Exposé

Submitted by

Stefania De Marchi

At the University of Kassel
Faculty- International Business Administration
EMBS

Department: Business Administration
Division: International Business Administration
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Abstract

Title: Online Purchasing Behavior in Online Apparel Stores. The influence of information search and website features on website attitude, perceived risk and purchase intentions.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Internet, Fashion, Electronic Commerce, Website Management

Background: The total online retail sales reached in 2011 US$ 399 billion globally. Apparel accounted for 18% of global online retail sales, second only to consumer electronics sales, but registering a faster growth. Apparel sales via online channels are estimated to double over the period 2012-2017. Researchers believe that the most appealing opportunities for the clothing industry lie on the wise use of this channel (Euromonitor International, 2013). Despite the promising forecasts, major apparel retailers have moved slowly in the online retail environment.

Purpose: This paper aims at filling gaps in previous literature by answering the following research question: What is the influence of website features and design, product information search on site attitudes, perceived risk and purchase intentions?

The purpose of the study is to outline the relationship between website features, perceived risk, site attitudes and purchase intentions, as well as the relationship between product information search, perceived risk and purchase intentions.

Method: Personal interviews will be conducted to outline the relationship between information search and product category and purchase intentions and perceived risk. Personal interviews will also aim at defining what are the most important features in apparel websites are. After that, a content analysis will be performed on twenty apparel websites to assess whether the identified features are present in websites.
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List of abbreviations

ABC: Affect Behaviour Cognition
ELM: Elaboration Likelihood Model
OCB : Online Consumer Behavior
PAD: Pleasure Arousal Dominance
S-O-R: Stimulus Organism Response
TAM: Technology Acceptance Model
VMD : Visual Merchandising
1. Introduction and statement of the problem

Internet is nowadays a very powerful tool for customers and companies. This means enables users to gather information on products, purchase goods and services and share opinions and experiences in a much shorter time than before. Since the advent of the internet and the implementation of the first virtual stores in the 90s, consumers have familiarized with this technology and a growing number of people rely on this channel for several transactions. Nowadays consumers are active, constantly online and have instant access to more information than before.

Under a business perspective, internet allows companies to access a wider range of distribution channels. Product and services are sold not only through traditional channels, but also via online stores. Virtual stores are a direct link between a company and its customers (Broderick & Demangeot, 2007). They represent an important communication instrument and can be considered a key element for success. In addition to that, virtual stores are of crucial importance to boost sales.

A company should not underestimate the weight and potential of online sales. In fact, due to the global recession, a growing number of customers is connecting to the internet searching for wider choice and lower prices (Euromonitor International, 2011). In addition to that, online access is expected to expand significantly in developing markets, allowing companies to reach a larger number of customers all over the world (Euromonitor International, 2011).

The total online retail sales reached in 2011 US$ 399 billion globally. Apparel accounted for 18% of the global online retail sales, second only to consumer electronics sales, but registering a faster growth. Apparel sales via online channels are estimated to double over the period 2012-2017. Researchers believe that the most appealing opportunities for the clothing industry lie on the wise use of this channel (Euromonitor International, 2013). Despite the promising forecasts, major apparel retailer have moved relatively slowly in the online retail environment.
All these facts taken into consideration, online retailing, and in particular related to fashion items, is certainly an attention-grabbing topic that presents several opportunities for research.

The relatively recent field of online consumer behavior has been widely explored by many researchers, which have grounded their studies in theories of consumer behavior and technology acceptance. However, given the extremely volatile nature of the subject of interest and the fast development of this channel, this paper mainly focuses on the most up-to-date researches.

A recent study from Dai Zhang and Zhou (2007) condensed the findings of previous literature in an extensive synthesis. With the introduction of a reference model called OSAM (Online Shopping Acceptance Model), they offer an holistic view of online shopping acceptance from a consumer perspective. They categorize previous studies in “consumer oriented”, which deal with consumers beliefs about online shopping, and “technology oriented”, which focus on technical specification of virtual stores. Consumer oriented researches analyze and identify relationships between variables such as demographics, cognitive/psychological characteristics, perception of risk and benefits, and shopping orientation. Technology oriented studies, on the other hand, deal with user interface features, website content and design, system usability (Dai et al., 2007).

