

Investigating the determinants and effects of prestige sensitivity in fashion retailing

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Abstract: Targeting the prestige fashion segment enables fashion retailers to continue growing while facing a challenging environment. To attract prestige-sensitive consumers, it is important to understand their buying motivations and responses to retail actions. Thus, this paper examines the motivational predictors and effects of prestige sensitivity in fashion retailing, using the symbolic self-completion theory as a framework. It also explores the moderating role of fashion innovativeness. The data collected from shoppers of apparel products ($N = 289$) in Croatia were analyzed using structural equation modelling (SEM). The results show that recognition enhancement, sexual attraction, and recreation shopping motivations, which help enhance individuals' self-identity in society, drive prestige sensitivity. At the same time, fashion innovativeness significantly moderates the relationship between recreation motive and prestige sensitivity. Prestige-seeking consumers positively respond to mannequin displays, spend more time shopping, and focus more on symbolic apparel attributes while shopping. This study contributes to the self-completion theory applied in fashion retailing by developing and testing the model that links prestige sensitivity with shopping motivations, fashion innovativeness, the selection of apparel attributes, response to visual merchandising, and time expenditure. The findings provide recommendations for marketers on how to develop fashion products/prestige brands in line with the expectations of prestige-seeking shoppers, target this market segment more efficiently, and increase the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

Keywords: Fashion retailing, prestige sensitivity, symbolic self-completion theory, shopping motivations, shopping behavior.

JEL Classification: M31, M37.

APA Style Citation: Anic, I.-D., Milakovic, I. K., & Mihic, M. (2024). Investigating the determinants and effects of prestige sensitivity in fashion retailing. *E&M Economics and Management*, 27(2), 183–200. <https://doi.org/10.15240/tul/001/2024-2-011>

Introduction

Luxury apparel is a growing market segment, contributing to the manufacturing and retailing industries (Statista, 2024) since there are consumers who like to show their wealth by paying higher prices for luxury clothing brands (Maran et al., 2021). Luxury fashion brands known for their high quality, luxury, and upper-class

status allow retailers to charge premium prices and increase profitability and loyalty, even in crisis, as these brands can create a sense of prestige, making consumers more inclined to continue purchasing them (Ajitha & Sivakumar, 2019; Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2000; Jain, 2020; Lai & Prendergast, 2019; Lichtenstein et al., 1993; Nyadzayo et al., 2020; Roy et al.,

2018). In light of recent economic uncertainty, luxury fashion brands are particularly resilient (Rilli & Bezze, 2022). However, attracting and retaining prestige-sensitive consumers is challenging because of their distinct preferences and high expectations (Mayasari & Wiadi, 2021). Intense competition, economic fluctuations, and the growth of online sales of luxurious brands that accelerated during the COVID-19 crisis (Beauloye, 2023) challenge sale revenues and loyalty to physical fashion stores. However, physical stores still play an important role in the luxury brand market, offering a unique advantage that is missing online, including human-led personal service, in-person experience, and interaction with the retail store and product (Beauloye, 2022).

Prestige sensitivity, i.e., a consumer tendency to buy high-priced apparel brands, has been considered a major concept for understanding prestige buying behavior (Lichtenstein et al., 1993). Previous research has acknowledged that personality traits (Casidy, 2012a,b; Mulyanegara, 2011), fashion consciousness (Casidy, 2012a,b; Casidy et al., 2015), social belonging (Sung, 2019), but also some motivational factors, including the need for uniqueness, the desire to have unique goods, attain a symbolic marker of group membership, hedonic motivations, and the need for perfectionism and materialism (Lai & Prendergast, 2019; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999) drive prestige sensitivity. Furthermore, existing literature indicates that prestige-sensitive consumers have distinct shopping behaviors, emphasizing the need to acquire symbols and a prestigious self-image (Montgomery et al., 2016). Most existing studies have focused on Western cultures, while values, attitudes, and acceptance of prestige fashion products differ in non-Western cultures (Ajitha & Sivakumar, 2019; Jain, 2020; Li et al., 2012; Roy et al., 2018; Shukla, 2012). In this context, what motivates shoppers to buy prestige products and how this personality trait drives retail outcomes in different settings are less clear.

