



# The effects of mall personality and fashion orientation on shopping value and mall patronage intension



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## ABSTRACT

It is imperative for mall operators in China to gain insights into consumer shopping behaviours that will allow them to further develop their mall personalities, in order to better differentiate themselves from the competition. The overarching objective of the present study was two-fold: to increase our understanding about contemporary Chinese shoppers; and to examine the relationships among mall personality, fashion orientation, shopping value and mall patronage intention. This study presents the results of a research survey conducted in Wuhan, China. Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) was used to analyze the survey responses from 324 shopping mall patrons. The findings indicate that consumers' fashion orientation has a significant influence based on their perception of the shopping mall personality. The path model analysis revealed that consumers' perception of shopping value had the strongest effect on their shopping intentions at the mall.

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## 1. Introduction

Due to its tremendous economic growth, China has emerged as the second largest economy in the world (Teather, 2010). According to a study conducted by Li and Fung (2013), from 2008 to 2012, the total retail sales of consumer goods increased dramatically, from 10.8 trillion yuan to 20.7 trillion yuan. Many urban dwellers have experienced and benefited from this rapid economic growth, including residents of the inland cities. In Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, for example, the retail sales of consumer goods increased more than 100 percent in five years, from RMB129.3 billion in 2006 to RMB295.9 billion in 2011 (HKTDC, 2012). Wuhan is considered to be a major economic hub and the most affluent city in the central region.

As the economy grows, many global retailers and property developers have rushed to China for different business opportunities, including the development of massive shopping malls in both first and second tier cities (Li et al., 2003). As Rapoza (2013) reported, "There is more mall space under construction in one single city in China than in 86 cities throughout Europe (not counting Russia and Turkey). Last year, the country was the No. 1 developer of that ubiquitous symbol of consumer capitalism: the shopping mall."

To maximize the space productivity and sales opportunities within a shopping mall, it is imperative for mall owners, operators and store managers to gain a sound understanding of today's consumer behaviour (Atsmon et al., 2010). The purpose of our exploratory study was to provide insights into the shopping behaviours of Chinese consumers through the examination of our proposed conceptual framework, which is comprised of various constructs including: mall personality, fashion orientation, shopping value, and mall patronage intention. The overarching objective of the present study was two-fold: (1) to increase our understanding about contemporary Chinese shoppers; and (2) to examine the relationships among mall personality, fashion orientation, shopping value and mall patronage intention.

## 2. Literature review and hypotheses development

Despite the impact of the 2008/2009 global financial crisis, the retail market in China still remains strong, and consumer spending power continues to grow (Cavender, 2010). The shopping-mall format has been widely accepted by Chinese shoppers, although this format is quite different from their traditional mode of shopping. Extant literature has previously examined consumer behaviour within the shopping mall context in Western societies (Bloch et al., 1994; Haytko and Baker, 2004; Millan and Howard, 2007; Michon et al., 2007, 2008). Several other studies are

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particularly relevant to the retail market in China (see Chan et al. (2007), Li et al. (2003, 2004) and Yu (2011)). Although research relating to the Chinese retail market has made significant progress over the last decade, much remains to be explored and further research is needed to gain a greater understanding of this rapidly changing market. For example, how the personality of the mall and fashion orientation might impact Chinese shoppers' intent and behaviour remains unaddressed. In fact, as far as we could determine, the concept of store/mall personality has never been studied in China at all. Thus, this study was intended to generate meaningful information and contribute important knowledge to the existing literature of mall shopping in China at both theoretical and practical levels. For example, as a result of our research, for the first time a number of theories developed in the West (personality scale, shopping value, fashion orientation) have now been tested in a non-Western retail market. In addition, most previous studies of consumer behaviour and retail market have been focused on the first-tier cities including Beijing (Anderson and He, 1998; Dickson et al., 2004; Yu, 2011), Shanghai (Davis and Sensenbrenner, 2000; Delong et al., 2004), and Guangzhou (Dickson et al., 2004), and little research has previously been conducted in second-tier cities such as Wuhan.

### 2.1. Fashion orientation and shopping value

“Shopping orientation” is a term used to describe shoppers' styles or patterns in certain activities, interests, and opinions concerning the shopping process” (Moschis (1992) p. 231). Prior research has revealed that shopping orientation is a multi-dimensional construct consisting of personal, economic, social, and recreational motivations (Kwon, 1991; Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1993; Visser and du Preez, 2001).

