

Predicting Fashion Involvement by Media Use, Social Comparison, and Lifestyle: An Interaction Model

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This study theoretically connects a host of communication and sociological variables with individuals' cognitive fashion involvement. Our empirical model tests an interaction effect through which media use, social comparison, and lifestyle produce a joint effect on fashion involvement. A random sample of 500 young Chinese individuals, ages 18 to 30 years, were interviewed via telephone. Results show that (1) media modality (i.e., traditional and new media) hardly makes any difference in explaining variance observed in fashion involvement; (2) fashion-related content across different forms of media is highly congruent, revealing between-media invariance; and (3) the persuasive power of fashion media is demonstrated in young people's professed willingness to adapt their appearance to the norms set by the media.

Keywords: moderation effect, social comparison, fashion involvement, media use, lifestyle

The task of defining fashion involvement appears deceptively simple because the meaning of the concept seems closely confined within the adornment industry, brands, and product (H.-S. Kim, 2005). A closer look, however, reveals the conceptually daunting side of an intricate person-object relationship (O'Casey, 2004). As the nature of that relationship spans practically all human activities, studies of fashion involvement inevitably have to address issues relevant to almost all academic disciplines.

Existing literature has identified fashion magazines and websites as the two primary sources of knowledge and feelings about fashion, as well as of consumption intention of fashion products (e.g., Evrard & Aurier, 1996; C. Martin, 1998). For instance, exposure to a thin-ideal image tends to prime social comparison (e.g., Bessenoff, 2006; Festinger, 1954). When adopting criteria for social comparison, people typically rely on mass media for guidance, reassurance, and, from time to time, even rationalization for their attitudinal and behavioral conversion between brands, designers, and products; this is particularly so among younger people (K. Chan, 2008; Sohn, 2009; S. H. Zhou, Zhou, & Xue, 2008). Individuals locked

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into the mindset of social comparison tend to pick up cues from mass media and use these cues as heuristics for the emulation of role models (Morrison, Kalin, & Morrison, 2004; Tiggemann & McGill, 2004). Some scholars view this pattern in terms of mass media's power to define success and shape career and lifestyle aspirations (e.g., Cheung & Yue, 2000). Part of the persuasive power of mass media in this regard stems from its selective representation of reality (e.g., idols or models), giving potency and legitimacy to certain ideas and behaviors, and thus raising the salience of some aspects of fashion (e.g., thin, masculine, gender neutrality) while reducing others (Botta, 1999; M. C. Martin & Kennedy, 1993).

When it comes to fashion perceptions, considerable discrepancies exist between Western and Chinese cultures in the way people understand and handle complex relationships among self, others, and the media (Davis, 1992; McCracken, 1988; Simmel, 2001; Wong & Ahuvia, 1998). Not surprisingly, research has well documented the claim that individuality has a more dominant place in Western than in Chinese society, where norm conformity typically reigns (K. Chan, 2008; Giacalone & Rosenfeld, 1989). As such, material products of fashion are more likely to take on symbolic meanings such as privilege and social status in China than in the West (K. Chan, 2008). According to Hu (1944), face (*mianzi*), or how one looks in front of others, in Chinese societies has greater centrality in maintenance (following the routine) than initiation (breaking the mold) because *mianzi* is largely propped up by its value as the benchmark of success and good taste (Wong & Ahuvia, 1998).

With social comparison as the larger research context and media persuasion as the main locus of study, we raise the following research questions: How is involvement in fashion connected to patterns of communication? What is the role of media exposure in the construction and consolidation of fashion involvement? What is the relationship between media exposure and fashion involvement when lifestyle and social comparison are taken into consideration?

Involvement in Fashion

One way to explicate fashion involvement traditionally is to see it as a joint product of exogenous societal-level factors such as income, peer influence, and communication, or institutional environment and endogenous psychological factors such as ego, values, beliefs, and dissonance (Rothschild, 1979). Another and more recent approach is to define fashion involvement in relation to attachment, risk perception, and capability of self-image improvement (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander, 2000; Khare & Rakesh, 2010). Our study focuses on material possessions and psychological attachment to these possessions, in keeping with a line of inquiry that started in the late 1980s (e.g., Mittal & Lee, 1989; O'Cass, 2000; Ohanian, 1990). Cognitive and affective commitment to a target (be it an idea, an object, or an action) is usually accompanied by mental resources channeled toward a quest of information relevant to that target. According to H. Kim (2008), involvement determines one's tendency to pay close attention to products or to engage actively in particular product-acquisition activities. Highly involved individuals evaluate a product more smoothly and show heavy reliance on marketing information (Chang, 2010).