To address a gap in the literature, we apply the framework proposed by Chen-Yu and Seock (2002) and Shchudro (2011) to examine which shopping motivations related to making purchasing decisions in the store predict prestige sensitivity, considering fashion innovativeness as a moderator. We also investigate

how prestige sensitivity is related to several under-researched retail outcomes, i.e., consumer response to in-store stimuli, selection of apparel attributes, and shopping time expenditure inside the fashion store. This research is based on symbolic self-completion theory, which postulates that individuals are committed to using material possessions (i.e., prestigious brands) as socially recognized symbols strongly related to what they perceive as the ideal self to protect their self-identity and communicating it to others to be accepted in the society (Braun & Wicklund 1989; Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2000; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981, 1982). The data were collected from adult shoppers of fashion products in Croatia in retail stores that sell prestigious fashion brands.

Our paper contributes to the literature on prestige sensitivity within symbolic self-completion theory in three ways. First, we provide additional insights into shopping motivations that drive prestige sensitivity. Although several motives were proposed to affect prestige sensitivity, ranging from different psychological factors, needs, and desires, such as hedonism and self-expression (Mayasari & Wiadi, 2021), there is limited understanding of fashion consumption (Lee & Huang, 2020) and impact of shopping motivations. We apply the framework of shopping motivations proposed by Chen-Yu and Seock (2002) and Shchudro (2011), which include motivations that drive consumers to engage in shopping activities and make purchasing decisions, such as sexual attraction, recreation, conformity, recognition, enhancement, fashion expression, fashion and aesthetic expression, and out-of-need, which has not been researched yet. Second, our study provides new knowledge about the effects of prestige sensitivity on consumer purchasing behavior inside the store, which includes apparel selection criteria, consumers' response to visual merchandising stimuli, and time spent shopping, which have not been researched. Consumers have different expectations regarding fashion products and make purchases based on features such as price, quality, and brand (Hopper & Istook, 2016). However, it is less clear which apparel attributes prestige-seeking consumers consider necessary in their decision-making process. We also seek to determine how prestige sensitivity is related to visual merchandising stimuli, as compared to the previous research that has

examined the effects of visual merchandising as an independent variable on emotions, consumers' attitudes, and impulse buying behavior as dependent variables (Ha & Lennon, 2010; Jain et al., 2014). Since visual merchandising plays a pivotal role in consumer in-store responses (Anić et al., 2018), exploring its relationship with prestige sensitivity will bring novelty. Finally, we examine the impact of prestige sensitivity on time spent shopping, which is insufficiently researched in the literature (Hornik, 2021). The third contribution of our study lies in providing new knowledge about the moderating effect of fashion innovativeness in the relationships between shopping motivations and prestige sensitivity, which has not been researched yet. By incorporating fashion innovativeness in the model as a moderator, we account for a key predictor of innovation adoption, which is crucial for success (Goldsmith & Hofacker, 1991).

The findings help fashion retailers targeting Croatia develop apparel products in line with consumers' expectations and increase the effectiveness of brand appeals, in-store stimuli, and advertising while targeting the prestige market segment more efficiently.

1. Theoretical framework

Our paper is based on the symbolic self-completion theory, which postulates that individuals use material possessions as socially recognized symbols related to what they perceive as the ideal self to protect their self-identity and communicate it to others (Braun & Wicklund 1989; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981, 1982). When questioned, individuals substantiate their definition of themselves and clarify and protect their identity. Key concepts in this theory are a commitment to goals, symbols of completeness, and social reality (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981). Goal commitment refers to personal identities or self-definitions; the symbols of completeness include material and non-material possessions used as means for identity attainment, while the social reality is created if symbols are recognized by others (Montgomery et al., 2016; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981). Symbolic consumption is closely related to prestige buying behavior, as prestige-sensitive individuals are likely to buy luxury brands to signal their desired level of social standing to others (Montgomery et al., 2016).

Prestige sensitivity, a key concept in prestige fashion shopping behavior, is defined as

“favorable perceptions of the price cue based on feelings of prominence and status that higher prices signal to other people about the purchaser” (Lichtenstein et al., 1993, p. 236). This concept refers to consumers' tendency to buy high-priced and expensive product brands because they bring them joy and good feelings and because they think others will notice them, as these products signal success and wealth to others and can improve social standing (Ajitha & Sivakumar, 2019; Lai & Prendergast, 2019; Li et al., 2012; Montgomery et al., 2016).

