

Impact of Trend Orientation on Self Concept and Consumer Decision Making

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary consumer culture, the increasing impact of social media has escalated an individual's tendency to follow trends, potentially impacting their internal beliefs and decision-making processes. This review article explores the influence of trend orientation on self-concept clarity and consumer decision making among young adults. Trends, encompassing socially shared patterns of preference or behavior gaining widespread acceptance within a specific time frame, act as an external influence that shapes an individual's sense of self and approach towards purchase decisions. Individual's internal structure may get affected if they rely on social cues and popularity signals while making purchase choices, and their self-expression in form of clothing might not align with their inner beliefs, rather gets shaped by collective expectations. This paper consolidates existing research to explain the relationship between trend orientation, consumer decision making, and self-concept clarity. It examines how following trends affect self-beliefs and styles of making purchase decisions in respect to clothing styles. Using keywords, eighteen studies have been identified. By integrating theoretical frameworks from various disciplines, this review provides insights into mechanisms underlying relationships between trend orientation, consumer decision making, and self-concept clarity.

Keywords: *Trend Orientation, Self-Concept Clarity, Consumer Decision Making, Young Adults*

Trend Orientation

“Trend Orientation refers to the degree to which individuals actively seek and adopt emerging trends and innovations. It reflects a consumer's tendency to pursue new product information and to be responsive to contemporary developments in the marketplace. Trend orientation has been conceptually grounded in broader frameworks of consumer innovativeness and novelty seeking behavior” (Manning et al., 1995)

“Batonic gave trendsetting model which considers trendsetting to be dispositional construct, i.e., internal construct whose characteristic includes information processing perspective. This perspective states three types of processes.

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- 1. Information Input:** Individuals are vigilant for new trends and ideas.
- 2. Information Throughout:** Individuals focus on core features and novel applications for innovations.
- 3. Information Output:** Individuals disperse information and engage in product recommendations to peers and family.” (Batinic et al., 2006)

Trends are associated with different ways of clothing and materials used for the cloth, aesthetics that are modern, traditional or lies somewhere in between, along with accessories subjectively well suited with the design adopted by individuals.

“Digital platform users can explore and interact with fashion content instantly, contributing to rapid rise and dissemination of trends. Digital content creators serve as major determinants in directing purchase decisions and reconstructing aesthetic standards for their large online audience. But it also creates concerns regarding hyper-idealized beauty norms and sustainability.” (Muturi, 2024)

Rogers (1962) explains “how new ideas, products, or trends spread through a social system over time”. Theory proposes that when an innovation is introduced, it is not immediately accepted in a social system, and spreads/ diffuses gradually with help of social interaction.” In modern times, social media acts as a mode of diffusion for fashion trends.

Trend orientation is extensively seen in young adults, who are in the phase of identity exploration. This idea is supported by a study which suggests that “GenZ, born between 1997 and 2012 are active social media users and are influenced by social media agents. In collected data it was observed that out of 101 participants, 78 individuals, majorly belonging age group 18-22 felt “need to change their clothing based on their surroundings”. This study further indicated that adolescents experience a sense of exclusion when their clothing style varies from their peers. (Adanil and Mehta, 2023).

Social Influence Theory proposed by Deutsch and Gerard (1955) proposed two types of social influences, ‘Normative Social Influence’ where individual conforms to group norms to gain social approval or avoid disapproval and ‘Informational Social Influence’ where individual accepts others' opinions as they are seen as reliable source of information, like choosing a product due to multiple positive reviews. The dynamic and transformative nature of trends creates pressure on individuals to update their styles and hence lead to socially guided decisions and impulsive purchases, that may or may not guarantee internal satisfaction.

If there is a shift and previously adapted ideas have lost its social appeal, consumers may feel remorse for spending on goods that are no longer valued, while some may develop cautiousness regarding future trend-based purchases.

Research by Ding (2025) suggests that pace at which fashion trends change makes it tough for companies and retailers to predict buyer’s preferences. As a result, there is overproduction of goods that are no longer popular, which leads to resource wastage and monetary strain. Extreme market competition pushes many fashion firms to depend on similar marketing strategies which reduces newness and distinguishment among products that are sold. This study supports the idea that the market potentially faces backlashes due to evolving trends.

Self-Concept Clarity

Self-concept clarity refers to “the extent to which self-beliefs are clearly and confidently defined, internally consistent and stable.” (Campbell et al., 1996). It serves as a crucial psychological construct that is developed by social interactions and life experiences which guide individuals' decisions, behavior, and choices in various domains. Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954) suggests that “people have an innate need to understand themselves and if objective standards are unavailable, they compare themselves with others for self-evaluation. Social comparisons fuel the ‘need to fit in’ and hence inclination towards public fabricated norms. Understanding self-concept clarity as variable helps to explain individual differences in susceptibility to following trends and making decisions as buyers.”