If it is conceptualized not as an object but as a set of behaviors (Vieira, 2009) or a coded one (Davis, 1992), fashion then is instrumentally linked with the pursuit of happiness. Richins (1994)

presented empirical evidence for a causal mechanism through which individuals scoring high on materialistic measures were more inclined to express themselves through exterior appearance such as clothing. In the same vein, Workman and Lee (2011) interpreted clothing to be a reflection of cultural, economic, and social status. Clothing acts as "a filter between the person and the surrounding social world", and its values are interpreted as being "intimately tied to the self" and as forming "the core of one's personal identity" (Hitlin & Piliavin, 2004, p. 382). Put differently, under certain circumstances, people use fashion both to distinguish themselves from others, to highlight personal values, and to integrate with others in a bid to follow group norms (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Piamphongsant & Mandhachitara, 2008).

Through socialization, individuals either learn to adopt or are assimilated into enduring sets of values and belief systems, some of which overlap with their worldviews and ideology. The notion that fashion clothing is an integral part of life, "a meaningful and engaging activity" (O'Cass, 2004, p. 870), places an implicit emphasis on people's internalized values and beliefs that are capable of motivating and guiding cognitive elaboration, impression management, and purchasing behaviors. Fashion addicts or people obsessed with appearance management tend to think of it frequently and are likely to dwell on fashion-related self-references much more often than those who do not (O'Cass, 2000).

Media Exposure

In the study of fashion involvement, one cannot underestimate the roles played by the media, not only in disseminating information, conveying images, and interpreting events but also in defining norms, setting trends, building role models, and legitimizing a given lifestyle. Moreover, fashion media promote a desired lifestyle by showing "how beauty, sexuality, career success, culinary skill, and social status can be sold and bought in the consumer marketplace" (Croteau & Hoynes, 2003, p. 188). In the process of media's linguistic representation of the cultural industry, consumption of luxury fashion is drowned in symbolic values (B. Zhang & Kim, 2013).

Most existing studies treat media use as equivalent to exposure, and it is most often indexed by asking respondents how often (usually in a week) they use a specific medium (Hollander, 2006). Furthermore, sociologists who emphasize the role of social relations in shaping individuals tend to give significant credit to mass media for being a powerful socializing agent in almost all aspects of people's lives. Studies that examine the linkage between media exposure and involvement typically loop back to the fundamental polemic about whether involvement leads to attitude change and how and when the process takes place (Hollander, 2006).

Furthermore, "the dominant models within social psychology view involvement or personal relevance as a cornerstone in how or whether people deal with new information and communication" (Hollander, 2006, pp. 377–378). Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2003) acknowledged that idealized images of men and women are an easy staple in media content, and their presence is so pervasive that exposure to these images is almost inevitable.

Social Comparison

Theories of social comparison are built on the assumption that people possess a shared need for self-evaluation. A common strategy to make that evaluation is self-referencing or comparison with similar others within groups and in face-to-face settings (Festinger, 1954). Regardless of whether people make judgments of others, the comparative judgment in social interactions has been extensively studied across decades of research (e.g., Foley, Ngo, & Loi, 2016; Kruglanski & Maysseless, 1990; Tylka & Sabik, 2010).

Despite numerous replications and convergence of findings, some of the later studies have yielded results that marked a consistent movement away from the original expectations. For instance, scholars found that individuals also compare themselves with dissimilar others (M. C. Martin & Kennedy, 1993), beyond face-to-face situations, and with impersonal images in advertising (e.g., Engeln-Maddox, 2005). In addition to attitude and opinions, social comparison also involves self-improvement and self-enhancement (e.g., Brown, Ferris, Heller, & Keeping, 2007; Eddleston, 2009).

To the extent that social comparison is an integral part of cognition, it has been found to operate in two opposite directions. Downward comparison indicates some measure of contempt for people who are deemed or perceived to have an inferior appearance, mostly in terms of cosmetics, clothing, fashion accessories, and/or the air with which they carry themselves. At the other end of the continuum, upward comparison refers to admiration of people who appear superior to oneself in those regards (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Olson & Evans, 1999). As expected, these two types of comparison produce very different emotional responses, with the former usually leading to positive moods, a sense of superiority, and high self-esteem, and the latter resulting in negative emotions (Lam & Huang, 2013; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004), loathing of self and others, and low self-esteem (Morse & Gergen, 1970).

Interestingly, forces of social comparison have been shown to drive individuals to sites of information and images where negative consequences of egoistic damage are more likely to occur (Hendriks & Burgoon, 2009; Richins, 1991). Beauty norms and an ideal body image are a case in point. Researchers have found that television plays an important role in shaping appearance norms, albeit occasionally at the cost of self-loathing (e.g., Botta, 1999; Sohn, 2009). Similarly, by virtue of its specialization, fashion magazines hold an even stronger potential to trigger mental mechanisms of social comparison, more so for younger than for older people (Richins, 1991; Sohn, 2009).

Lifestyle

Early lifestyle research was mostly contextualized in product marketing and consumption behavior. Plummer (1974) argued that lifestyle segmentation includes the concepts of lifestyle patterns and market segmentation that put consumers into different groups based on their activities, interests, and opinions. Zablocki and Kanter (1976) noted that individuals share a tendency of self-segmentation through things they like to do and the way they spend their leisure time and income. Accordingly, the Values, Attitudes, and Lifestyles (VALS) measurement was developed and used to separate individuals into eight groups by their psychological attributes, demographics, and consuming behaviors: Innovators, Thinkers, Achievers, Experiencers, Believers, Strivers, Makers, and Survivors.