Fashion can express self-image, role, and position towards others (Miller et al., 1993), while clothing is generally used to communicate and express social information (McCracken & Roth, 1989). Thus, fashion retailing serves well for applying self-completion theory to examine prestige sensitivity (e.g., Cassidy, 2012a,b; Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2000; Montgomery et al., 2016). Luxury products enable consumers to satisfy their psychological and functional needs (Nyadzayo et al., 2020) and gain the attention of others as a form of social communication (Li et al., 2012). They can enhance self-esteem and improve one's standing in the social hierarchy (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2000; Montgomery et al., 2016; Phau & Leng, 2008; Roy et al., 2018; Shukla, 2010). Prestige brands give consumers a sense of uniqueness (Ajitha & Sivakumar, 2019) and materialism (Montgomery et al., 2016) and help them fulfill hedonic needs (Epuran et al., 2015). In an international context, acquiring status is the major motive behind buying prestige brands, while differences exist in price quality, hedonism, and materialism (Mayasari & Wiadi, 2021; Shukla, 2012). According to some professional insights, self-expression is a vital badge of the new luxury paradigm (Beauloye, 2023). As motivations for acquiring prestige brands vary across countries, there is a need for further research in different environments.

Furthermore, past research indicates that prestige-sensitive consumers have distinct shopping patterns. Some papers suggest that they tend to buy fewer store brands (Bao & Mandrik, 2004) and seek to acquire symbols to emphasize a prestigious self-image (Montgomery et al., 2016). Luxury shoppers are brand-consistent and channel-agnostic and can assess and pick a shopping channel depending on convenience or innovations (Riili & Bezze, 2022). Despite some existing studies

examining prestige aspects, we still do not know how prestige shoppers respond to various elements of in-store stimuli and how this personal trait relates to store time expenditure.

2. Developing hypotheses

2.1 Clothing shopping motivations and prestige sensitivity

To examine which shopping motivations drive prestige sensitivity, we employ the framework proposed by Chen-Yu and Seock (2002) and Shchudro (2011), which includes several shopping motivations related to recognition, enhancement, aesthetic expression, sexual attraction, and recreation shopping motivations, arguing their relevance for the prestige-seeking behavior in a fashion retailing context. Although no study has examined the relationship between recognition enhancement and prestige sensitivity, some indirect findings suggest the potential association. Namely, recognition enhancement motivation refers to selecting a distinctive style of unusual clothes and buying well-known brands that can display an individual's personality (Shchudro, 2011). The self-completion theory postulates that individuals buy products with symbolic qualities that communicate prestigious identification to others to enhance their identity or self-image (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2000). In addition, prestige sensitivity is associated with physical and achievement concerns (Netemeyer et al., 1995), while clothing is seen as one of the easiest ways of broadcasting one's self-image to others (Millan & Mittal, 2017). Moreover, a need to express individuality is related to a strong desire to display status through uniqueness. At the same time, possessing prestigious luxury brands can enrich consumers' sense of self (De Kerviler & Rodriguez, 2019) and empower expressions of individual identity (Beauloye, 2023). Hence,

H1: Recognition enhancement motivation is positively associated with prestige sensitivity.

A shopping motivation related to aesthetic expression refers to concerns with beauty, finding clothes that look the best, and showing that the individual is outstandingly well-dressed. Current literature has not explored the connection between aesthetic expression and prestige sensitivity. However, some indirect findings indicate the potential association. Since individuals with high prestige sensitivity are influenced by other people's opinions (Casidy & Wymer,

2018), we expect them to strive to achieve societal approval by buying clothes that will improve their appearance. In addition, public self-image drives high-prestige brand purchase behavior (Sung et al., 2019), indicating the motive to achieve a good-looking appearance. Hence,

H2: Aesthetic expression motivation is positively associated with prestige sensitivity.

Motivation related to sexual attraction refers to buying clothes that are attractive to other people. Previous studies indicate that individuals often use clothes to show sexual interest and intent (Lennon et al., 2017) and stimulate sexual consciousness and attraction. They might want to wear clothes that appeal to the other gender (Shchudro, 2011) and arouse other people's interest (Chen-Yu & Seock, 2002). Lai and Prendergast (2019) suggest that luxurious brands might signal a woman's beauty and perceived social standing. Furthermore, status consumption closely related to prestige shopping is the central motivating force of fashion innovativeness related to sexual attractiveness (Anić et al., 2018). However, the connection between sexual attraction motivation and prestige-seeking consumers is less clear. Still, it might be important because sexuality is central to building individuals' self-identity. Thus,

H3: Sexual attraction motivation is positively associated with prestige sensitivity.