I assume this general distinction is also valid for studies focused on online purchasing behavior in virtual apparel stores. However, as demonstrated by Girard, Korgaonkar and Silverblatt (2006), product category significantly influences consumer online patronage and purchase intentions. Given the particular nature of clothing items, generally recognized as experience goods, results from previous studies focused on different retail environments should be treated carefully (Carr, Carson, Childers & Peck, 2001; Richard, 2005; Donthu, Poddar & Wei, 2009; Hausman & Skiepe, 2009; Chen, Hsu & Lin, 2010).

Researchers conducted several studies on online purchasing behavior in virtual apparel stores. They have investigated the role of previous experience and age (Noh, & Kwon, 2010), gender (Cho & Workman, 2011), involvement (Ha & Im, 2011), brand familiarity (Park & Stoel, 2005), online VMD (Ha, Kwon & Lennon, 2007), presentation of fashion garments (Levitt & Mc Cormick, 2012), website quality,
brand trust and involvement (Jones & Kim, 2010). However, according to my knowledge, no extensive research has been produced on the relation between product type (that is the nature of the item) information search and perceived risk. In addition to that, the majority of previous studies collected data from students and young customers (Krumwiede, Nitse, Ottaway & Parker, 2004; Park & Stoel, 2005; Perotti, Sorce & Widrick, 2005; Jones & Kim, 2010; Cho & Workman, 2011; Ha & Im, 2011; Foxx, Kim, Martin Funches & Park, 2012; Livett & McCormick, 2012). Students and young customers are generally considered part of a peculiar segment, which can present uncharacteristic traits. Furthermore, no research has investigated the role of website features and aesthetics and perceived risk.

This paper aims at filling this gap by answering the following research question: What is the influence of website features and design, product information search on site attitudes perceived risk and purchase intentions?

And more precisely:

- What is the influence of website features on site attitudes, perceived risk and purchase intentions?
- What is the influence of product information search on perceived risk and purchase intentions?

To answer the given research questions, personal interviews will be conducted to outline the relationship between information search and product category and purchase intentions and perceived risk. Personal interviews will also aim at defining what are the most important features in apparel websites. After that, a content analysis will be performed on twenty apparel websites to assess whether the identified features are present in websites.

This paper answers the call of Laroche (2010) for further research need with regard to website aesthetics, the influence of product type, intangibility and perceived risk.

This research will include managerial implications for the segmentation of customers and practical hints to reduce perceived risk. Furthermore, results from this study may contribute to unravel the issue of unexpressed potential of online sales.
## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 Theoretical background - Research model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reference and source</th>
<th>Content and main findings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modeling internet consumer behaviour</td>
<td>(Laroche, 2010). <em>Journal of Business Research</em></td>
<td>Suggests further research to develop models based on the S-O-R paradigm rather than on TAM model. Suggests to further develop and insert in a consumer behaviour model: site organization, navigational cues and other site aesthetics; emotional responses to website exposure (e.g. pleasure, arousal, dominance); influence of product intangibility and perceived risk; role of culture, acculturation process and global consumer culture; efficient measures of website use; segmentation of website visitors according to motivation for search, product classification and individual differences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental psychology</td>
<td>(Mehrabian &amp; Russel, 1974)</td>
<td>S-O-R paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes and persuasion</td>
<td>(Cacioppo &amp; Petty, 1981)</td>
<td>ELM of information processing</td>
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The research model will be based on the ELM of information processing (Cacioppo & Petty, 1981) and the S-O-R paradigm (Mehrabian & Russel, 1974).
## 2.2 Outlining online purchasing and consumer behaviour.