“Individuals with low self-concept are more likely to engage in social comparison and their maladaptive sense of perfectionism like fear of negative evaluation accelerate tendencies to compare them with peers. Individuals with unstable sense of self seek external validation.” (Saadat et al., 2023)

“Individuals with low self-concept clarity showcase lower subjective wellbeing and to compensate and fill the identity gaps, they turn to material possessions and use consumption as coping mechanism.” (Chang et al., 2023)

Cushman's Empty Self Theory suggests that people with ‘empty self’ exhibit characteristics like unclear self-concept and high self-uncertainty and material goods act as symbolic fillers to compensate for that inner desolation. This theory supports the idea that a person seeks materialism to fill the internal void, and it affects consumer decision making styles.

Consumer Decision Making

Consumer decision making refers to a process where individuals recognize a need, evaluate alternatives, and make choices about purchasing goods and services to satisfy their needs.

“A consumer decision-making style is defined as a mental orientation characterizing a consumer's approach to making choices. It has cognitive and affective characteristics (for example, quality consciousness and fashion consciousness). In essence, it is a basic consumer personality, analogous to the concept of personality in psychology.” (Sproles & Kendall, 1986)

Social Learning Theory by Bandura (1977) explains how individuals learn behavior by imitating people they consider role models. Four processes involved in observational learning include attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. In context to fashion trends, influencers and celebrities act as role models, and social media is a learning environment. “Observational learning strengthens external motivation and promotes imitative behavior. Example, customers when see high sales of products on social media, they view it as being of good quality.” (Chenjie Deng, 2024)

“Contemporary digital markets have introduced features like algorithmic personalization and predictive analytics that incorporate targeted advertising and recommendation systems that expose customers to curated content. Digital platform algorithms analyze browsing history, search patterns, and engagement behaviors to predict future actions. Hence, consumer decisions are influenced by digital exposure. Visualization techniques like trend mapping and sentiment detection are graphical methods used to understand consumer behavior” (Salah, 2025)

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The EBM model, proposed by Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard in 1995, consists of five stages that explain how consumers make purchase decision along with information processing that includes mental pathway between seeing a trend and deciding to buy a product, individual differences (example, self-concept, motivation, personality, attitudes and values) and environmental influences (example, culture, social class, trends, etc.).

The “Hedonic consumption perspective emphasized that consumer behavior is not purely rational or utilitarian but also involves multisensory experience, fantasy and emotional motives. Products are chosen on the basis of emotional state and can be used for fantasy fulfillment and mood enhancement. Also, there are individual differences while experiencing hedonic consumption.” (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1989)

“Consumer behavior textbooks, authored by Assael (1998), Blackwell et al. (2005), Darley et al. (2010) mentions five stage model of purchasing behavior including problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternative, purchase decision, and post purchase evaluation. This model is conceptually rooted in John Dewey’s Problem-Solving Model (1910).”

The eight factors to assess decision making includes-

1. *Perfectionistic, High Quality Conscious Consumer*, who looks for the best quality products to cater to needs. Such consumers generally find prices as valuable indicators for quality and buy carefully.
2. *Brand Conscious Consumers*, who are oriented towards products from expensive or well-known brands. Consumers choose products with an affirmative image.
3. *Novelty Fashion Conscious Consumers*, who are attracted towards trendy and novel ideas and goods. Consumers are distracted by fresh stock of apparel.
4. *Recreational, Hedonistic Consumers*, who seek joy and thrill from shopping and see it as leisure activity.
5. *Price Conscious Consumers*, who choose affordable options, look for discounts and best prices at various platforms for the same good.
6. *Impulsive, Careless Consumers*, who purchase products without in-depth thought and may regret their decision afterwards. Consumers do not engage in looking for other options or care for the amount of money they are spending on brands or products.
7. *Confused by Overchoice Consumers*, who face indecisiveness in selecting due to various options.
8. *Habitual, Brand Loyal Consumers*, who exhibit brand loyalty and purchase from same brands or stores.

Consumer Syles Inventory provides a standardized measurement system to understand how consumers approach purchase decisions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Self-concept clarity has been identified as an important factor influencing a person’s susceptibility to external influences and comparison processes. Hassan Saadat et al. (2017) found that there is a significant negative relationship between self-concept clarity and social comparison, i.e., as self-concept clarity decreases social comparison increases. People having lower levels of clarity with themselves are more likely to be affected by external sources.

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In addition to this, self-concept clarity has also been associated with maladaptive coping strategies. Baorui, Zang and Fang (2023) revealed that participants low in self-concept clarity exhibited higher materialism and lower level of subjective well-being, in Chinese context. It focuses on the fact that people who are unclear about their inner self, feel less happy, and to cope with this uneasy feeling they buy things to feel secure. This approach can instead reduce overall well-being.

