Why do people buy apparel in the virtual world? The influence of cool and interactivity on purchase intentions

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Abstract: The meta-universe notion is regularly introduced in the digital era, and meta-universe virtual apparel has become a new trend with the growth of Internet technology. With highly tailored, technological, and intelligent properties, virtual clothing can imitate the digital environment in digital form. Based on self-presentation theory, this research investigates these elements and provides a conceptual model, followed by an empirical test utilizing samples from a questionnaire survey. The findings show that cool and interactivity have a substantial influence on purchase intention for virtual apparel. And online self-presentation desire plays a mediating role. On this ground, it is proposed that the virtual world creates an environment of new and trendy social interaction.

1 Introduction

In times of lower living standards, clothes were used to protect the body from the cold. As people's living standards improve, clothing needs to meet the growing aesthetic and consumer needs of people. In the digital age, with the development of technologies such as VR, AR and MR, a revolution in technology and art is taking place. For a long time, fashion and technology have maintained an inseparable relationship, which is reflected in the content expression and form expression of fashion, especially today, the conventional form of fashion has been altered by technological innovation. With the power of digital technology, appeals can take physical or virtual forms that are invisible in real life.

Hamari and Keronen (2017) [1] presented 65 factors based on an inductive analysis of the literature which was represented in numerous elements such as attitude, flow and network size in their later study. Today virtual clothes are mostly found in platforms and games with social interaction, where consumers use them as a tool for self-expression and interactive communication. As a result, social interactions driven by social networks motivate users to manage the image displayed in the virtual space (Chen and Chen, 2022) [1] . Warren et al.(2018) [2] proposed cool as a motivating factor for consumer behavior, consumers love fashion, innovation, and express great interest in something unique, and the concept of cool fits perfectly with their pursuit.

This study introduces the theory of self-presentation. This theoretical framework is able to explain why people actively construct self-images and create a desire to buy. Validating the positive effects of cool and interactivity on consumer purchase intention aims to help marketing practitioners and related scholars understand more clearly the mechanisms at play in consumers' purchase of virtual apparel, and thus provide theoretical guidance and practical insights based on marketing practitioners.

2 Theory and hypotheses

2.1 The role of cool in purchase intentions for virtual apparel

In the mid-twentieth century, African Americans adopted a lifestyle in order to fight against racial discrimination and seek a better life, to alleviate their inner pain and depression, and to express their spiritual concept of transcendence. This lifestyle is also considered to be the beginning of the modern concept of "cool". Warren and Campbell (2014)[4] defined cool as a positive appraisal or view of something that consumers perceive as distinct and appealing, expressing their leisure, enjoyment, and transcendent attitudes, and is distinguished by dynamism and social constructs. First, cool products are frequently seen as trendy and unusual (Bird and Tapp,2008) [3]. Second, cool is appealing. Cool is an aesthetic term that refers to a specific artistic style that offers an outwardly obvious aesthetic appeal. Cool products might attract consumers' attention due to their attractive designs (Sundar et al., 2014) [4].

Consumer attitudes and behaviors are positively related to cool perception. For example, Belk et al. (2010) [7] argue that a cool spokesperson can boost a product's perception among customers. And Kim et al.(2015) [8] have shown that perception of coolness promotes
consumer behavior by encouraging favorable consumer attitudes.

Purchase intention, a behavioral tendency, can be used to effectively determine and grasp what kind of purchase behavior consumers will choose in the future, and is a measure of the likelihood of consumers to make a purchase of a certain product. It is a measure of the probability that a consumer will purchase a product. It is a measure of the probability that a consumer will purchase a product, on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is a measure of the level of effort that a consumer is willing to make in order to purchase a product. If the willingness to purchase is more positive and strong, the higher the probability that the consumer will make a purchase, and therefore, researchers often use this indicator to predict the actual future purchases of consumers.

Based on this, we hypothesize the following:

H1: Cool has a positive influence on purchase intention.