### Consumer oriented view:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
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<th>Content and main findings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude and age differences in online shopping</td>
<td>(Perotti, Sorce and Widrick, 2005). <em>International Journal of Retail &amp; Distribution Management</em></td>
<td>Older shopper seemed to purchase as many products as young consumers. Young consumers tend to search more products online, but they do not buy more than older consumers. If older customers searched for a product online, they were more likely to purchase the product compared with younger respondents. Older consumers were less likely to agree that online shopping is more convenient than traditional shopping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand name and consumers’ perceived risk</td>
<td>(Dubinsky, Huang and Schrank, 2004). <em>Journal of Consumer Behaviour</em></td>
<td>Familiarity with a brand name has an impact on consumers’ perceived risk. The presence of a brand name increases consumers’ risk perception. Consumers’ perceived risk was not different for well-known and lesser-known brands. Brand names may not represent an important symbol of product quality for online shoppers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer characteristics and attitude towards online shopping</td>
<td>(Wu, 2003). <em>Marketing Intelligence and Planning</em>.</td>
<td>Consumer behaviour is affected by internal (beliefs, attitudes, learning, motives and needs, personality perception and values) and external (demographic, economic, social, situational and technological factors) influences. <strong>Findings:</strong> Attitude towards online shopping is determined by: Consumer demographics, consumer purchase preference, consumer benefit perception and consumer lifestyle have an influence on the attitude towards online shopping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer online patronage and product classifications</td>
<td>(Girard, Korgaonkar &amp; Silverblatt, 2006). <em>Internet Research</em></td>
<td>Investigates the relation between online retailing product classifications, online store type and consumer preferences. <strong>Findings:</strong> Consumer online patronage is influenced by product category and online store type. Online retail store type per se does not matter to consumers, but it does with the effect of product category.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drivers of online customer satisfaction,</td>
<td>(Cyr, Dash &amp; Kindra, 2008). <em>Online</em></td>
<td>Local websites designs were preferred. Local websites tend to induce greater trust, satisfaction and loyalty.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors affecting consumer online purchase behaviour</td>
<td>Information Review</td>
<td>Predictions and implications</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Kim &amp; Park, 2003)</td>
<td><em>International Journal of Retail &amp; Distribution Management</em></td>
<td>Information satisfaction and relational benefits are crucial elements driving consumer online purchases because they reduce risk perception and transaction costs. Information quality, user interface quality and security perceptions are the key elements influencing users’ information satisfaction and relational benefits. Consumer’s commitment to a website and actual purchase behavior are also related to the latter elements. Service information quality is the more important factor because it contributes to the reduction of transaction costs and risk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Ballantine, 2005)</td>
<td><em>International Journal of Retail &amp; Distribution Management</em></td>
<td>Level of interactivity and product information impact consumers’ satisfaction (the more interactivity, the higher the satisfaction, the more information, the higher the satisfaction). Level of interactivity impacts more positively consumers’ satisfaction compared with the amount of information provided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Close &amp; Kukar-Kinney, 2010)</td>
<td><em>Journal of Business Research</em></td>
<td>The identified motivations for cart use in online retail environments are: securing online price promotions, organizing shopping items, and entertainment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Broderick &amp; Demangeot, 2007)</td>
<td><em>International Journal of Retail &amp; Distribution Management</em></td>
<td>Evaluation of the impact of holistic attributes in consumers’ response. Sense-making potential produces utilitarian value, but it does not generate involvement directly. The impact on involvement is mediated by exploratory potential. Involvement produces both utilitarian and hedonic value, and it is essential in creating shopping value and intention to revisit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Buckinx &amp; Van den Poel, 2005)</td>
<td><em>European Journal of Operational Research</em></td>
<td>Identify four categories of predictors: general clickstream behaviour, clickstream information, customer demographics and historical purchase behaviour. Clickstream behaviour is important to define the tendency to buy.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Role of internet expertise, consumers’ learning hierarchy

(Vara, Martínez-López & Martínez, 2005). Internet Research

Consumers’ beliefs influence their attitude towards the internet. Web design is the element that influences the most attitude and beliefs. Personal beliefs, social benefits generated by internet and the perception of invasion of privacy are also important.