The segmentation model of VALS subsumes three primary motivational dimensions: ideals, achievement, and self-expression. Among the eight distinct lifestyle types, Thinkers and Believers are motivated by ideals, and their behaviors are guided by knowledge and principles; Achievers and Strivers are motivated by excellence in performance and exhibit their success to friends through flaunting material possessions; Experiencers and Makers demonstrate the motivation of self-expression. They enjoy social activities, diverse experiences, and risk seeking; Innovators have all three motivations to varying degrees, but Survivors do not show any prominent motivation (SRI Consulting Business Intelligence, 2003). In fashion marketing studies, a typical consumer does not make purchases solely out of utilitarian concerns (Kahle, 1985). As a type of consumption motivation and a source of desirable social rewards (McCracken, 1988), acquisition of fashion products in general and clothing in particular could help establish identity and communicate social differentiation (J. K. C. Chan & Leung, 2005). Achievement and self-expression-oriented lifestyles therefore constitute an important factor that precedes fashion involvement.

In this study, we treat lifestyle as a contingent factor for media's impact on fashion involvement for two reasons. First, despite its close connection with one's ascribed social status, the general pattern of lifestyle is usually formulated at an early age and tends to be an enduring personal character. Second, as a trait, lifestyle is more susceptible to change in the external environment than are innate attitudes and worldviews (e.g., Harcar & Kaynak, 2008).

Research Context

Perhaps nothing is more representative of today's Chinese popular culture than brand names, designer products, vogue, and fashion. Since the 1980s, China has experienced waves of great economic booms spurred by policies encouraging reform and opening up. China's annual economic growth rate has routinely topped upward of 8% to 10% during the past 15 years (Lei, 2007). During the late 1980s and the early 1990s, the notion of "postsocialism" appeared in discussions related to globalization (Liu, 2004; N. Wang, 1993). Various discourses mainly respond to economic and material environmental changes in the hope of introducing pluralistic global culture to China (X. D. Zhang, 2001, 2008) and connecting China with the postsocialist world (Erjavec, 2003). Global cultural interactions cause a "hybrid post-revolutionary culture" in China (Liu, 2004, p. 3). Fashion terms such as consumerism, consumer society, and middle class can be encountered quite often in pop culture. These materialistic and symbolic resources, very much an ideology in themselves, have been shown to have the power to override political debates in China (Paek & Pan, 2009).

The advent of commercialization in China has given brand-name and luxury products a revered status as the symbol of success and the most visible showcase of face (*mianzi*) within people's social network (Hui, Zhou, Han, & Kim, 2003; C. J. Wang & Lin, 2009; Wei & Pan, 1999; L. Zhou & Hui, 2003). Consumption in China is "not just meant to meet basic needs but also to fulfill a social need for identification, status and social recognition" (Thompson, 2010, p. 73).

Conformity to social norms and cultural values representing collectivist cultures continues to persist, even though the influence of globalization looms large (Corbu, 2009; Jin & Kang, 2011). Clothing reflects economic development, cultural value, and social norms (Workman & Lee, 2011). Apparel

selection is affected not only by individual's tastes and lifestyles but also by particular social norms (Khare, Mishra, & Parveen, 2012). In a collectivist society, people use fashion clothing to manage and exhibit their group affiliations (Banister & Hogg, 2004; Piamphongsant & Mandhachitara, 2008) and to represent the symbolic values endorsed by the group (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006). Individuals actively look for the latest fashion information cues approved by the group they look up to (Auty & Elliott, 1998) and adopt fashion clothing styles associated with these group norms (McCracken, 1988) in a bid to gain group acceptance and membership (Auty & Elliott, 1998).

In the process, perceptions of socio-ideological surroundings also matter. For example, political orientation plays a part in China's fashion industry as well. In Mao's era, whole populations were dressed in gray, black, white, army green, and navy blue, colors that embody the schemes of Chinese puritan communism (Zhao, 1997). In the 1990s, rampant mass consumerism increased Chinese people's interest in Western fashion styles. "The nature of the symbolic values attached to fashionable clothing depends on the cultural and political history of the country and the characteristics and variety of the ethnic groups of which it is composed" (Crane & Bovone, 2006, p. 324).

The rise in people's purchase power and the will to consume has become an important consideration in policy formulation. People have started to pay much more attention to style and taste as a means to expressing differences, consolidating identity, and, ultimately, maintaining social status. Chinese consumers capable of purchasing luxury goods fall roughly into two social strata: the super-rich and the rising middleclass ("Branding in China," 2007). An almost perfect relationship can be detected between people's social anchoring, their attitude toward spending, and patterns of their actual purchase behavior (e.g., Huang, 2005; Lu, 2006).