2.2 The role of interactivity in purchase intentions for virtual apparel

Based on the news communication perspective, network interaction is divided into two dimensions: content interaction refers to the degree of information recipients' participation in the content of the medium, while interpersonal interaction refers to the fact that information recipients can likewise use the network to share, communicate and exchange information in the virtual space. The two-dimensional division of online interaction is more classical, and many subsequent researchers have divided the dimensions of online interaction based on this basis, and researchers have not developed a unified standard. This study focuses on interpersonal interactivity in the online network world. The definition of interactivity in this study is taken from Liu and Shrum (2002): the degree to which two or more communication participants can act on each other is referred to as interactivity.

Social interaction is a highly valued factor among users of virtual worlds, who seek intimacy and strong relationships in social interaction. In this process, users are eager to present the image they want to create to others in order to get a response from the interaction or to influence them. In this regard, interactivity gives an intrinsic motivation to present an image (Animesh et al. 2011). Members who actively participate in interactive behaviors in the virtual world will be more likely to have higher trust in consumer information, and by this influence, they will be more inclined to change their attitudes and behaviors. Moreover, this interactivity will promote users to promote people to share their experiences including appearance, price and other usage experiences, and this sharing increases members' knowledge about the apparel, and in the process can increase the sales of virtual apparel. It is these motivations that create the desire to purchase virtual apparel.

Therefore, we propose the following hypotheses:

H2: Interactivity has a positive influence on purchase intention.

2.3 Mediating role of the desire for online self-presentation

Self-presentation theory describes the reason and way people express specific pictures in social interactions, and it is a paradigm in which individuals try to control the impressions others have of them (Goffman, 1959). In the virtual space, there will be new emotional rules, new social distance, new ways of interaction, new self-presentation. Users express themselves in the virtual world through avatars. People seek to create a personal identity and utilize it to engage with others during this process. As a result, they invest money, time and effort to construct and maintain the image in the virtual world, with the expectation that through incarnation, behavior and identity will remain consistent in the virtual world, assisting in the establishment of relational ties (Schau and Gilly 2003). Individuals engage in self-presentation in specific social circumstances, according to the theory. The desire to display oneself is portrayed as a motivation to meet one's psychological demands. As a result, once a system is able to meet a user's online self-presentation needs, certain user behaviors are likely to occur.

Many literatures point out that cool perceptions can have an impact on consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and emotions. Specifically, cool products can satisfy consumers' need for uniqueness, which in turn can change consumers' perceptions of themselves. Cool perception not only enhances consumers' sense of belonging, self-identity and social identity, but also reduces consumers' insecurities. Some studies suggest that perceptions of coolness help consumers maintain and present their independent, autonomous and individual selves.

Interaction is the basis and essential feature of virtual communities. This interactive process not only expresses the self-confidence of the person, but also increases the presence of the other party, so that both parties can move forward together towards the path of self-presentation.

Consumers perceive the coolness of the product and use it to show off their personality, while interactivity, through its emphasis on social interaction, satisfies both the user's need for perceived control over the performance of self-presentation. Users then have the desire to purchase apparel in the virtual world. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H3a: The desire for online self-presentation mediates the relationship between cool and purchase intention.

H3b: The desire for online self-presentation mediates the relationship between interactivity and purchase intention.

All hypotheses for the base model are summarized in Figure 1.
3 Data and methods

3.1 Variable measurement

The scales in this study were all generated from existing scales, and the items were somewhat modified to meet the context of the study in order to make the items more relevant to the situation in the virtual world, as shown in Table 1. The measurement items for all of the scale variables were measured by a 5-point scoring method. Respondents answered that they strongly disagreed to strongly agreed on a scale of 1-5.

3.2 Reliability and validity

SPSS 20 and AMOS 26 were used for data analysis. A Cronbach’s α of ≥0.8 represents acceptable and high reliability. A CR value of ≥0.7 indicates high reliability. AVE should be > 0.5. In this study, all constructs had AVE and CR values exceeding suggested values, indicating adequate convergent validity and composite reliability (Table 1). As presented in Table 2, discriminant validity was verified because each construct’s square root of AVE was higher than that of all constructs.

