Consumer Decision-Making Styles in Sport Products: Gender and Age Group Differences

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China is a fast growing developing country and has become an important market for all sport products. Based on the report of the Chinese Academy of Industry Economy Research, the sales of Chinese sporting goods were 91 billion RMB or 14.2 billion US dollars in 2008 (Jiang & Zhang, 2010). Recently, the Chinese sporting goods market (which includes footwear, apparel, and equipment) has grown substantially and it reached over $106 billion RMB in 2010 (Lei, 2010; Zhang & Won, 2010). In December 2012, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in China reached a record high of 8230 billion US dollars and this represents 13.27% of the world economy. Nevertheless, the Chinese sporting goods market only accounted for 0.4% of GDP when compared to other developed countries such as the United States (2% GDP). Though there is a great potential for the Chinese sporting goods market, little research have been done to investigate the consumers in China. The purpose of this study was to examine the decision-making styles of Chinese consumers in purchasing sport products. Based on the revised Purchasers Style Inventory for Sports Products (PSISP; Bae, Lam, & Jackson, 2009), participants were asked their purchase style based on the following seven factors: Quality, Brand, Fashion, Price, Confusion, Habit, and Endorsement. By the end of the 30-day survey period in June 2012, 490 members voluntarily responded to the survey posted online.

The PAWS Statistics 18 software was used for data analysis. Factorial multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to examine the combined effects of gender and age on the mean vectors scores of the seven factors of PSISP. Results of the factorial MANOVA indicated that there was no significant (p > .05) interaction between gender and age (F [21, 1367] = 1.465, p = .077; Wilks’ Lambda = .938). However, significant main effects were found in gender (F [7, 476] = 6.360, p < .001; Wilks’ Lambda = .941) and age and (F [21, 1367] = 5.611, p < .001; Wilks’ Lambda = .789). Follow-up univariate ANOVAs indicated that there were gender differences in the following dimensions: Quality (F = 21.627, p < .001), Brand (F = 4.083, p = .044), Habit (F = 7.576, p = .006), and Endorsement (F = 3.936, p = .048). Interestingly, all male participants (n = 364) had higher mean scores than those of the female participants (n = 126) in all these significant factors. Likewise, follow-up univariate ANOVAs were used to examine the PSISP factors and yielded six significant results: Quality (F = 5.656, p = .001), Brand (F = 2.681, p = .046), Fashion (F = 5.565, p = .001), Price (F = 5.460, p = .001), Confusion (F = 7.679, p < .001), and Endorsement (F = 6.177, p < .001).

For the Quality factor, the 20 years old or younger age group (M = 3.19) had significant lower mean scores than those in 26-30 years old (M = 3.53) and those who were 31 years or older (M = 3.53); whereas the 21-25 year age group (M = 3.30) had significant lower mean scores than those in 26-30 year old group (M = 3.53). In terms of the Brand factor, both the 20 years or younger (M = 2.75) and the 21-25 year age group (M = 2.83) had significantly lower mean scores than those in the 31-year or older age group (M = 3.11). This situation was just the opposite for the Fashion factor, both the 20 years or younger (M = 3.26) and the 21-25 years (M = 3.15) age group had significantly higher mean scores than those in the 31 years or older age group (M = 2.77). When it came to the Price factor, those who were 31 years or older (M = 2.41) had significantly lower mean scores than all their younger counterparts, but there were no significant mean differences among other age groups. There were barely significant (p = .05) mean differences between the 20 years or younger (M = 2.90) and the 21-25 years (M = 3.09) age groups in the Confusion factor. Nevertheless, both age groups had significantly higher mean scores than those in the 26-30 years (M = 2.59) and in the 31 years or older (M = 2.55) age groups. The results of the Endorsement factor were identical to those of the Price factor. Those who were 31 years or older (M = 2.52) had significantly lower mean scores than all their younger counterparts, when there were no significant mean differences among other age groups.

The majority of the participants (74.3%) in this study are males. Coincidentally, when Chen and Li (2010) did a research study to examine consumers’ willingness to buy in a Chinese online market, they found that there were
more male (70.3%) than female participants. It seems that the sporting goods market in China is dominated by males, and it seems that Asian males were more likely to shop online than females (Hashim et al., 2009). In this study, it was hypothesized that there would be significant differences in the online purchasing styles between male and female participants. In this regard, the null hypothesis was partially accepted since the results indicated that there were no gender differences in the following factors: Brand, Fashion, and Price; whereas there were gender differences in Quality, Confusion, Habit, and Endorsement. Interestingly, male Chinese online consumers had higher level of agreement than females. The results were not consistent with the study of Bae and John (2009) since they found male and female college-aged consumers had different decision-making styles on Fashion, Impulse, and Brand. This may be because most males in China spend less time shopping than females and thus they choose products from high-quality well-known brands endorsed by celebrities. The female participants in China, on the other hand, usually hang out and go shopping with their friends who gave them advice. For this reason, female participants were more concerned about style and outfits and paid less attention to quality and endorsement.

The majority (69.40%) of the sample were made up of young adults 25 years old or younger. These was probably because young adults, particularly students, spend more time browsing the sporting goods websites and were more interested in responding to the survey (with free prizes) than their older counterparts. Basically, the results of this study supported H2 that there would be significant differences in the online purchasing styles among participants in different age groups. As seen from the results of this study, there were differences between those 25 years of age (“younger adults”) or younger and those older than 25 years old (“older adults”) in almost all the factors of the PSISP. Overall, older adults were more concerned with the brand and quality of sport products. On the other hand, younger adults were more concerned with price, fashion style, and celebrity endorsement; yet they were more confused by the variety of sporting goods. According to the results of this study, marketers should develop different strategies for different age groups. For older adults, emphases should be placed on the brand and quality. These consumers believe that the higher the price, the better the quality and they can afford premium prices since they have better income levels. To maximize profits, marketers should target these consumers with high-end sport products. On the other hand, younger adults were more sensitive to price and fashion. Though this age group did not have a very high income level, they had plenty of potential because of their population size. For example, the number of young adults between the ages of 20 and 24 years alone had already reached over 120 million, the highest percentage among all age groups in China (Shedlock, 2012). The buying potential would be much greater if teenagers were also included (i.e., an additional 200 million people). For these young adults, the products should be stylish and always new and fresh. As one marketer pointed out, a stylish T-shirt of under $7 could easily make a profit of 28% (Dale, 2009).