The young Chinese generation has been found to exhibit a particularly strong propensity for brand-name products (Kalish, 2005; Kwan, Yeung, & Au, 2003). Western values of individualism and consumerism have eroded centuries-old domination of collectivism for Chinese young people (Stevenson & Zusho, 2002). In their 2010 China Consumer Survey, McKinsey and Company reported that Chinese consumers were creating a distinct identity. "They have not only distinctive tastes and priorities but also unique ways of choosing and buying products" (Atsmon, Dixit, Magni, & St-Maurice, 2010, p. 12). Guided by previous research, we raise the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship among media exposure, social comparison, lifestyle, and fashion involvement?

RQ2: What is the relationship between media exposure and lifestyle when involvement in fashion is high? Do lifestyles motivated by achievement and self-expression moderate the relationship between media exposure and fashion involvement?

RQ3: What is the relationship between social comparison and lifestyle? What kind of lifestyle can predict social comparison?

Existing studies have found that people who engage in upward social comparison show a stronger desire for more possessions and consumption (Ogden & Venkat, 2001). Young people are attracted to brands endorsed by their celebrity icons because they want to strive for the idealized self-identity (Swann, Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). Social comparison is quite often triggered by aspiration to be fashionable, rich, attractive, and respected (K. Chan, 2008). Individuals who experience social comparison with ideal images on media would like to create inflated and unrealistically high evaluations of their icons' living standards (Kasser, 2002). Considering the relationship between social comparison and lifestyle, we ask:

RQ4: If the relationship between involvement in fashion and exposure to fashion media depends on one's lifestyle, does social comparison account for such an effect?

Method

Sample

Data for this study were collected from a telephone survey in 2011. A total of 500 young residents in Guangzhou, a large southern metropolis, were selected through random digital dialing methods. Slightly more than half (53.8%) of the interviewees were males, and 46.2% were females. A total of 59% of the respondents were between 18 and 24 years of age, whereas the rest were between 25 and 30 years (41%). Respondents with junior college or college education constituted 63.6% of the sample. The unmarried individuals occupied a much larger percentage than the married, which were 75% and 25% respectively. Table 1 shows the details.

Table 1. Sample Statistics.

Demographics	%
Sex	
Male	53.80
Female	46.20
Age (in years)	
18–24	59.00
25–30	41.00
Education	
High school	22.40
Junior college and college	63.60
Postgraduate and above	2.20
Others	11.80
Income (CNY)	
Less than 40,000 (include 40,000)	19.40
40,001–80,000 (include 80,000)	25.00
80,001–100,000 (include 100,000)	7.60
100,001–140,000 (include 140,000)	36.80
140,001–200,000 (include 200,000)	6.00
More than 200,000	5.20
Marital status	
Unmarried	75.00
Married	25.00

Note. $N = 500$.

Measurements

Fashion involvement was measured using four 5-point Likert-scale items (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*) based on the measurement of product involvement originally designed by O’Cass (2000). The four questions were (1) “Fashion clothing is a significant part of my life”; (2) “I am very much involved in fashion clothing”; (3) “I would say that fashion clothing is central to my identity as a person”; and (4) “I pay a lot of attention to fashion clothing.” Reliability score of the four items was adequate (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .72$). A factor analysis (principal component oblimin rotation, eigenvalue > 1) generated one single factor that we labeled the Fashion Involvement Scale (see Table 2). This factor was used in subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Factor Analysis (Principal Component With Oblimin Rotation) on Fashion Involvement Indicators.

	Fashion Involvement
Fashion clothing is a significant part of my life.	.76
I am very much involved in fashion clothing.	.78
I would say that fashion clothing is central to my identity as a person.	.80
I pay a lot of attention to fashion clothing.	.63
Variance accounted for (%)	70.00

Note. Loadings on the factor are sufficiently clean that no cross-loaders at or larger than .25 are observed ($N = 500$).

For media exposure, respondents were asked to report how frequently they used two forms of media: fashion websites and fashion magazines. A 3-point Likert-scale item (1 = *never*; 2 = *sometimes*; 3 = *often*) was used. This was followed by a few more measures, such as “How many fashion magazines do you often read?”; “How much time do you spend on website browsing every time?”; and “How many fashion websites do you often browse?”

For lifestyle measurement, 10 items were selected from the Values, Attitudes, and Lifestyles measure (VALS: SRI Consulting Business Intelligence, 2003) using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *mostly disagree*; 5 = *mostly agree*). Items concerned with special cultural issues (e.g., Biblical references, the mention of the federal government) were excluded. Several other items that are detached from the Chinese social reality or are outside the scope of daily conversations (e.g., racial, sex, bipartisan issues) were also excluded. Still others that failed to meet the loading criterion of at least .60 (McCroskey & Young, 1979) were likewise dropped. An exploratory factor analysis of the 10 items resulted in four clean factors in accordance with the conceptualized distinctions among Strivers, Experiencers, Thinkers, and Survivors. Together, the four factors account for 63.4% of the total variance (see Table 3).

Table 3. Factor Analysis (Principal Component With Oblimin Rotation) on Lifestyle Indicators.

