to measure the construct; higher scores indicated greater fashion innovativeness. These scores ranged from 1 to 8, with a mean of 5.12 (SD = 1.46).

Fashion opinion leadership was measured by three items with the same response format borrowed from Hirschman (1980): (1) "How often do you influence the types of clothing fashions your friends buy?" (2) "How often do others turn to you for advice on fashion and clothing?" and (3) "How many of your friends and neighbors regard you as a good source of advice on clothing fashion?" A factor analysis showed the three items formed a unidimensional scale. The sum of the responses to these three items measured the construct; higher scores indicated greater fashion opinion leadership. Coefficient alpha was .77. These scores ranged from 0 to 12, with a mean of 5.56 (SD = 3.94).

We measured spending for new fashions with a single item asking "how much you spend on new fashions for yourself in a typical month." A 9-point response format ranging from "under \$25.00" to "\$200 and over" was used. These scores ranged from 1 to 9, with a mean score of 3.1 (SD = 2.22).

## Results

### Sample Characteristics

Of the 5145 questionnaires mailed, 368 (7%) were returned as undeliverable. Six hundred eleven questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 12.8%, about par for a "cold" mail survey of this type (Dillon, Madden, and Firtle 1987, p. 139). Four of these were unusable, so that usable responses were received from 607 respondents.

There were 270 (47.5%) men and 298 (52.5%) women in the data set. Whites made up 279 (66.7%) and African-Americans 189 (33.3%), reflecting the well known under-response of this group to mail surveys (Mitchell 1983, p. 67). The respondents ranged in age from 21 to 92. The mean age was 45.2 years (SD =

15.8), and the median was 42.3 years. Fifty-eight percent of the sample was married. Forty percent of the sample reported household incomes of \$50,000 or more, and 54% claimed to have earned a college degree or attempted or completed a graduate degree. Nearly 43% of the sample's occupations were classified as either professional or managerial. These figures indicate that the sample represented an upscale market segment.

### Non-Response Analysis

Although the overall response rates of men and women appeared to be about equal, whites responded proportionally more than African-Americans, and more black women responded than black men. To further evaluate non-response, a "trend analysis" was performed (Tull and Hawkins 1984, p. 154). A variable representing the speed with which the questionnaire was returned was computed so that the characteristics of earlier respondents could be compared with those of later respondents on the assumption that the later respondents were more like non-respondents than were earlier respondents (Kanuk and Berenson 1975). Correlations with interval level variables indicated no relationships with the time the questionnaire was returned. In addition, the sample was split into an earlier response group (58%) and a later response group (42%), and t-tests of mean differences and cross tabulations were computed for both interval level and categorical variables. None of these analyses showed systematic differences ( $p < .05$ ) between earlier and later respondents. Moreover, these analyses were performed separately for African-Americans and whites with identical null results. Thus, while proportionately fewer African-Americans responded than whites, there appeared to be little non-response bias in the data.

### Validating the Measure of Fashion Innovativeness

We split the scores on the fashion innovativeness measure so that respondents who scored either a 7 or 8 on the fashion innovativeness scale (the top 12 percent) were designated as fashion innovators. The split yielded two groups containing 70 innovators and 536 non-innovators. This scheme was suggested by the frequency distribution of the scores, by the responses to the two fashion items ("often" to at least one of the two questions), and by literature on fashion innovators that suggests only a minority of clothing buyers are fashion innovators (King and Summers 1967).<sup>2</sup>

The mean scores on the dependent variables of the 70 fashion innovators and 536 non-innovators were compared using t-tests so that the specific hypotheses could be tested. The results appear in Table 1. Fashion innovators reported a mean age of 40 years and the non-innovators a mean age of almost 46 years, confirming hypothesis 1. This difference was statistically significant

