

## The Influence of Experiential Marketing on Customer Purchase Intention of Online Fashion Products

**Authors :** Marike Venter de Villiers, Alicia Kruger

**Abstract :** The rapid development of the Internet has facilitated the proliferation of online stores. It has, therefore, become a pertinent issue for online retailers to provide the ultimate experience to customers in an attempt to maintain market share in this competitive landscape. Experiential marketing refers to the sensory dimensions that consumers experience when being faced with a purchase decision, such as getting them to sense, feel, think, act, and relate. The goal of experiential marketing is to provide a holistic experience for customers that allow them to engage in an activity where they may be motivated to purchase the concept behind the product. Creating a unique online experience holds several benefits to brands such as increased customer satisfaction, increased revisit intention, and higher levels of customer loyalty. Although several studies have explored the topic of experiential marketing in an online context, a lack of research exists on South African consumers, an emerging economy that is often overlooked globally. More specifically, the present study focused on professional females and their perceptions of experiential marketing when shopping for fashion products online. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the experiential factors that influence the online purchase intention of fashion products among female professionals. Furthermore, this study aimed to achieve the following objectives: firstly, to gain insight into key website characteristics that consumers value when shopping online for fashion products; secondly, to apply Pine and Gilmore's (1989) Four Realms of an Experience (entertainment, education, esthetics, and escapism) to ground the study; and thirdly, to gain in-depth insight into the importance of these dimensions and identifying sub-categories that fashion marketers can use to enhance consumers' online experience. By means of a qualitative study, a focus group was conducted comprising six professional females by using semi-structured questions. Respondents were selected using convenience sampling, and the results were analyzed using thematic analysis. The present research suggests that three of the four realms of experience influence purchase intention of fashion products online, namely, escapism, esthetics, and education. The fourth dimension, pleasure, was present but to a lesser degree. In other words, 'escapism' provides online shoppers with a sense of emotional and intellectual pleasure, while 'esthetics' refers to the website design, functionality, and product range, and 'education' comprises the product information such as the quality, fabric, price and available sizes. The findings of this study provide fashion marketers with insight into how they can maximize on experiential marketing when selling fashion products online. It further provides strategies and techniques for creating an enhanced online experience that ultimately may lead to increased purchase intention.

**Keywords :** experiential marketing, fashion, online, retail

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