Attitude towards the internet influence trust in online shopping, which is directly linked to online purchasing intentions.

Situational factors and online retail attribute importance affecting online shopping

(Gehrt & Yan, 2004). Journal of Retail & Distribution Management

Situational factors (ex. time availability) influence retail attribute importance except for the price factor.

Situational factors affect retail format preference. For experience goods, traditional store retailers are preferred.

For experience goods consumers are sensitive to retailer personality.

Technology oriented view:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effect of web interface features on online purchase intentions</td>
<td>(Hausman &amp; Siekpe, 2009). Journal of Business research</td>
<td>Drivers of online shopping include cognitive and psychological factors. Computer factors and human factors indirectly influence consumers’ attitude towards the website. Human factors have a strong influence on evaluations of usefulness and entertainment. These two elements impact attitude. Attitude influences purchase and return intentions. Computer features are important for website design to induce positive perceptions of usefulness and informativeness and to avoid irritation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonic and utilitarian motivations for online shopping behaviour</td>
<td>(Carr, Carson, Childers &amp; Peck, 2001). Journal of retailing</td>
<td>Navigation convenience and sustainability of electronic environment are important to predict online shopping attitudes. Media design must be related to the intrinsic enjoyment criterion and consumers’ expectations and preferences for interactive shopping.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact of internet atmospherics on</td>
<td>(Richard, 2005).</td>
<td>Role of internet atmospherics cues (central, such as structure, organization, informativeness and navigation characteristics; and peripheral, that is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
surfer behaviour (Journal of Business Research.)

Main findings: internet atmospherics influence surfers behaviors, and in particular site involvement and exploratory behavior.

No relationship found between site attitudes and purchasing intentions.

No positive relationship found between site attitudes and involvement in purchase decisions.

Role of website personality on perceived quality and purchase intentions (Donthu, Poddar & Wei, 2009).

Web site congruity is important to induce high quality perception. Consumers develop positive attitudes towards sophisticated websites. A positive perception of the website in terms of trustworthiness is likely to reinforce consumers’ positive attitude toward the brand’s website.

Website attributes and online purchase intentions (Chen, Hsu & Lin, 2010).

Comprehensive list of attributes and features of shopping websites that increase consumer purchase intention.

2.3 Outlining online purchasing and consumer behaviour –Online apparel.

Consumer oriented view:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reference and source</th>
<th>Content and main findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dimensions of online shopping attributes and predictors of clothes purchase intentions</td>
<td>(Kim &amp; Kim, 2004). European Journal of Marketing</td>
<td>Identify four factors affecting perceived attitudes of online shopping: transaction/cost, incentive programs, site design, and interactivity. Key factors to predict purchasing intentions are the transaction/cost and incentive programs, together with demographic variables (gender, income, number of children).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect of brand familiarity experience and information on online apparel</td>
<td>(Park &amp; Stoel, 2005). International Journal of Retail &amp;</td>
<td>Brand familiarity and previous experience impact purchase intentions. The amount of information does not influence perceived risk and purchase intentions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>Summary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact of color representation on the web</td>
<td>(Krumwiede, Nitse, Ottaway &amp; Parker, 2004). <em>European Journal of Marketing</em></td>
<td>Color representation is important in attracting loyal customers. Color misrepresentation cause high dissatisfaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of previous experience and age on perceptions and online purchase intentions of mature consumers</td>
<td>(Noh &amp; Kwon, 2010). <em>Journal of Fashion Marketing &amp; Management</em></td>
<td>Perceived benefits and perceived financial risk are predictors of mature consumers’ online clothing purchase intention. Previous experience strongly influences perceived risk and online shopping benefits. No relation found between age and general internet expertise and consumers’ perceptions and purchase intentions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement in online apparel shopping context</td>
<td>(Ha &amp; Im, 2011). <em>Journal of Fashion Marketing &amp; Management</em></td>
<td>Perceptual fluency generated enjoyment, indirectly influencing in a positive way situational involvement, purchase intention and cognitive effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship among product attributes web browsing and impulse buying for apparel</td>
<td>(Foxx, Kim, Martin Funches &amp; Park, 2012). <em>Journal of Business Research</em></td>
<td>Attributes of apparel products are influenced by three factors: variety of selection, price, and sensory attributes. When browsing, consumers act either for utilitarian or hedonic purposes. Variety of selection positively influences utilitarian browsing, while price impacts hedonic browsing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of gender, fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership.</td>
<td>(Cho &amp; Workman, 2011). <em>Journal of Fashion Marketing &amp; Management</em></td>
<td>Online channel choice is determined by fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership. “Offline” channel preference influenced by need for touch. No gender differences identified regarding online versus offline channels choice.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Technology oriented view:

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<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influence of brand trust, offline patronage, involvement and website quality on online apparel shopping intention</td>
<td>(Jones &amp; Kim, 2010). <em>International Journal of Consumer Studies</em></td>
<td>Usability and information quality, visual appeal and image of the website, retail trust, offline patronage and clothing involvement influence consumers’ intention to shop clothing items online.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Info components of apparel websites</td>
<td>(Kim, Kim &amp; Lennon, 2007). <em>Journal of Fashion Marketing &amp; Management</em></td>
<td>Catalog e-tailers provide the most information for both high and low task-relevant information components.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online visual merchandising</td>
<td>(Ha, Kwon &amp; Lennon, 2007). <em>Journal of Fashion Marketing &amp; Management</em></td>
<td>Taxonomy of online VMD cues. Findings: many VMD features present in traditional stores have been implemented in virtual stores. Some features of online apparel stores are not present in offline stores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation of fashion garments and web experience influence (young customers)</td>
<td>(Livett &amp; McCormick, 2012). <em>Journal of Fashion Marketing &amp; Management</em></td>
<td>Identification of two elements: functional product viewing (utilitarian effects) and aesthetic fashion information provided (hedonic effects). Hedonic entertainment is important for young consumers shopping online.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Research Questions
What is the influence of website features and information search on perceived risk and purchase intentions?
And more precisely:

- What is the influence of website features on site attitudes, perceived risk and purchase intentions?
- What is the influence of product information search on perceived risk and purchase intentions?

4. Propositions
To answer the research questions, five propositions are formulated. Propositions are divided into two main sections in relation to the research question: the first section is related to website features, the second to information search.

Website features

P1: Website usability affects (a) site attitudes and (b) purchase intention positively.

The first proposition deals with how the website quality and usability affect purchase intentions in virtual apparel stores. Previous literature demonstrated that in a general online environment, computer features are crucial to induce positive perceptions of usefulness and informativeness (Hausman & Siekpe, 2009). Richard (2005) discovered that internet atmospherics impact surfers behaviors and site involvement, but no relation was found between internet website usability and purchase intentions. Chen, Hsu and Lin (2010), on the other side, revealed that usability impacts purchase intentions positively. Website usability points at a website overall design and functionality, and refers to user-friendly interfaces, easiness of use, fast processing, accurate search capability and interactive mechanisms (Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Malhotra 2002; Vijayasarathy, 2004; Richard, 2005; Schaupp & Belanger, 2005; Anand, 2007). Several authors showed how well-implemented functions of websites can contribute to consumer satisfaction and consequently lead to higher return rates (Ranganathan & Ganapathy, 2002; Schaupp & Belanger, 2005; Hausman & Siekpe, 2009). Ha and Stoel (2009) and Chen et al. (2010) discovered that technology features affect online purchase intentions. Chang and Chen (2008) found out that
website quality impacts consumers trust and perceived risk, and consequently purchase intentions.