	Striver	Experiencer	Survivor	Thinker
I like to dress in the latest fashions.	.77			
I follow the latest trends and fashions.	.76			
I dress more fashionable than most people.	.73			
I want to be considered fashionable.	.64			
I am always looking for a thrill.		.82		
I like a lot of excitement in my life.		.71		
I am really interested in only a few things.			.81	
I must admit that my interests are somewhat narrow and limited.			.80	
I am often interested in theories.				.85
I would like to understand more about how the universe works.				.74
Variance accounted for (%)	28.71	13.23	12.41	9.05

Note. Loadings on the four factors are sufficiently clean that no cross-loaders at or larger than .25 are observed. Actual cross-loading figures are therefore omitted for ease of reading ($N = 500$).

The first factor, Strivers (eigenvalue = 2.87; variance = 28.71%) contains four items, characterizing people who are fashion conscious, fun seeking, and mindful about what others think of them. The second factor, Experiencers (eigenvalue = 1.32; variance = 13.23%), includes two items representing young people who seek variety and excitement and savor the new, the offbeat, and the risky. The third factor, Survivors (eigenvalue = 1.24; variance = 12.41%), subsume people who are the least motivated. They are comfortable with what they are familiar with and are primarily concerned with safety and security. They focus on meeting survival needs rather than fulfilling desires. The fourth factor, Thinkers (eigenvalue = 0.91; variance = 9.05%), are pragmatists who value order, knowledge, and responsibility and look for durability, utility, and value in the products they buy. Taken together, the four lifestyle types were conceptually consistent with the theoretical expectations described by SRI Consulting Business Intelligence (2003).

Social comparison was measured with four items developed by Krucmar, Giles, and Helme (2008) using 5-point Likert-scale items (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). The items were (1) "I compare my body and looks to actors and celebrities that I see in magazines or websites"; (2) "I compare my dress and adornments to actors and celebrities that I see in magazines or websites"; (3) "At parties or other social events, I compare my body and physical appearance to those of others"; and (4) "At parties or other social events, I compare my dress and adornments to those of others." Reliability of the four items was more than acceptable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$). A factor analysis (principal component oblimin rotation, eigenvalue > 1) generated a single factor labeled as the Social Comparison Scale (see Table 4). The factor accounted for 58% of the total variance.

Table 4. Factor Analysis (Principal Component With Oblimin Rotation) on Social Comparison Indicators.

	Social Comparison
I compare my body and look to actors' and celebrities' bodies and looks that I see in magazines or websites.	.73
I compare my dress and adornments to actors' and celebrities' dress and adornments that I see in magazines or websites.	.76
At parties or other social events, I compare my body and physical appearance to the bodies and physical appearance of others.	.81
At parties or other social events, I compare my dress and adornments to dress and adornments of others.	.78
Variance accounted for (%)	58.98

Note. Loadings on the factor are sufficiently clean that no cross-loaders at or larger than .25 are observed ($N = 500$).

Demographic variables include gender (1 = *male*; 2 = *female*), age (measured in two-year increments), education (ordinal measures from primary school, junior high school, senior high school to junior college, college, and graduate school), household annual income (total income from all members of the family), marital status (1 = *unmarried*; 2 = *married*), and occupation.

Results

General Pattern of Media Use

According to the results, gender was significantly correlated with media use ($\beta_{\text{magazine}} = .14$; $p < .01$; $\beta_{\text{website}} = .13$; $p < .01$). Females, compared with males, were more likely to use fashion media frequently. The other demographic factors such as education level, income, marital status, and age were not associated with media use.

More than 68% of the respondents mentioned that they read fashion magazines sometimes, and close to 20% of the respondents read them often. More than 40% of respondents replied that they did not regularly read a particular fashion magazine and optionally selected different ones to read.

Among these respondents, nearly 34% used fashion websites very often, and more than 52% used websites sometimes. About 24% spent half an hour on obtaining fashion information online each time, and nearly 12% spent one hour online every time. There was no significant difference between males and females in selecting fashion media. Both fashion magazines and websites were popular among young people.

Research Question 1

Regression analyses were conducted to test the predictive power of the three norms. Across demographics, females were significantly more likely than males to pay close attention to fashion clothing ($\beta = .17$, $p < .001$), a finding that is neither surprising nor inconsistent with prior research reports (e.g.,

Auty & Elliott, 1998; Hourigan & Bougoure, 2012). Marital status was significantly but negatively related to fashion involvement ($\beta = -.10, p < .05$). The rest of the three demographic attributes, particularly income and education, were completely absent of significant prediction.

Controlling for demographics, lifestyle emerged as the strongest predictor, accounting for 19% of the variance in fashion involvement. Three of four lifestyle types (factors) significantly related to fashion involvement. Being highly self-conscious and fashion conscious, Striver was fully equivalent to mental or behavioral commitment to fashion as the strongest beta indicates ($\beta = .41, p < .001$). Experiencer was another strong indicator of fashion involvement ($\beta = .12, p < .01$). Survivor was the only lifestyle that was mildly but significantly opposed to fashion involvement ($\beta = -.09, p < .05$). Survivor's consumption pattern mainly oriented to low price and pragmatic purposes, therefore, it was not difficult to understand its inclination against consumerism and fashion issues.