3.3 Path inspection

AMOS 26 was used to test the hypotheses using structural equation modeling (SEM). SEM can be used to examine causal relationships between multiple latent variables. Several goodness-of-fit indices were used in the current study to assess the theoretical model’s fit. Cmin / DF = 1.598, RMSEA = 0.054, 0.10, CFI = 0.924 > 0.9, NFI = 0.951 > 0.9, IFI = 0.981 > 0.9 were the fitted parameters. All of the indicators were within the standard ranges, indicating that the model fit well and that the paths were significant at 95% confidence intervals. Figure 2 depicts the structural model results, which show that all current hypotheses are supported.

Table 1. Variable measurement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Measurement items</th>
<th>Factor load</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cool</td>
<td>COL1: I think virtual apparel is fashionable.</td>
<td>0.866</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COL2: I think virtual apparel is charming.</td>
<td>0.900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>COL3: I think virtual apparel is creative.</td>
<td>0.899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>INT1: I can interact and give feedback to friends and others in the virtual world.</td>
<td>0.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INT2: I like my friends and other people in the virtual world.</td>
<td>0.920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INT3: I can compete with others in the virtual world and feel happy in the process.</td>
<td>0.901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire for online self-presentation</td>
<td>PRN1: In the virtual world, I want to make a favorite version of myself.</td>
<td>0.903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRN2: In the virtual world, I want to project a likeable image.</td>
<td>0.796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PRN3: In the virtual world, I want to present an image about myself.</td>
<td>0.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchase intention</td>
<td>PI1: The probability that I would consider buying virtual apparel in the near future is high.</td>
<td>0.818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PI2: My willingness to buy virtual apparel in the near future is high.</td>
<td>0.879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PI3: The likelihood of my purchasing virtual apparel in the near future is high.</td>
<td>0.979</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Discriminant validity test.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COL</th>
<th>INT</th>
<th>PRN</th>
<th>PI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.696</td>
<td>0.459</td>
<td>0.483</td>
<td>0.352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.847</td>
<td>0.548</td>
<td>0.548</td>
<td>0.425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.800</td>
<td>0.701</td>
<td>0.701</td>
<td>0.800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Research model.

Figure 2. Standardized estimates of the theoretical framework.

3.4 Mediating effect test

Bootstrapping was utilized to investigate the mediation effects. The mediation effects were investigated in this work utilizing the bootstrapping approach in AMOS 26 to estimate the total, indirect, and direct impacts. The
statistical significance was investigated using 5000 bootstrap samples, and results were found within a 95% confidence interval. Table 3 shows the estimates for the indirect and direct pathways. When the confidence interval did not contain 0, a mediating effect was confirmed. H3aH3b were supported, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Mediating effects of desire for online self-presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pathway</th>
<th>Est.</th>
<th>Std.error</th>
<th>Lower Bound</th>
<th>Upper Bound</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COL→PRN→PI</td>
<td>0.082</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>0.181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INT→PRN→PI</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>0.044</td>
<td>0.036</td>
<td>0.211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 Conclusions

First, this paper develops a relationship model between cool, interactivity, desire for self-presentation online and purchase intention for virtual apparel. And collects data through questionnaires to verified that consumers who have strong perceptions of clothing coolness and virtual world interactivity will have stronger purchase desire. Furthermore, the desire for presenting oneself online significantly predicts one's inclination to buy virtual appealing. Self-presentation mirrors consumers' social demands in some way, and this motive will drive consumers to buy since virtual apparel allows them to transmit their social image.

This study analyzes and explains the purchase motivation of virtual apparel using self-presentation theory and finds the driving action of self-presentation desire on the purchase intention of virtual apparel, increasing the application of the theory. At the same time, the analysis of factors that stimulate the purchase of virtual apparel in the meta-universe has a reference role in the construction of future virtual scenarios and the development of social functions. Finally, this paper only considers two factors that affect consumers' self-presentation; other factors may also affect consumers' purchase of virtual apparel.

Acknowledgments

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References