Social Networks Clothes Shopping and the Influence of Brand Image and Perceived Benefits on Purchase Intention

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Abstract: The research around social networks have become increasingly important in recent years because they are a powerful means of communication between different generations, especially the younger ones. Social networks are occupying a privileged place in the marketing and communication of brands, which has been reflected in the increase in sales in various sectors of activity. The present investigation aims to analyze how the relationship between Brand Image and Clothing Purchase Intention is mediated by the Consumers Perception benefits that this purchase provides them. The study used a quantitative methodology with questionnaire survey which had the participation of 947 subjects in the study, aged between 18 and 55 years (M = 28.69, SD = 9.16), who during the period of confinement, caused by the pandemic situation, bought clothing through social networks. The results revealed that Brand Image has a significantly positive impact on Purchase Intention, but when Perceived Benefits enter in the model, the effect diminishes, although it remains positive and significant. It is verified that there is a partial mediation of the Perceived Benefits, which indicates that it has an indirect effect on consumers Purchase Intention. This research is important for marketing professionals to deepen their knowledge about Brand Image importance and the Perception of its Benefits has on consumers Purchase Intention, in order to develop Marketing and Advertising effective strategies to reach the target audience.

Keywords: Brand image, Purchase intention, Perceived benefits, Social networks, Clothing sector, Lockdown

1. Introduction

Currently, social networks are a powerful communication tool (Hyun, Thavisay and Lee, 2022; Zhang, Xu and Ye, 2022) among consumers of different generations (Zakaria, Salleh and Kozako, 2019; Bento, Martinez and Martinez, 2018), having been used to make online purchases (Muresan and Sinuraya, 2018). Given this reality, it makes sense to deepen the studies on Brand image and clothing Purchase intention (Kawaf and Istanbulluoglu, 2019).

This article includes a literature review divided into three subchapters that address the studies related to the three hypotheses presented. The second part of the study presents the quantitative study carried out.

2. Literature review

2.1 Brand image and Purchase intention

The concept of Brand image has been studied by academics and professionals and continues to be part of scientific studies due to its importance in the field of marketing and communication (Zhang, 2015), as a strong brand provides a series of benefits for companies and delivers managers with information on how and where brands add value (Keller and Brexendorf, 2019).

According to the American Marketing Association, in Kotler and Keller (2008, p. 258), a brand is a name, term, sign, symbol, design, or a combination thereof intended to identify goods or services from one of the sellers or groups of sellers and differentiate from competitor goods or services.

Pramono et al. (2021), refer that is required to the company carry out a good and correct strategy in order to attract attention to consumers and not lose competitiveness with other businesspeople. For corporations, Brand
image is the perception given by consumers to the products or services offered. Brand image is the perception that consumers have of the valuation for the enterprise that persists in consumers’ minds.

Several authors (e.g., Išoraitė, 2018; Kalieva, 2015; Oriol and Rindell, 2014) define Brand image as a memorized consumer perception and it is considered as one of the most important intangible assets that have an impact on consumer perception. Martínez, Pérez and Del Bosque (2014) explain that the Brand image has functional and affective dimensions. The first measures tangible characteristics and the second deals with feelings and attitudes. Whenever a company increases its product portfolio, it is working to establish Brand image and recognition, increasing the potential number of customers aware of its Brand image (Kremer and Viot, 2012). Solihin (2021) suggests that Brand image is the key driver of brand equity, which refers to consumer’s general perception and feeling about a brand and has an influence on consumer behavior.

Wydyanto and Ilhamalimy (2021) consider that a good or positive Brand image should have an added value impact on consumers, if a brand has a bad image, consumers are not interested in making a purchase. On the contrary, a positive brand image lasts for a long time, and this means that the image formed must be clear and have a brand advantage over other brands. The formation of a brand image is also influenced by consumer experience.

According to Kotler and Keller (2021) Brand image is the consumer’s perception of a brand as a reflection of the associations that exist in the minds of consumers. Brand image is an association that appears in the minds of consumers when they remember a particular brand. These associations can simply appear in the form of thoughts and images associated with a brand. The authors reinforce that “a brand is a promise between the firm and the consumer. It is a means to set consumers’ expectations and reduce their risk. In return for customer loyalty, the firm promises to reliably deliver a predictably positive experience and set of desirable benefits with its products and services. A brand may even be “predictably unpredictable” if that is what consumers expect, but the key is that it fulfills or exceeds customer expectations in satisfying their needs and wants” (p. 322). Consumers are more likely to make purchases if they have a positive image from the brand of that specific product.

Wydyanto and Ilhamalimy (2021) define purchasing decision as the selection of two or more alternative purchasing decision choices, which means that someone can make a decision, there must be several alternative choices.