( $p = .004$ ), supporting both the generalization that fashion innovators tend to be younger than non-innovators and the validity of the fashion innovativeness measure. (Another paper by the current authors (Goldsmith and Stith 1990) examined the relationship between "cognitive" or psychological age (Barak and Schiffman 1981) and fashion innovativeness and found that fashion innovators reported that they looked and felt younger, and that they had younger interests and activities than non-innovators, even when chronological age was controlled statistically.) Fashion innovators also scored significantly higher on the measures of fashion opinion leadership (7.9 versus 5.2) and spending for new fashions (4.4 versus 2.9), confirming hypotheses 2 and 3. The 70 innovators even reported spending significantly more for new fashions than the 207 respondents who scored a 6 on the scale. These results support the generalizations that fashion innovators act as fashion opinion leaders more than non-innovators and buy more new fashions than non-innovators, and hence provide support for the validity of the fashion innovativeness measure. To examine the possible effect that income might have on fashion innovativeness, we correlated the fashion innovativeness scores with income and cross-tabulated the dichotomous classification of fashion innovators versus non-innovators against the eight income categories. Neither analysis indicated any relationship between fashion innovativeness and income level.

#### The Social Values of Fashion Innovators

The mean importance ratings of the nine LOV items were compared between innovators and non-innovators. In this analysis we used MANCOVA with chronological age as a covariate to remove the possibility that value importance differences between the two groups could be attributed to the difference in age between them. The results were statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ), showing that, even when age was held constant, there was an overall difference between fashion innovators and non-innovators. Next, we compared the differences in mean importance scores for all nine values between the two groups using t-tests, and these results are shown in Table 1. These figures support hypothesis 4; excitement does seem to be more important to fashion innovators. This analysis was repeated for men and women separately, and for whites and African-Americans separately with the same result, demonstrating its robustness across demographic groups.

In addition, the fashion innovators also reported greater importance for the value of fun and enjoyment, although to a lesser degree. This finding makes intuitive sense if one believes that excitement and fun/enjoyment are similar value judgments and logically associated with fashionable clothing. Should this relationship be replicated across additional studies it would prove to be an

important addition to our knowledge of the motivation of the fashion innovator.

#### **Discussion**

The present study examined the social values of fashion innovators. It was hypothesized that when compared with non-innovators, fashion innovators would place more emphasis on the value of excitement. Data from a random sample of 607 middle and upper-middle class consumers provided support for the hypothesis. In addition, fashion innovators appeared to be chronologically younger, to describe themselves as fashion opinion leaders, and to spend more on new fashions than non-innovators. There was also some evidence that fashion innovators placed greater importance on the value of fun and enjoyment in life, but this finding was somewhat tenuous and should be confirmed by future studies before it is accepted. The importance of excitement, however, proved to be robust when the effects of chronological age were held constant and when tested across gender and races.

The findings are important because they confirm important characteristics of fashion innovators, namely, they are younger, tend to be fashion opinion leaders, and spend more on new fashions than non-leaders. Moreover, the findings extend our knowledge of fashion leadership by revealing value differences of fashion leaders. Understanding that fashion leaders value excitement, and perhaps fun & enjoyment, gives us further insight into the motives of fashion leaders because it can be surmised that they seek out new fashions partly to realize these values. Fashion leaders appear to be unique to the extent that they use new fashions to achieve psychosocial goals expressed as values. The findings are important because they support Kahle and Kennedy's (1989) argument that the LOV is a useful tool to use in understanding consumer behavior. These findings are also important because, as recent reports on the troubled fashion industry (*Newsweek* 1988) make clear, marketers need to appeal to fashion leaders. Stressing the excitement and perhaps the fun of new fashion may be an efficacious way to appeal to the psychosocial needs of these consumers. For later buyers, however, clothing seems to meet different needs, functional chiefly, and appeals to the middle majority of consumers should be focused accordingly.

The present findings are limited by the sample and measures used, although an effort was made to procure a random sample of adult consumers geographically scattered across the country, and the measure of fashion innovativeness was carefully validated. The relatively low response rate to the survey also possibly limits the generalizability of the findings, even though a systematic evaluation revealed no non-response bias. Nevertheless, there may be aggregate differences among consumers in