Study by Gemilani Nalanan, Matulesy and Pasca Rini (2025) found a low correlation between conformity and impulsive buying among college students. Students might conform to social norms to fit in groups but in case of impulsive buying, other factors like internal motivation, emotions, and personal preferences are more dominant. In addition, it was found that students have positive relationship between hedonistic lifestyle (i.e., consumptive activities like visiting shopping malls, relaxing in cafes, watching movies in theatres) and impulsive buying as students are more exposed to attractive and tempting items and make unplanned purchases.

In terms of beauty products, Sánchez Giménez (2023) took both males and females, who were college going were taken as sample size from Spain and qualitative method was used along with quantitative. Statistically positive correlation between self-concept clarity and consumer decision making styles were revealed. A definite inner identity supports reasoned consumer behavior. Customers who purchase premium skin care products engage in consumption to align with their ideal self and consider skincare as a form of self-care. Consumers who purchase premium makeup consider it a form of 'self-expression'. It was noted that premium skincare was paired with premium cosmetics. Consumers who buy budget friendly skincare or makeup share similar traits, like being price conscious and viewing products as functional items, not centering their self-concept around it.

Social media as agent was also explored in study conducted by Yun Zou et al. (2025) where it was found that for self-presentation on social media, experiential consumption (i.e., focused on obtaining an experience like going to concerts or taking vacation) is more likely to be shared than material consumption (i.e., focused on obtaining material goods like electronics, clothes, etc.). Further, it is stated that women consumers are more likely to engage in experiential consumption than male consumers, after self-presentation on social media. Additionally, the study reveals that consumers who express themselves on social media have clearer self-concept clarity and are more likely to spend money on experiential consumption. Further study by Jill Nash (2018) explored social media influence in UK sector and Generation Y and Generation X were taken as sample sizes. Findings revealed that Generation Y participants produced affirmative feelings when viewing pictures of high street fashion on social media. They identified an internal sense of style by going through different accounts and satisfying their hedonistic needs. It was also found that subjects who were involved in fashion were more likely to follow social media fashion trends. It was also found that social media also facilitated subjects' active search for high street fashion information.

In terms of physiology behind consumer decision making, a study conducted by Munyaradzi Mhaka (2025) explains how different cognitive moods affect consumer decision making, shifting focus from only extrinsic factors. Research has discussed five key cognitive moods, mainly "Neural Challenge, Neural Inquiry, Neural Experiment, Neural Experience, and Neural Content" which tells how each state affects information processing, purchase

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contentment, and brand loyalty. It studies cognitive features behind consumer decision making.

In addition to this, influence of demographics on consumer decision making was explored by Abdelwahab, Diao and Ahmed Nagaty (2023) on Egyptian population. Four demographic variables chosen were age, gender, income, and education. Eight decision making styles were correlated with fashion product involvement, and each style has a different degree of product involvement. Like novelty fashion conscious consumers who seek for new designs and brands show stronger involvement in fashion, followed by hedonistic consumers (who view shopping as pleasurable activity), perfectionist consumers (make rigorous product evaluation before buying) and brand conscious consumers (who are more likely to buy top selling products). Least impact of fashion product involvement is on brand loyal consumers who make repetitive purchases from same brand or store, as they make buying decisions based on previous experiences. For age as variable, younger customers were more involved in comparison to older consumers because of the need for being up to date. In respect with gender, females are more likely to buy fashion products than males. In respect to income, lower income groups generate more efforts in buying fashion products, and due to lack of financial resources, they cannot afford to make wrong choices hence deploy more efforts. In terms of education, undergraduates have stronger fashion involvement than higher educational level individuals due to the availability of better free time.

The relationship between fashion and consumer decision making was explored with the help of study conducted by Manilall Dhurup (2014). Sample included university students and Consumer Style Inventory by Sproles and Kendall was used. No significant relationship was found between fashion interest and brand consciousness. Product novelty, where new things are tried, has a directional relationship with brand consciousness. Product quality also influences brand consciousness, but there is no significant relationship with brand loyalty.

In addition to this, dynamics of fashion trends were studied using research conducted by Akhilendra and Aravendan (2023) where significant relationship between fashion trends and visual merchandising strategies in retail stores was found. Retailers modify store displays like mannequin styling and window displays to align with current fashion trends, which in turn positively affect consumer buying decisions. Such stores are considered as 'fashionable and modern' and impulsive buying can also be triggered by getting attracted towards the clothing display in shops.