Researches related to virtual apparel websites show similar results. McMillan, Hwang and Lee (2003) pointed out that websites feature impact shopping behavior and attitudes towards the website. Dawson and Kim (2010) demonstrated that cues on virtual apparel stores websites trigger impulsive buying. Jones & Kim (2010) demonstrated that website quality positively affects online shopping intention. In particular, website usability (and specifically a user-friendly interface) and information quality were found to be the most significant predictors of online purchase intention. These authors also pointed out that usability can be enhanced by providing clear page layout and labels.

**P2a:** Detailed product information affects (a) perceived risk and (b) purchase intentions positively.

**P2b:** Product return services affect (a) perceived risk and (b) purchase intentions positively.

**P2c:** Tools that help the shopper visualize the outfits affect (a) perceived risk and (b) purchase intentions positively.

The second group of propositions refer to services and functions offered in a website that allow users to reduce time and effort in the transaction (Chen, Hsu, Lin, 2010), facilitate browsing, information gathering and visualization of products. These functions include: product catalog, search engine, shopping carts, tracing mechanisms, product return services, detailed product information (for example detailed information regarding colors and fabrics), tools to help the shopper visualize the outfits and how the clothing items would look like when worn (for example enlargement tools, hanging and mannequin presentations), variety of payment options (Liang & Lai, 2002; Kerfoot, Davis & Ward, 2003; Chen et al., 2010).

Previous researches demonstrated that many of these functions are important to increase purchase intentions in a general online environment, as they contribute to decrease perceived product uncertainty (Ha, Kwon & Lennon, 2007; Chen et al. 2010). In addition to that, Jones and Kim (2010) pointed out that as information quality is a crucial element to influence purchase intentions, specific details regarding colors, fabrics and sizes of garments should be provided.
This research aims at evaluating these functions in an apparel virtual context. Also, according to my knowledge, previous studies have not evaluated the possibility of visualizing the clothing item with relation to the specific user.

**P2d:** The possibility to personalize the item influences (a) site attitudes and (b) purchase intentions positively.

Product customization in the e-commerce context has been investigated by Moon, Chadee and Tikoo (2008). These researchers argue that the possibility to personalize a product may decrease perceived differences between consumer expectation related to a product and the delivered item and therefore contribute to reduce product perceived uncertainty (Moon et al., 2008). Chellappa and Sin (2005) define personalization as “the tailoring of products and purchase experience to the tastes of individual consumers based upon their personal and preference information” (p.1). According to these authors, personalization depends on retailers’ ability to gather and process information but also on consumers’ willingness to share personal information and use personalization services (Chellappa & Sin, 2005).

Product personalization has been identified as a major recent trend, together with an increasing consumers’ need for being protagonists in the consumption process (Agnese, 2013).

According to my knowledge, previous studies have not evaluated the possibility to personalize clothing items (for example by adding writings and name initials), but it can be considered important in the light of recent trends related to product personalization. This research aims at defining the influence of product customization on purchase intentions in an apparel virtual store.

**P3:** Background patterns influence site attitudes positively.

According to Eroglu, Machleit and Davis (2003) background patterns are part of the low task-relevant cues, together with colors, borders, typestyles and fonts, animation, music, sounds and entertainment (Eroglu et al. 2003). Low task-relevant cues are those cues that provide “site information relatively inconsequential to the completion of the shopping task” (p.142). It was proved that for offline retailers that also rely on an online channel, the low-task relevant cues are important in generating memories of shopping in the virtual store (Eroglu et al. 2003).