The second strongest factor was media exposure, accounting for an additional 14.30% of the variance in fashion involvement. Results showed markedly similar patterns in the predictive structure across the two variables (see Table 5). Fashion website surfing registered a slightly higher impact on fashion involvement than magazine reading did ($\beta_{\text{magazine}} = .21, p < .001$; $\beta_{\text{website}} = .25, p < .001$). Given the high correlation between website and magazine exposure ($r = .52, p < .001$), it appeared as if individuals paid more attention to fashion information than to the channel on which information was disseminated.

Table 5. Predicting Fashion Involvement.

Factors	<i>r</i>	β
Demographics		
Gender	.15***	.17***
Age	-.02	.03
Education	-.06	-.07
Marital status	-.05	-.10*
Income	.02	.05
<i>R</i> ² (%)		3.60
Lifestyles		
Strivers	.44***	.41***
Experiencers	.17***	.12**
Survivors	-.06	-.09
Thinkers	.06	.04
Incremental <i>R</i> ² (%)		18.90
Social Comparison		
	.32***	.32***
Incremental <i>R</i> ² (%)		10.50
Media exposure		
Magazine	.32***	.21***
Website	.34***	.25***
Incremental <i>R</i> ² (%)		14.30

Note. Entries are standardized OLS regression beta coefficients ($N = 500$). All figures controlled for demographics.
all values without * mean $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Social comparison was the third strongest predictor ($\beta = .32, p < .001$), accounting for 10.50% of the variance in fashion involvement. Individuals followed upward with high standard and tried best to get close to the standard through wearing fashion clothes.

Research Question 2

RQ2 is mainly concerned with the possibility of a moderation effect. Moderation is the examination of the statistical interaction between two independent variables in predicting a dependent variable (Jose, 2013). Figure 1 shows a graphical depiction.

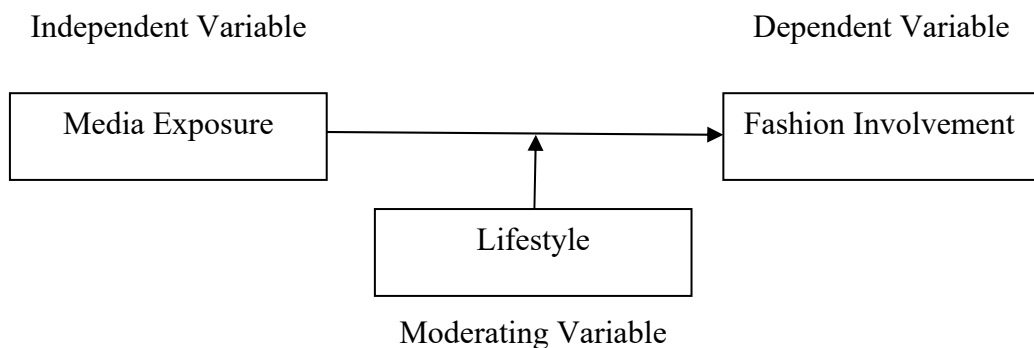


Figure 1. Moderation effect.

A multiple regression model was performed to investigate whether the association between media exposure and fashion involvement depends on the two aspects of lifestyle (Striver and Experiencer). In the process, an interaction term was created by multiplying the Striver and Experiencer component of the lifestyle factors with magazine and website exposure, respectively. Then media exposure, lifestyle, and the interaction were entered into a simultaneous regression model. Regression analysis betas controlling for demographics for the four interaction terms were identical ($\beta = .41, p < .001$ for Striver and magazine; $\beta = .39, p < .001$ for Striver and website; $\beta = .204, p < .001$ for Experiencer and magazine; and $\beta = .201, p < .001$ for Experiencer and website), suggesting that the effect of media exposure on fashion involvement depended on the two lifestyle factors (see Table 6).

Findings implied at least two plausible explanations: (1) Consistent with Table 5, exposure to the two forms of media did not seem to show discriminant validity in terms of exhibiting distinct paths of influence. Although they were conceptually unique, fashion magazines and websites appeared to be interchangeable empirically; and (2) this was because, as the data pattern suggested, the two were subsumed under some broader concept, such as fashion information or fashion image.

Table 6. OLS Regression: Joint Effect of Striver Lifestyle and Media Exposure on Fashion Involvement.