Savitri et al. (2022) finds revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between Brand Image and Purchase Intention. Their research points out that social media marketing has a positive effect on purchasing decisions, which means that if the use of social media marketing increases, purchasing decisions will also increase. In the same study the authors show that Brand image is able to mediate the relationship between social media marketing and purchasing decisions, which means that if Brand image increases, the relationship between social media marketing and purchasing decisions will also increase. Accordingly, the following hypothesis was put forward in this study about the influence of the brand on the clothing Purchase intention using social networks.

H1: Brand image positively influences consumers Purchase intention through social networks.

2.2 Brand image and Perceived benefits

While brand benefits are the “personal value” (i.e., what the consumer perceives the product attribute will do for them) that consumers associate to a brand, brand benefits can be classified into functional, experiential, and symbolic, that motivates the needs that drive consumption behaviour (Keller, 2013).

The symbolic image of the brand emphasizes the satisfaction of consumer needs (e.g., social status symbol, promotion of self-esteem, role definition, group fit and self-identification). Thus, when such product associations symbolize associations with certain groups or individuals or derive a sense of superiority, self-esteem and high social status, the attitude towards such products becomes positive (Shah, Khan and Hameed, 2019).

Experiential brand benefits are based on the satisfaction of sensory needs (i.e., what it feels like to use a product), satisfying consumers' internal desire to go after excitement and diversity and provides consumers with
positive feelings, such as feeling pleasant, comfortable, or amiable, and consumers’ inner demand is satisfied, leading consumers’ attitude towards the brand to be more positive (Kharajo and Kharajo, 2020).

According to Aaker and Moorman (2017) he argues that brand management implies maintaining good long-term strategies, staying connected to consumers and through functional benefits, among others. Positioning by benefits is when the brand is positioned through the value that can be added with the product or service.

Rosário, Carrillo and Lopes (2018) considers that a brand provides both functional and symbolic benefits to consumers. Functional benefits can be physically expressed by products and satisfy practical and immediate needs. Symbolic benefits, on the other hand, are intangible and obtained only when the person who receives them understands the meanings constructed by the person who provides them. These symbolic benefits satisfy the needs for self-expression and prestige, and are related to personal image and social identification.

Generally speaking, there are three different types of brand associations that can be present in the consumer’s mind, namely: attributes, benefits and attitudes. These different types of brand associations form the brand image, which can vary according to its strength and uniqueness (Keller, 2013).

For the purposes of this study, the benefits of the brand are addressed. These denote the personal value and meaning that consumers attach to the attributes of the good or service, that is, what consumers think the good or service can do for them (Kotler & Keller, 2006). According to the same authors, the benefits can be divided into three categories: functional benefits, experimental benefits and symbolic benefits. The functional benefits generally correspond to the attributes related to the product, consisting of the most objective advantages of its consumption. Experiential benefits are product-related attributes that relate to how the consumer feels when using the good or service (Kharajo and Kharajo, 2020). These satisfy needs such as cognitive simulation, sensory pleasure, and variety. Symbolic benefits correspond to attributes not related to the product, referring to the more superficial advantages of consumption, usually relating to the implicit needs for social approval or self-esteem (Yap, 2022). In this sense and after reviewing the literature, it is possible to affirm that the benefits perceived by the consumer are influenced by the Brand Image, with the second hypothesis being elaborated.

H2: Perceived benefits are positively influenced by the Brand image.

2.3 Mediation of Perceived benefits in the relationship between Brand image and Purchase intention

Chen and Lee (2015), considers that Purchase intention is an important variable that measure potential action that consumer choose to be done. By understanding consumers’ Purchase intention, it can help the companies to understand the market and adjust the offered product or services that enable them get more sales and earn profit. Kudeshia and Kumar (2017), refers that understanding consumers’ Purchase intention can predict the customer’s retention of a particular brand.

Nasidi, Hassan and Ahmad (2021) based on the results of hypothesis testing, it was found that there is a positive and significant relationship between Brand Image and Purchase Intention. There is a positive and significant relationship between Social Media Marketing (SCM) and Brand Image. There is a significant relationship between Social Media Marketing and Purchase Intention through Brand Image (Savitri et al., 2022). Although the literature review reflects some similar studies, it was not possible to find a study that analyzes exactly the same hypotheses as this investigation, reason why it was considered pertinent to formulate the following study hypothesis.

H3: The relationship between Brand image and clothing Purchase intention through social networks is mediated by Perceived Benefits.

3. Methodology

The aim of this study was to analyze the impact of the Brand image on clothing Purchase intention and to understand how this relationship is mediated by the perception that consumers have about the benefits that this purchase provides them. The investigation was operationalized through a quantitative methodology, based on a hypothetical-deductive approach that aimed to analyze the relationship between the variables under study.