**Table 1**  
**Differences in Mean Scores Between Fashion Innovators and Non-Innovators**

	Mean		Degrees of Freedom	t-value	r
	Low Fashion (n = 536)	High Fashion (n = 70)			
<u>Demographics</u>					
Age	45.9	40.0	594	2.89**	-.23**
<u>Fashion Behaviors</u>					
Opinion Leadership	5.2	7.9	603	-8.27**	.46**
Spending	2.9	4.4	603	-5.56**	.38**
<u>Social Values</u>					
Being Well Respected	7.4	7.5	594	-.54	.09*
Security	7.3	7.3	593	.03	.11*
Sense of Belonging	6.2	6.5	590	-1.00	.10*
Excitement	5.3	6.4	584	-4.29**	.26**
Self-Respect	8.1	8.0	79 <sup>1</sup>	.55	.07
Sense of Accomplishment	7.6	7.8	586	-.58	.11*
Fun/Enjoyment in Life	6.9	7.5	592	-2.52*	.21**
Self-Fulfillment	7.3	7.5	593	-.85	.15**
Warm Relationships	7.5	7.5	592	-.06	.14**

<sup>1</sup>Separate variance estimate

\*\*p < .01 \*p < .05 (two-tailed)

highly urbanized areas where fashion is easily available and fashion leadership occurs among many older and wealthier individuals. Although our data came largely from the urban areas of our states (there was no difference in mean fashion innovativeness scores across the five states), other researchers should pay particular attention to the geographic location from which their samples are drawn. Many previous clothing and fashion studies have used college students, who may be poor representatives of the current fashion scene in urban areas. Limitations also exist in the measurement of social values and the demographic constraints of the sample. Other measures of social values may reveal additional differences among fashion leaders, and

consumers both below and above the middle class may manifest different results.

The present study presents one of the first attempts to use the LOV to examine the motivational bases for specific buyer behaviors. Additional studies using samples from other social classes and other measures of social values should be used to extend these fashion findings. Although the idea of using values to explain part of consumer behavior has been proposed for years, no systematic stream of research fulfills this promise. Values other than excitement and fun should be associated with buyer behavior in alternative product categories. Systematic application of the LOV in other

product categories would go a long way toward extending our knowledge of the role played by values in consumer behavior.

Marketers and clothing retailers are naturally interested in the fashion leader segment because acceptance by these consumers may legitimize and facilitate the spread of new clothing fashions to later buyers. Consequently, the demographics and life styles of the earliest buyers of new fashions have long preoccupied researchers. Incorporating knowledge of social values into the profile of the fashion market leader should help in designing strategies to reach and appeal to this key segment.

### Suggestions for Future Research

Additional study of this topic could focus on value differences between innovators and non-innovators for product categories other than fashionable clothing. Positive findings would not only enhance our understanding of the motives underlying the purchase of product innovations in a variety of product categories, they would continue to demonstrate the importance personal values play in this aspect of consumption. It would also be important to extend the study of the relationship between innovativeness and social values to the adoption of new services to determine whether values play the same role in influencing the adoption of new services as they seem to do for new products. Consumer behaviors other than innovativeness should also be evaluated for the influence of social values. Involvement with product categories is a prime topic for such research seeking to detect difference in value ratings between high- and low-involved consumers. One would suspect that positive findings in this area would give insight into the motivational forces underlying product involvement. Finally, social values hold the potential to further our insight into differences among standard market segments for a variety of products and services, thereby guiding theoretical development and managerial practice alike. ■

### \*\*\*Footnotes\*\*\*

1. Hirschman (1980) actually used a three item scale to measure fashion innovativeness. Accordingly, in the present study, these three items were also used, but the third item ("Are you usually among the last to try new clothing fashion?"), is worded in the negative direction and was not correlated with the other two items, both of which are worded in the positive direction. Consequently, this item was not used to form the measure of fashion innovativeness. Moreover, a factor analysis (principal axis factoring) of the six fashion items followed by an oblique rotation showed (1) that the three fashion opinion leadership items and the two positively worded

fashion innovativeness items did load on two distinct factors and (2) that item 3 did not load significantly on either of these two factors.

2. As an alternative check on the data analysis to see if the findings were sensitive to the way the sample was split, the Pearson correlation coefficients showing the correlations between the measure of fashion innovativeness and the other variables across all the entire sample are presented in Table 1 besides the results of the t-tests.

As a second check on the data analysis, we formed two groups, this time comprised of the bottom 14% (84 laggard consumers) and top 70 innovators as before. The results of t-tests comparing mean scores on the dependent variables between these two groups were not only identical in direction to those shown in Table 1, but the sizes of the differences in mean scores between the innovators and the laggards were larger, showing that the findings did not depend on the way the sample was split.

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