

# Hedonic/Utilitarian Cool Attitudes: A Comparison of Young Female and Male Consumers



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## Opinion

Young consumers are considered fashion innovators because they tend to accept, adopt, and use new products more frequently than any other consumer group. Young consumers are appealing to commercial apparel marketers because their purchasing power has increased over the years and their buying behavior can influence the acceptance or rejection/avoidance of new products within a few months after they are introduced to the marketplace [1]. Apparel marketers use the concept of cool as a marketing tool to stimulate young consumers to purchase. A cool lifestyle reflects consumers' desire for novelty. As such, marketers that develop profitable new cool products fulfill consumers' tastes for novelty. In general, consumers purchase products for both hedonic and utilitarian values in shopping venues [2]. Specifically, women tend to enjoy hedonic shopping more than men, who often shop only to accomplish an instrumental need and do not engage in "shopping for shopping's sake" [3]. Chang et al. [4] find that male shoppers tend to possess more utilitarian constructs for apparel shopping satisfaction than hedonic constructs. From these studies, we expect to find a gender difference in hedonic/utilitarian attitudes toward purchasing cool clothing. Thus:

**a. Hypothesis 1:** Young female consumers exhibit more positive hedonic attitudes toward cool clothing than young male consumers.

**b. Hypothesis 2:** Young female consumers exhibit more negative utilitarian attitudes toward cool clothing than young male consumers.

Consumers' self-image can have a strong influence on behavior in the marketplace [5]. In particular, consumers' actual self-image is important to marketers because consumers seek out brands that match the self-image they want to project to others [6]. Noh & Mosier [7] find that young consumers with high levels of actual self-image are not interested in utilitarian values

when purchasing cool products. As such, we suggest that young female consumers' actual self-image influences their hedonic attitudes toward purchasing cool clothing. Thus:

**c. Hypothesis 3:** Young female consumers' actual self-image is positively related to their singular hedonic attitudes toward cool clothing.

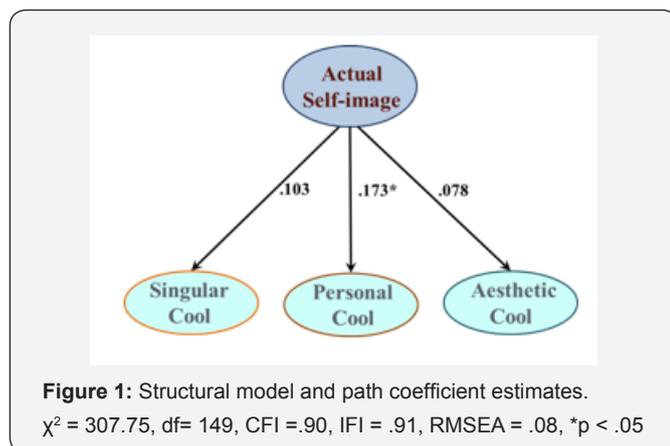
**d. Hypothesis 4:** Young female consumers' actual self-image is positively related to their personal hedonic attitudes toward cool clothing.

**e. Hypothesis 5:** Young female consumers' actual self-image is positively related to their aesthetic hedonic attitudes toward cool clothing.

This study examines the difference in hedonic/utilitarian attitudes toward cool clothing, between young female and male consumer groups and the causal relationship between actual self-image and hedonic attitudes toward cool products for young female consumers. To measure actual self-image, we used the Actual Self-Concept scales ("e.g., I see myself in regard to being unattractive/attractive") [8]. We also employed the measurement scale related to the concept of cool (singular, personal, aesthetic, functional, and quality cool) [9]. College students enrolled in 11 different courses at a major US university participated in the main study. Of the respondents, 165 were women (62.3%) and 96 were men (36.2%). Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 28 years, with a mean age of 21 years. Most of the respondents were Caucasian (63.0%). The majority of the respondents had an average family income of \$67,500 with an average discretionary spending of \$70.97 per week.

We employed multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and single-group Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the developed hypotheses. The MANOVA results revealed significant differences in the three hedonic (singular, personal, and aesthetic

hedonic cool) attitudes toward cool clothing between the two groups ( $F=14.82$ ,  $p < .001$ , partial  $\chi^2=.225$ ), in support of  $H_1$  but not  $H_2$ . That is, young female consumers are more likely to be in a hedonic than utilitarian mindset when shopping for cool products. We conducted single-group SEM with the maximum likelihood estimation to examine the hypothesized relationships (from  $H_3$  to  $H_5$ ). The results indicated that the proposed conceptual model had a significant chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2=307.75$ ,  $df=149$ ,  $p=0.000$ ), and other model fit indices also were below acceptable cutoff levels ( $CFI=0.90$ ;  $IFI=0.91$ ). However, the RMSEA was 0.08, indicating a moderate fit of the model [10]. Therefore, we assessed the path coefficients of the model corresponding to the hypotheses. As seen in (Figure 1) and the regression coefficient for the path from actual self-image to the personal cool attitudes was statistically significant. The SEM results indicate that young female consumers' actual self-image is positively related to their personal hedonic attitudes toward cool clothing. Therefore, the results provide support for  $H_4$  but not for  $H_3$  and  $H_5$ . Young female consumers with a high level of actual self-image desire to purchase cool products to reflect their personality and individuality and to fit their lifestyles.



Young female consumers' actual self-image is a crucial factor to the success of cool clothing products; however, no studies

have examined the relationship between this critical factor and hedonic attitudes toward cool clothing. These findings provide commercial marketers with some valuable information about young female consumers' purchasing behaviors toward cool products, which then allows them to develop strategies to increase sales of new products targeted to young female consumers based on a more in-depth understanding of perceptions of cool. The findings offer guidance to apparel commercial marketers in determining which hedonic cool products are congruent with their targeted young female consumers' actual self-image.

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