In the study 947 subjects participated who, during the period of confinement, bought clothing through social networks. Ages range from 18 to 55 years (M = 28.69, SD = 9.16) and 65.5% are female. Most of the respondents
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(50.9%) have qualifications lower than a degree, 41.2% have a degree and 7.9% have a level of education higher than a degree. It was also possible to ascertain that more than half of the study participants (60.7%) have an average monthly income equal to or greater than €1501 (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Respondents’ demographic profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>34.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age group</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 years old and below</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 21 and 25 years old</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 26 and 30 years old</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 31 and 40 years old</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 years old and over</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic school</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>368</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional course</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monthly net income of the household</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower than €500</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between €501 and €1000</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between €1001 and €1500</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between €1501 and €2000</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between €2001 and €2500</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher than €2501</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>23.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard deviation

3.1 Measures

The constructs were measured using three instruments. Brand image was evaluated through the four items developed by Villarejo Ramos (2002; *e.g.*, *Through advertising I can see if a brand has a good reputation*). To measure Purchase intention, the four questions developed by Duffett (2015; *e.g.*, *I plan to purchase products that are promoted on social network*) were used. The Perceived benefits, in turn, were measured by the four items created by Qureshi, Khan and Ahmad (2012; *e.g.*, *I think this product/service is very beneficial*). The answers to the items that comprise them were given using a Likert-type scale that ranges from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 7 (Strongly agree), depending on the degree of agreement of the participants with each of the statements. In order to characterize the sample, a set of sociodemographic questions (*e.g.*, gender, age) was also included.

3.2 Procedures

Items that assess Brand image, Perceived benefits, Purchase intention and questions regarding sociodemographic characterization were introduced in the Google Forms platform. The link was shared on the researchers’ social networks (*e.g.*, Facebook, LinkedIn) and sent by email to their contact networks. All participants were aware of the research objectives and were informed that they could withdraw at any time if they wished to do so. It should be noted that all the guidelines of the General Regulation on Data Protection regarding the anonymity and confidentiality of responses were ensured. Subsequently, the data were processed using the statistical software IBM-SPSS and AMOS (version 28).

4. Results

The analysis began with the verification of the fit of the model to the sample under study. For this purpose, a path analysis was carried out to describe the existing relationships between the constructs involved in the investigation (Figure 1).
The structural model was analyzed using the following indicators: the Chi-Square ($\chi^2$), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Root Mean Square Residual (RMSR), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and the Expected Cross-Validation Index (ECVI). In the analysis of the values obtained, the cut-offs recommended by Hair et al. (2018) and it was found that the mediation model fits the sample data [$\chi^2(41) = 8.576, p < 0.001, \text{CFI} = 0.979, \text{GFI} = 0.976, \text{RMSR} = 0.036, \text{RMSEA} = 0.053, \text{LO90} = 0.048, \text{HI} = 0.058$].

Reliability was analyzed using Cronbach’s alpha coefficient, whose results revealed adequate internal consistency for all constructs under study (Brand image: $\alpha = 0.75$; Purchase intention: $\alpha = 0.89$; Perceived benefits: $\alpha = 0.80$).

Data analysis revealed that Brand image positively influences the Purchase intention ($\beta = 0.403, t = 13.521, p < 0.001$) and Perceived benefits ($\beta = 0.408, t = 13.749, p < 0.001$), which, in turn, also have a positive impact on consumers Purchase intention ($\beta = 0.381, t = 35.876, p < 0.001$). However, it was found that when the Perceived benefits enter the model with the status of mediating variable, the Brand image effect decreases from $\beta = 0.403, p < 0.001$ to $\beta = 0.297, p < 0.001$, despite remaining positive, a partial mediation occurs, whose indirect effect is significant ($p < 0.001$; Table 2).

**Table 2: Mediation of Perceived benefits in the relationship between Brand image and Purchase intention**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictor variables</th>
<th>Purchase intention ($\beta$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand image</td>
<td>0.403**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F_{(1, 945)}$</td>
<td>182.809**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived benefits</td>
<td>0.297**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>0.260**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F_{(2, 944)}$</td>
<td>131.868**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results suggest that despite the Brand image having a significant weight in the Purchase intention, when consumers perceive that the benefits derived from the purchase of certain clothing are positive, the importance attributed to the Brand image decreases slightly.

In view of these results, it was considered relevant to determine whether there are significant differences in Purchase intention as a function of sociodemographic variables. After verifying the assumptions of normality and heteroscedasticity, parametric t-student and ANOVA tests were used, depending on the number of categories of independent variables. These tests make it possible to analyze how the average values are manifested as a function of the sociodemographic variables considered.

