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A social comparison theory approach to mothers' and daughters' clothing co-consumption behaviors: A cross-cultural study in France and Japan[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Much remains unknown about the clothing co-consumption practices of mothers and their teenage daughters, especially from a cross-cultural perspective. This study uses social comparison theory to examine how mothers engage in clothing co-consumption practices with their adolescent daughters and the effects on their likelihood of changing brands, stores, or styles. It includes 732 French and Japanese mothers who have adolescent daughters between the ages of 15 and 18 years. The structural equation modeling and qualitative analysis with structural associations reveal that Japanese mothers with high self-esteem enter into strong social comparisons, which lead to co-consumption practices (common shopping, joint purchases, clothing exchanges), whereas regardless of their levels of self-esteem, French mothers engage in social comparison processes that lead them to change their clothing styles, brands, and stores.

1. Introduction

The global marketplace offers an area of potential growth for a wide range of fashion firms and their clothing products. In Japan for example, the total apparel market reached 9.38 trillion yen (JPY) (~83.5 billion Euros) in 2014, and 63% of that (5.91 trillion JPY, or 52.5 billion Euros) involved women's apparel (Yano Research Institute, 2015). In France, the global apparel market was 41.7 billion Euros in 2015 (The Statistics Portal, 2016), and 36% (15 billion Euros) was devoted to women's apparel (Institut Francaise de la Mode, 2016). Furthermore, preliminary research suggests that mothers' clothing consumption practices are highly relevant in these markets. For example, in a study of mother–daughter joint behaviors, Sugawara (2013) finds that 65% of the Japanese mothers surveyed note that they like shopping at malls with their daughters. In another study with 500 French mothers, 45% of them indicate that they like shopping with their teenage daughters, and 38% of them go shopping with their teenage daughters at least once a month (Decoopman, Gentina, & Fosse-Gomez, 2010). These findings suggest that understanding adult women's clothing consumption practices might require accounting for the broader context, including the potentially powerful role of mother–daughter interactions.

Previous studies of such interactions primarily leverage

intergenerational influence theories (Mandrik, Fern, & Bao, 2004; Moore, Wilkie, & Lutz, 2002; Moore-Shay & Lutz, 1988) or address consumer socialization (Grossbart, Carlson, & Walsh, 1991; Martin, 2009), without considering how adolescent daughters might influence their mothers' clothing consumption (Ruvio, Gavish, & Shoham, 2013). Intergenerational influence theory postulates similar consumption behaviors by mothers and daughters, presumably due to the transfer of competences and knowledge from mothers to their daughters (Gavish, Shoham, & Ruvio, 2010; Mandrik et al., 2004; Moore et al., 2002; Moore-Shay & Lutz, 1988). Traditional consumer socialization theory also tends to highlight mothers' influential role as socialization agents for their daughters, ignoring the potential reverse influence (Carlson, Grossbart, & Walsh, 1990; Flurry & Burns, 2005). However, recent marketing research suggests just this type of reverse socialization, whereby teenage daughters serve as fashion role models for their mothers (Gavish et al., 2010; Ruvio et al., 2013), though no studies explicate mothers' underlying motivations for seeking their daughters' input on their clothing consumption. Teenage daughters often function as proximal symbols of their mothers' extended selves (Kimura & Sakashita, 2010), such that they serve as significant comparison targets for their mothers and influence their clothing consumption behaviors (Gentina, Decoopman, & Ruvio, 2013). For these reasons, this study

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adopts a social comparison theory approach in an attempt to explain the underlying mechanisms of mothers' clothing co-consumption behaviors with teenage daughters, which may satisfy their needs to maintain ideal self-images. Prior studies of social comparison typically focus on vicarious role models (e.g., Martin & Gentry, 1997), so investigating mothers and their teenage daughters in a clothing consumption context seems particularly worthwhile.

Numerous studies focus on clothing consumption by mother–daughter dyads, primarily in a single nation (e.g., United States, Gillison et al., 2015; Moore et al., 2002; France, Gentina et al., 2013; Israel, Ruvio et al., 2013; Australia, Minahan & Huddleston, 2010) without any cross-national or cultural comparisons. These single-culture investigations may limit understanding of the complexity of mother–daughter clothing co-consumption behaviors, because they cannot reveal the potential impact of national culture on such behaviors (Gentina, Kimura, Sakashita, & Decoopman, 2013). As Epp and Price (2008) note, little research in marketing details the impacts of national culture on motives that underlie consumption practices within families. In response, this study compares clothing co-consumption behaviors by mothers and their teenage daughters in two national cultures: Japan and France.

Hofstede (2001) characterizes Japan as a collectivistic, interdependent country with high power distance. In contrast, France is an individualistic, self-oriented society, with low power distance scores. By studying these distinct national cultures (Japan as collectivistic, France as individualistic), this study seeks to determine whether cultural differences prompt different social comparison processes, which in turn result in different clothing co-consumption practices. Specifically, this study investigates how national cultures influence the relationships of multiple self-esteem pathways with two levels of social comparison (group and individual), which in turn might lead mothers to change their brands, stores, or styles, but also might affect co-consumption behaviors by mothers and their teenage daughters.