Several studies investigated the impact of low task-relevant cues. Krumwiede, Nitse, Ottaway, Parker, 2004 have demonstrated that color representation on the web is
important in attracting loyal customers, while color misrepresentation cause high dissatisfaction. Song and Zinkhan (2003) showed how website features such as colors graphics and music are important to improve usability. Hausman and Siekpe (2009) demonstrated that wrong use of colors in a website can increase user irritation while browsing. Chang and Chen (2008) included appropriate use of colors and background patterns as important environment cues and essential elements for evaluating website quality. According to Ha, Kwon and Lennon (2007) environmental atmospherics can influence perception and may attract consumers into an online store. Kim, Kim and Lennon (2007) outlined the importance of low-task relevance information components for consumers.

Information search:

P4: Information on products collected on social medias decreases perceived risk. Several studies have investigated the influence of perceived risk in online purchasing behaviour and demonstrated that it negatively influences online purchase intention (Kim & Park, 2003; Dubinsky, Huang, Schrank, 2004; Zhou et al. 2007; Noh & Kwon, 2010).

Perceived risk has been defined by Pavlou (2003) as the consumers’ subjective belief of suffering a loss when chasing a desired outcome. Risk perception is generally recognized as being higher in an online context given the impersonal nature of e-commerce and the greater information asymmetry (Zhou et al., 2007). Perceived risk related to online purchasing can be behavioural or environmental (Park, Lee, Ahn, 2004). The first is generated by the possibility of opportunistic behaviour of retailers; this risk includes product risk, psychological risk, and seller performance risks. On the other hand, environmental risk includes financial and privacy risks, and it is strictly related to the unpredictability of internet itself (Park et al., 2004).

According to Mangold and Faulds (2009), social medias can be considered as the hybrid element of the promotion mix, as they allow organizations to indirectly communicate to customers. Social medias include blogs, chat rooms, social networking websites, moblogs, forums. These authors also demonstrate how social medias influence consumer behavior by impacting awareness, information gathering, opinions, attitudes, purchase behavior and post-purchase communication (Mangold, Faulds, 2009). In addition to that, Xiang and Gretzel (2010) revealed that social
Social medias allow users to share information in different ways through several means, and were able to considerably speed up the word-of-mouth process. This research is aimed at figuring out whether the increased amount of information provided by these tools (for example the possibility to evaluate other users experiences after purchasing in a given website) impact the customer perceived risk. In particular, this study assumes the increased amount of information will positively impact consumers’ perceived risk.

Blog users are defined by Park Ahn and Kim (2010) as active creators, owners and managers of symbols and signs of consumption. Also, the blog network is crucial in creating trends, spreading news and opinions and sharing information via word-of-mouth (Johnson & Kaye, 2004). According to Cho and Workman (2010), the online channel choice is determined by fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership. Fashion bloggers can be considered opinion leaders in the field of fashion, and therefore:

**P5:** Information on products collected on fashion blogs influences (a) user curiosity (b) purchase intentions positively.

5. Methodology

Personal interviews will be conducted to outline the relationship between information search and product category, and purchase intentions and perceived risk. Semi structured interviews will also aim at defining what are the most important features in apparel websites. After that, a content analysis will be performed on twenty apparel websites to assess whether the identified features are present. Personal interviews and content analysis have proved to be effective tools in researches investigating similar topics (Kim, Kim, Lennon, 2007; Donthu, Poddar, Wei, 2009).

The participants will be selected on the base of personal contacts and interviewed either via face-to-face interviews or Skype. The selected contacts will be workers
over 25 years old. This is aimed at avoiding students, as they belong to a peculiar segment and may lead to biased results.

6. Preliminary thesis structure
1. Introduction
1.1. Problem Statement
1.2. Research question and Objectives of Thesis
2. Literature Review
2.1. Online Purchasing Behavior
2.2. Purchasing Behavior for Online Apparel Purchasing
3. Theoretical background and research model
3.1 ELM of information processing
3.2 S-O-R paradigm
3.3. Research model
4. Methodology
4.1. Semi structured interview
4.1.1 Results
4.1.2 Analysis of Results
4.2. Website Content Analysis
4.2.1 Results
4.2.2 Analysis of the results
5. Implications for companies
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8. References


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