The results obtained reveal that the Purchase intention varies depending on the gender of the participants [$t_{(945)} = -2.334, p < 0.05$] with women having higher mean values ($M_{\text{Male}} = 4.42, SD_{\text{Male}} = 1.25$; $M_{\text{Female}} = 4.61, SD_{\text{Female}} = 1.18$).

In order to facilitate the reading of the data, the age was organized into five age groups as shown in Table 1. To homogenize the size of the groups, a similar procedure was carried out for the education level and to monthly net income of the household, having obtained the categories presented in the Table 3.
Table 3: Recoding of education level and monthly net income of the household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school /</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>50.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional course</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s degree /</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s or PhD’s degree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monthly net income of the household</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower than 1.500€</td>
<td>372</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1.501€ and 2.000€</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher than 2.001€</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was also possible to verify that the Purchase intention only differs significantly as a function of age if a significance level of 10% is considered \(F_{(4, 942)} = 2.257, p = 0.061\). It should be noted that the highest average values belong to the age group that ranges from 21 to 25 years old, as opposed to participants aged 20 and under who show less intention to buy clothing through social networks. These results may be due to the fact that most respondents who are part of the younger age group are still studying and do not have purchasing power.

Finally, it was found that the participants who earn a monthly net income of the household of less than €1500 are the ones who show a greater intention to buy clothing through social networks, although the differences are not statistically significant when compared to the other salary brackets \(F_{(2, 944)} = 1.017, p = 0.362\). These conclusions may be due to the fact that participants who have a higher monthly net income of the household prefer to buy a more refined type of clothing, which is not always available through social networks.

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to analyses the relationship between Brand image and clothing Purchase intention through social networks and how it is mediated by the perception that consumers have about the benefits that this purchase provides them. According to Appel et al. (2020) social networks allow an easier reach and engagement with the brand’s target audience and constitute a more effective way of influencing consumer behaviour in relation to their Purchase intention.

After analysing the data, it was found that the clothing Purchase intention through social networks is positively influenced by Brand image, which allowed us to validate the first hypothesis formulated. The results are similar to those found by Solihin (2021) according to which the Brand image is the factor that most influences consumer behaviour at the time of purchase. Kotler and Keller (2021) add that when consumers have a positive image about the brand, their purchase intention increases significantly. Wydyanto and Ilhamalimy (2021) go further and claim that the formation of a Brand image is also largely influenced by the range of products available, combined with consumers’ familiarity with social networks.

It was also possible to verify that the Perceived benefits are positively influenced by the Brand image, which allowed us to confirm the second study hypothesis. These conclusions are consistent with those found by Jacobson, Gruzd and Hernández-García (2020) who demonstrate that Perceived benefits are also strongly influenced by customer engagement with the brand and the positive experiences that products provide and satisfy their needs. Following this idea, Kharajo and Kharajo (2020) state that Perceived benefits are based on the satisfaction of sensory needs and when these needs are satisfied, consumers develop a closer connection with the brand. According to Bhatti and Rahman (2020), consumers’ perception of the benefits of purchasing a product/service from a particular brand is influenced by their needs and expectations, which influence their purchase intention.

The third hypothesis, which postulated that the relationship between the Brand image on clothing Purchase intention to social networks is mediated by the Perceived benefits was corroborated from the analysis carried out. However, it was found that there is a partial mediation, whose indirect effect is significant, because when the Perceived benefits enter the model with the status of mediator, the importance attributed to the Brand image decreases slightly. Despite the positive relationship that occurs between Brand image and Purchase intention (Savitri et al., 2022), the perception of benefits is positively influenced by utilitarian and hedonic motivations (Yap, 2022).
While utilitarian motivation is rational and oriented towards satisfying consumer needs (Zheng et al., 2019), hedonic motivation characterizes the emotional aspects that the acquisition of a product/service of a particular brand represents for the consumer (e.g., social status, acceptance, prestige; Shah, Khan and Hameed, 2019). Both motivations have a positive impact on Purchase intention and are largely influenced by the way the brand is advertised on social networks (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

6. Conclusion

After analyzing the literature review and the quantitative study carried out, through the application of a questionnaire to a sample of 947 consumers, it was possible to conclude that Brand Image has a significant importance in Purchase Intention, but when consumers perceive that the benefits related to the purchase of clothing are positive, the value of Brand image decreases. So, it is essential to know and understand consumer behavior in relation to their Purchase Intention, so that brands can make more impactful decisions regarding their products/services and gain competitive advantage in the market. (Lim et al., 2017).

In a study in which a large majority of participants were women, it is possible to conclude that participants under the age of 20 manifest less intention to buy on social networks (probably because they are students with lower purchasing power). The group that expresses the greatest intention to buy clothing through social networks reveals a monthly net income of the household of less than €1500 and is in the 21-25 age group.

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