Factors	β
Demographics	
$R^2(\%)$	3.60**
Striver lifestyle	
Incremental $R^2(\%)$	17.30***
Experiencer lifestyle	
Incremental $R^2(\%)$	3.90***
Media exposure	
Incremental $R^2(\%)$	14.30***
Interaction term	
Striver \times Magazine	.41***
Incremental $R^2(\%)$	16.30***
Striver \times Website	.39***
Incremental $R^2(\%)$	15.00***
Experiencer \times Magazine	.204***
Incremental $R^2(\%)$	3.90***
Experiencer \times Website	.201***
Incremental $R^2(\%)$	3.80***

Note. Entries are standardized OLS regression beta coefficients ($N = 500$). All figures controlled for demographics.

all values without * mean $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Research Question 3

Again, several regression analyses were conducted to examine the impact of particular kinds of lifestyle on social comparison. Controlling for demographics, Striver turned out to be the strongest predictor ($\beta = .42, p < .001$). Experiencer ranked second ($\beta = .09, p < .05$). Neither Survivor nor Thinker had much to do with social comparison (see Table 7). Thinkers would like to keep their eyes on abstract or psychological issues instead of social comparison. Survivors were excluded in social comparison because of the limitation of economic and social resources.

Table 7. Predicting Social Comparison.

Factors	<i>r</i>	β
Demographics		
Gender	-.014	-.002
Age	.041	.044
Education	.048	.045
Marital status	.006	-.002
Income	.069	.063
<i>R</i> ² (%)		0.8
Lifestyles		
Strivers	.416***	.393***
Experiencers	.228***	.094*
Survivors	.031	.035
Thinkers	.096*	.014
Incremental <i>R</i> ² (%)		19.60

Note. Entries are standardized OLS regression beta coefficients ($N = 500$). All figures controlled for demographics.

all values without * mean $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Research Question 4 (Mediated Moderation Effect)

Research Question 4 is concerned with the mediation of a moderated effect. According to Jose (2013), this mediated moderation analysis essentially involves an interaction term in a path model. We adopted the original and classic approaches outlined by previous studies (e.g., Baron & Kenny, 1986; Judd & Kenny, 1981; Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005) with the following theoretical model (see Figure 2).

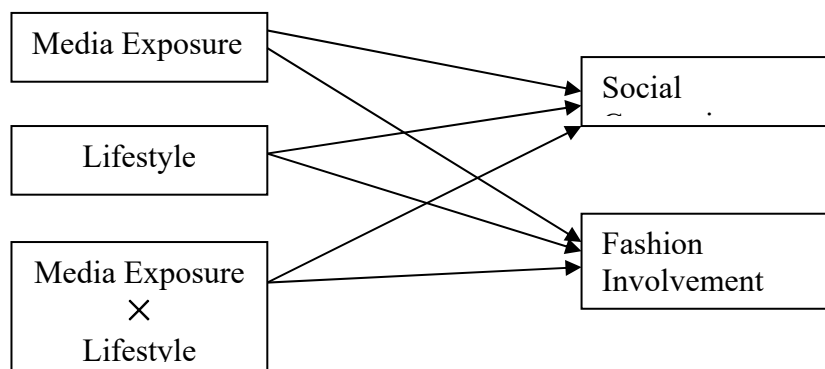


Figure 2. A mediated moderation model.

Regression analyses were conducted to examine whether social comparison mediated the moderation of lifestyles motivated by achievement and self-expression in the relationship between media exposure and fashion involvement.

Step 1 was a simple 2 × 2 ANOVA on fashion involvement. Controlling for demographics, followed by media exposure, the two lifestyle variables (Striver and Experiencer), and the Media Exposure × Lifestyle interaction term. The interaction effect was significant. In Step 2, social comparison was regressed on media exposure, lifestyle, and the Media Exposure × Lifestyle interaction. In Step 3, fashion involvement was regressed on media exposure, lifestyle, the Media Exposure × Lifestyle interaction, social comparison, and the Social Comparison × Lifestyle interaction.

The Media Exposure × Lifestyle interaction significantly affected fashion involvement ($\beta = .41, p < .001$ for magazine and Striver factor; $\beta = .21, p < .001$ for magazine and Experiencer factor; $\beta = .39, p < .001$ for website and Striver factor; and $\beta = .20, p < .001$ for website and Experiencer factor), indicating a moderation effect. In Steps 2 and 3, the moderation of the residual treatment effect, the interaction (β_{33}) was not significant (see Table 8a–8b). On the whole, results were consistent with expectations: (1) media exposure was a positive predictor of both social comparison and fashion involvement; (2) lifestyle was a positive predictor of both social comparison and fashion involvement; and (3) social comparison was a positive predictor of fashion involvement. Together, the findings converge on a mediated moderation effect (e.g., Baron & Kenny, 1986; Jose, 2013).

It is clear that the interaction term explains a significant amount of variance in fashion involvement through social comparison. For individuals with high levels of self-expression and achievement aspiration, a stronger relationship between media exposure and fashion involvement has been found. In other words, the effect of media exposure on fashion involvement is largely a function of self-expression and achievement aspiration. And this relationship is found to be mediated by social comparison.

Table 8a. Regression Results for Mediated Moderation Effect (X = Magazine Exposure).