By contrast, “fashion orientation,” as defined by Gutman and Mills (1982), is a latent construct consisting of four factors: fashion leadership, fashion interest, importance of being well dressed, and anti-fashion attitudes. According to a number of studies (Darley and Johnson, 1993; Trautmann-Attmann and Johnson, 2009), consumers' fashion interests are related to their shopping behaviours. For example, Darley and Johnson, (1993) found that American female adolescents' shopping behaviours were greatly influenced by fashion orientation. Shoppers who are fashion leaders seem to be more involved in shopping in general, and more concerned about shopping value and shopping mall environment specifically, than are those with less interest in fashion.

In this research, the latent construct “shopping value” is made up of indicator variables relating to both “utilitarian” and “hedonic” shopping values. In other words, shopping value is the way that consumers assess the worth of their shopping experiences, including both utilitarian and hedonic factors. Previous research (Kang and Park-Poaps, 2010) has shown that fashion orientation is linked to shopping value, including both utilitarian and hedonic components. This implies that individuals may seek out or prefer specific shopping environments on the basis of their fashion orientation. However, it is important to note that utilitarian and hedonic values should not be viewed as two opposed shopping motives (Michon et al., 2007, 2015). In many cases, they are positively correlated and complement each other. As Michon and Chebat (2004) point out, hedonic shoppers are also motivated by perceived shopping goals. On the basis of these findings, we believe that both utilitarian and hedonic benefits could play an important part in shoppers' behaviour, and it is reasonable to suggest that consumers who are fashion oriented may greatly influence the construct of shopping value. Therefore, the following hypothesis was developed to explore the relationship between fashion orientation and shopping value:

**H<sub>1</sub>** : Fashion orientation significantly influences perceived shopping value.

### 2.2. Shopping orientation and mall personality

Over the years, Aaker's (1997) brand personality scale (BPS) has been widely applied in different domains and various countries including retail stores in Germany (Zentes et al., 2008), family-type restaurants in South Korea (Lee et al., 2009) and web site brand communication in the United States (Opoku et al., 2007). Despite the widespread application of BPS, the value of its universal applicability across industries and countries has been questioned and criticized. For example, Musante et al. (2008, p. 308) point out that “the primary fault is that many of the 42 traits that were used in the scale were not easily applicable,” and Zentes et al. (2008), p. 180 suggest that “whether the scale is generalizable to other European markets remains open for further research.” Due to the concerns of scale appropriateness, some researchers have developed their own personality scales for different domains based on Aaker's (1997) concept. For example, store personality scales (SPS) were developed for the retail market by d'Astous and Lévesque (2003) and Das (2014).

Although many studies (Bregman and Willems, 2009; Das, 2014a, 2014b; d'Astous and Lévesque, 2003; Zentes et al., 2008) have examined the store personality in different countries, the specific topic of “shopping centre/mall personality” has received little attention (Michon et al., 2015). For this research study, the personality traits of the store personality scale (SPS) developed by d'Astous and Lévesque (2003) were adapted in order to elucidate how mall personality is linked to fashion orientation, shopping value and mall patronage intention in the context of the shopping environment in Wuhan, China. We chose to use the SPS scale of d'Astous and Lévesque because the shopping motives and activities (e.g., service/product acquisition, entertainment, self-gratification and social experiences) at both retail stores and shopping malls are similar.

Some prior studies (e.g., Darley and Johnson (1993)) have shown that fashion orientation and store environment are related. A number of researchers (e.g., Goldsmith and Flynn (1992); Goldsmith et al. (1991)) have found that fashion leaders tend to patronize clothing stores more frequently than do other consumers. Shoppers with high fashion orientation are more likely to shop at upscale department stores (Gutman and Mills, 1982). Another study of fashion retailer personality conducted in Belgium (Bregman and Willems, 2009) also found that consumers' perception toward a store was influenced by its personality. It is evident that the mall environment plays a significant role in the behaviour and experiences of fashion oriented shoppers (Michon et al., 2007). In other words, consumers' perceptions of a shopping mall could be closely related to their affective responses to various associative stimuli, including attributes associated with mall personality (e.g., sophistication and solidity). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed to explore the relationship between fashion orientation and mall personality:

**H<sub>2</sub>** : Fashion orientation significantly influences shoppers' perceptions of mall personality.

### 2.3. Mall personality and shopping value

Prior research has revealed that shopping activities can generate both hedonic and utilitarian outcomes for consumers (Fischer and Arnold, 1990; Sherry 1990). Utilitarian values often refer to the functional, instrumental, practical, and task-related benefits, whereas hedonic values refer to ones that are aesthetic, experiential, emotional, and pleasure-related (Batra and Ahtola 1990;

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