Fashion trends and their influence on consumer behaviour have been examined across different cultural and situational factors. For instance, study conducted by Ningsih and Faraby (2025) revealed that fashion trends have little impact on Muslim apparel purchases and consumer buying decisions, residents of Bangkalan City are not majorly impacted by changes and advancements in fashion trends, rather are influenced by viral marketing. In contrast, other research highlights the significant role of fashion trends in shaping consumer decisions. Jiaxin Ding (2025) demonstrated that consumption behavior is not only income driven but is also influenced by various other factors like current fashion trends, social media exposure, and psychological and emotional drivers. Consumers use popular fashion elements to express personal aesthetics, like clothing styles, colors, patterns, etc. Consumers are influenced by reference groups like peers, family, influencers and social media has expanded this group beyond physical circle. Cultural background and regional differences impact fashion choices, example, western customers may seek different style than Asian customers.

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Additionally, Chenze Lei (2024) reported that US people during the COVID-19 pandemic became cautious and spend money on necessities rather than fashion which impacted fashion business. Fluctuations in economic conditions significantly influence fashion consumption. The rapid expansion of e-commerce and social media platforms has significantly altered purchasing habits, enabling consumers to access fashion trends more quickly and conveniently.

Research suggests that consumer decisions can be effectively understood by behaviour patterns such as digital footprints, purchase frequency and engagement with product trends. Mahmoud Salah (2025) found that consumer behavior influences the production and innovation cycle and is influenced by emotional cues, especially given by creators appreciating specific brands or products.

The growing influence of celebrities and public figures have also contributed in the transformation of consumer choices. Study conducted by Yanning Li (2026) took South Korean organizations into consideration and their social media conduct's influence on followers was studied. It was demonstrated that the audience follows the fashion style of their preferred celebrities, along with using diets and surgeries to copy their picked superstar. Young customers are more prone to acquire things linked to their heroes, hence making purchase decisions based on this. Also, young customers buy products recommended by their favorite celebrity.

Social media platforms have also emerged as powerful tools for tracking fashion trends. Alex Rudniy, Olena Rudna, Arim Park (2023) introduced novel method, named 3Ts (Trend Tracking Tool) that analyses fashion discussions taking place on twitter and detect trending apparel attributes (e.g. colors, fabrics, styles) along with identifying increase and decrease in fashion related conversations. It helps in a fast fashion context from the point of view of consumers and sellers. This method helps to provide time-sensitive insights. Similarly, Sultana, Batool & Abbas (2025) found that Instagram functions as a significant platform for fashion awareness and promoting clothing brands. Effective clothing brand strategies and online engagement are valuable for consumer style preferences. Instagram influencers shape style decisions by creating an attractive branding environment.

Furthermore, digital innovations have significantly expanded the reach of fashion trends. Ruicheng Dai (2023) found that digital fashion week functions both as commercial and expressive platforms. Brands generate revenue by expanding market reach to various regions of the world. Buy now options and 'virtual try-on' enhance user experiences. Cinematic fashion films and digital avatars help in creative expression. These developments accelerate digital innovation and influences fashion trends.

CONCLUSION

This review focuses on examining the relationship between trend orientation, consumer decision making, and self-concept clarity. The findings across studies suggest that trend orientation is largely shaped by social media platforms and global connectivity, which accelerate diffusion of fashion trends and styles. While trends serve as a medium of self-expression, it acts as a strong external influence which can pressurize consumers to purchase apparels, particularly young adults who are in the process of identity exploration.

A consistent pattern observed in the literature highlights the critical role of self-concept clarity in shaping individual's choices. People with a lower level of self-concept clarity are

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more likely to engage in social comparison and seek external validation, along with relying on materialistic coping strategies. Lack of clear sense of self leads to dependence on trends and socially driven consumption out of conformity. In contrast, people with stable self, exhibit internally guided and confident decision-making styles.

Consumer decision making emerges as a multidimensional process influenced by physiological, psychological, and technological factors. Review demonstrates that contemporary consumer behavior is not solely guided by rational evaluation but also seeks hedonic motives and digital exposure. Social media influencers, celebrities, and algorithm driven content play a crucial role in transforming preferences, acting as reinforcers to guide purchase decisions.

Overall, review highlights that trend orientation, consumer decision making and self-concept are closely interconnected areas.

Although existing literature has explored trend orientation, consumer decision making and self-concept clarity independently, there is a lack of comprehensive study exploring integration of these variables across different cultures. While existing literature has explored external factors like social media, marketing strategies, and economic factors related to consumer trends, less emphasis has been drawn upon psychological factors and internal constructs. Further, there is not sufficient focus on various age groups and how these variables impact them. Addressing these limitations in future research would contribute to a comprehensive understanding of trend orientation and its impact on consumer decision making and self-concept clarity.

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Conflict of Interest

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