Predictor	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
X: Magazine exposure	.197	4.703***	.111	2.560*	.182	4.330***
Mo: Lifestyle						
Striver	.363	8.660**	.419	2.753**	.363	2.358*
Experiencer	.170	3.947***	.100	.594	-.013	-.081
X × Mo: Magazine Exposure × Lifestyle						
Magazine × Striver	.410	9.992***	-.022	-.146	-.064	-.415
Magazine × Experiencer	.204	4.577***	.128	.767	.132	.828
Me: Social comparison					.152	3.493**
MeMo: Social Comparison × Lifestyle						
Compare × Striver					.029	.698
Compare × Experiencer					.015	.356

Note. Me=Mediator; Mo=Moderator; MeMo=Mediated Moderation. All figures controlled for demographics (N = 500). * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 8b. Regression Results for Mediated Moderation Effect ($X = \text{Website Exposure}$).

Predictor	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>X</i> : Website exposure	.213	5.072***	.142	3.296**	.193	4.579***
<i>Mo</i> : Lifestyle						
Striver	.355	8.459***	.448	3.260**	.401	2.850**
Experiencer	.157	3.638***	.116	.765	.038	.253
$X \times Mo$: Website Exposure \times Lifestyle						
Website \times Striver	.393	9.518***	-.066	-.483	-.107	-.772
Website \times Experiencer	.201	4.491***	.100	.660	.072	.482
<i>Me</i> : Social comparison					.142	3.244**
<i>MeMo</i> : Social Comparison \times Lifestyle						
Compare \times Striver					.045	1.085
Compare \times Experiencer					.011	.249

Note. *Me*=Mediator; *Mo*=Moderator; *MeMo*=Mediated Moderation. All figures controlled for demographics ($N = 500$).

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Conclusion and Discussion

A visible pattern has emerged from data analyses: Chinese young people's fashion involvement is interwoven with achievement and self-expression-oriented lifestyles, social comparison motives, and fashion media exposure. The complexity of the model can be more easily understood when findings are decomposed into subsets. Apparently, those in search of fashion information do not discriminate between forms of media or sources of information. In part this may be because considerable degrees of content uniformity exist in the world of fashion media.

Taken together, attention to fashion clothing is a likely result of a part of an individual's lifestyle that is either achievement (i.e., the Striver mentality) or self-expression motivated (i.e., Experiencer). The strength of the relationship is increased when the latter is combined with media exposure. Among all the antecedents of fashion involvement, social comparison stands out to be the strongest predictor. Under pressure of social comparison, young Chinese exhibit an intensely positive attitude toward changing their body image through fashion and vogue (Sun & Guo, 2013).

This study advances and tests an interactive model that incorporates a chain of mediation, moderation, and mediated moderation effects. The positive correlation between exposure to fashion contents and involvement being the main effect, social comparison enters the relationship as a mediator, and two of the lifestyle factors (Striver and Experiencer) moderate the relationship. Highly motivated individuals (i.e., achievement and self-expression) in other aspects of everyday life are also highly involved in fashion.

It came as no surprise that women are much more conscious (and self-conscious) of body-related issues than men are. However, variance in involvement accounted for by gender is much weaker in comparison with that produced by achievement and self-expression-motivated lifestyles. Enjoyment of self-exposing, using fashion media and fashion involvement as a whole, tend to be augmented by motivation variables. Of particular importance are the two aspects of lifestyle (Striver and Experiencer) that significantly predict social comparison beyond controls of demographics and other variables. Social comparison, in turn, mediates the moderation effect of lifestyle, a complex process that integrates micromental activities and macrosocial environmental forces. Our study is among the first attempts at testing these cross-level relationships. Individuals such as Strivers and Experiencers usually pay more attention to fashion information and are highly involved in fashion. Furthermore, we find that comparisons with fashion images are positively correlated with fashion clothing consciousness. On the flip side, findings show that high levels of motivations are likely to lead to worsened mood from comparing oneself with image norms or iconic idols than are low levels of motivations. The results suggest that the uneasiness felt by individuals who are highly motivated is more easily exacerbated by exposure to media that promote a strong desire for goods with symbolic values.

Research results from this study have yielded multiple theoretical implications: First, attention may be more profitably paid to interaction effects in fashion involvement. Based on what we have found in this study, fashion involvement is the consequence of not only individual factors but also of variables in concerted effects. The earliest test of moderated mediation and mediated moderation was conducted in the 1980s, when psychologists distinguished the properties of moderator from mediator variables at different levels and provided specific analytic procedures to help researchers make effective use of these distinctions (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Nearly 30 years of research have yet to fill the gap left in our understanding of the possible hybrid effects in fashion communication studies.

Second, different forms and patterns of media use may interact with one another to produce various possible effects. Interactions between exposure to fashion magazines and websites may show a diminishing return in the power of explanation. When content is identical across different platforms of information, a likely scenario is that "the whole is less than the sum of its parts" (Shen & Eveland, 2010, p. 378).

Third, individuals may mainly rely on websites for information and regard other forms of media as either supplementary or competitive. When sources of information clash, users may be forced to make a choice, in which case the exposure-content-platform interaction would be significantly reduced (Holbert, 2005). We therefore suggest that future studies may look into intramedia effects and their influence on fashion-related behaviors in various communication settings.

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