For a detailed analysis of all these relationships, this study offers a comparison of a traditional structural equation modeling (SEM) approach with fuzzy set/qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), a novel configurational technique that overcomes some limitations of traditional correlational analyses (Woodside, 2013, 2016). The two methodological approaches have different foci: the net effect of an independent variable of an outcome variable for SEM versus the conditions that lead to a given outcome for fsQCA (Skarmeas, Leonidou, & Saridakis, 2014; Skarmeas, Lisboa, & Saridakis, 2016).

In summary, this study contributes to existing research into mother–daughter interactions and clothing co-consumption behaviors in three ways. First, it extends knowledge about mothers' clothing consumption practices, according to a social comparison theory approach. Second, it sheds light on the importance of national culture for illuminating the mechanisms that underlie such phenomena. Comparing Japan and France provides a clearer understanding of different, culturally specific consumption behaviors. Third, this study validates the findings with a multi-method comparison. Mothers' clothing co-consumption behaviors with teenage daughters can be better understood by contrasting the results of correlational and configural analyses.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Social comparison processes for mothers: Daughters in adolescence

According to recent studies, mothers seek to reconstruct their own femininity during transitional periods, and their teenage daughters function as significant social comparison targets (Decoopman et al., 2010). When daughters enter adolescence, mothers often struggle with uncertainty; they must acknowledge that their teenage daughters are transitioning toward adulthood, separating from childhood. This transition is often associated with a “progressive loss of their maternal identity (child care, reproduction, etc.), which may be replaced by a

reawakening of their feminine dimension” (Gentina et al., 2013, p. 96). Teenage daughters generally represent the most immediate layer of their mothers' extended self (Kimura & Sakashita, 2010). They also present a new image of femininity, which helps their mothers redefine themselves, by reorganizing their own femininity (Henwood, 1993). In this sense, teenage daughters likely have strong influences on their mothers and can function as significant targets of social comparison (Decoopman et al., 2010; Gentina et al., 2013, 2013; Gentina, Sakashita, Kimura, & Decoopman, 2013). Using social comparison as a foundational theory, this study seeks to specify how mothers engage in clothing co-consumption practices with and are influenced by their adolescent daughters, such that they consider changing their preferred clothing brands, stores, or styles.

2.2. Self-esteem as a determinant of social comparison

Social comparison theory states that when no objective standards exist, people judge and evaluate their own behaviors through comparisons with others (Festinger, 1954). A social comparison occurs on either the group or the individual level (Guimond et al., 2007). For example, if mothers were to compare themselves against societal expectations of a young and attractive physical appearance for women, it constitutes social comparison at the group level, and these mothers likely feel social pressure to wear clothing that reflects their age-based group (Gentina et al., 2013). However, if mothers compare themselves with a specific person, it represents social comparison at an individual level (Gentina et al., 2013). The central notion of social comparison theory is the similarity hypothesis, which predicts that people select others who are similar to themselves for comparison. When they undergo transitions, they seek to redefine themselves by engaging in social comparison process at an individual level with a significant comparison standard who is otherwise similar to themselves. Mothers with high self-esteem might engage in social comparison processes at the individual level with their teenage daughters, as well as at the group level with other women in the society, because both comparisons should enable them to redefine and enhance their feminine image.

Prior research in social psychology offers contradictory results when it comes to the link between self-esteem and social comparison processes though (White, Langer, Yariv, & Welch, 2006). Some studies indicate that people with low self-esteem (Wood, 1989; Wood, Giordano-Beech, & Ducharme, 1999; Wood, Giordano-Beech, Taylor, Michela, & Gaus, 1994), who feel insecure (Maslow, Hirsh, Stein, & Honigmann, 1945), or who lack a stable sense of self-worth (Kernis, Paradise, Whitaker, Wheatman, & Goldman, 2000) are more inclined to make social comparisons with others to enhance self-evaluations. But other studies instead suggest that people with low self-esteem seek to protect themselves by avoiding social comparisons (Wills, 1981; Wood et al., 1994). If people have high self-esteem, their stable, non-contingent sense of self-worth likely produces positive attitudes toward the self. Overall though, the inconclusive findings highlight the need for more research that explores the relationship between self-esteem and social comparison processes, including the potential role of moderating variables, such as culture.

2.3. Social comparisons and consumption behavior

Consumption can connect mothers to their adolescent daughters, and clothing co-consumption practices likely facilitate their direct comparisons with others, whether a teenage daughter or other women in general. Thus, mothers likely shop with their teenage daughters, jointly purchase clothing items, and exchange clothes (Decoopman et al., 2010). Beyond functioning as shopping companions, teenage daughters are fashion models who introduce new clothing stores and brands to their mothers and give advice on their mothers' clothing styles (Gentina et al., 2013). As previously noted, prior studies on mother–daughter shopping behaviors focus primarily on single nations,

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