Recreation motivation refers to seeking entertainment, fun, and joy in shopping (Shchudro, 2011). The hedonic motivation, closely related to recreation motivation, has often been researched in fashion retailing. It referred to personal gratification, entertainment, fun, pleasure, novelty, and rewards-seeking shopping (Hausman, 2000; Michon et al., 2015) and was shown to be associated with the purchases of expensive products, i.e., the consumption motivated by self-image, but also with careful and economically oriented shopping (Epuran et al., 2015), making the impact of recreation shopping motivation on prestige shopping even more complex. The literature further suggests that hedonic motivation stems from emotional arousal and symbols that convey the image associated with purchases of expensive products (Epuran et al., 2015). Finally, self-directed pleasure and personal fulfillment are seen as determinants of the value of new luxury consumption (Atkinson & Kang, 2022).

Thus,

H4: Recreation motivation is positively associated with prestige sensitivity.

2.2 Prestige sensitivity and the selection of apparel attributes

Consumers evaluate apparel products using several attributes when making purchasing decisions. Literature acknowledges different classifications of evaluation criteria. One classification relates to symbolic and functional apparel attributes (Abraham-Murali & Littrell, 1995). Symbolic attributes provide additional value to the product (Miller et al., 1993). In fashion retailing, they include the trendiness, image, country of origin, brand name, fashionability, sexual attractiveness, and uniqueness of clothing, and aim at fulfilling the needs for self-enhancement, role position, and ego (Hopfer & Istook, 2016; Lee & Nguyen, 2017). Some previous studies suggest that prestige-seeking consumers tend to purchase brands that emphasize symbolic attributes of the product to express their identity and increase their self-image (Mulyanegara, 2011; Phau & Leng, 2008). Thus, prestige-seeking consumers might highly value these attributes. On the other hand, functional attributes such as fit, quality, ease of care, comfort, and fiber content motivate consumers to search for products that solve externally generated consumption needs (Hopfer & Istook, 2016; Lee & Nguyen, 2017) might also be important for prestige-seeking consumers. Namely, fit and quality seem to be related to the purchase of foreign brands (Lee & Nguyen, 2017) preferred by prestige shoppers. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: Prestige sensitivity is positively associated with functional apparel attributes.

H6: Prestige sensitivity is positively associated with symbolic apparel attributes.

2.3 Prestige sensitivity and consumers' response to visual merchandising

Visual merchandising, which includes interior displays, store layouts, mannequin displays, atmospherics, light, music, scents, colors, and signage, is used by fashion retailers to create an enjoyable shopping experience to attract and motivate consumers to shop. The theory suggests that consumers are more likely to make impulsive purchases when they are exposed to visual merchandising, which affects the individuals' perceptions and emotions and leads to approach behavior and purchase

(Ha & Lennon, 2010; Jain et al., 2014). The more the customers enjoy the shopping experience, the more they will be engaged in browsing and the higher the number of impulsive purchases (Jain et al., 2014). Atkinson and Kang (2022) also indicate that intrinsic experiential value drives customers' intention to engage with a new luxury brand. However, it is not clear how prestige-seeking consumers respond to in-store stimuli. Considering that consumers high on prestige are hedonic-oriented and fashion-conscious and are more willing to engage in new experiences (Casidy, 2012a; Epuran et al., 2015), we assume they might be more likely to respond to visual merchandising stimuli. Hence,

H7: Prestige sensitivity is positively associated with consumer response to visual merchandising.

2.4 Prestige sensitivity and time spent shopping

Some evidence indicates that prestige sensitivity might be related to time expenditure in retail stores. Previous studies suggest that time expenditure is influenced positively by emotions (Lucia-Palacios et al., 2016; Stoel et al., 2004), recreation, self-gratification, reward-seeking motivations, and learning about new trends (Hornik, 2021; McDonald, 1994). While hedonic motivations positively affect time expenditure, utilitarian motives are negatively associated with time. There is also a notion that many shoppers today are under time pressure and tend to shop quickly and efficiently (Hornik, 2021), which makes the predictions more difficult. Since prestige-sensitive consumers are hedonic-oriented (Epuran et al., 2015) and are more excitable and emotional, we assume that prestige orientation might stimulate them to spend more time in the store shopping to find the brands that will emphasize a prestigious self-image. Hence,

H8: Prestige sensitivity is positively related to time spent shopping.

2.5 The moderating role of fashion innovativeness

Fashion innovativeness describes consumers' interest in new products and their tendency to learn about them and be the first to buy them (Goldsmith & Hofacker, 1991). Fashion innovators are more brand-sensitive, more interested in fashion brands (Beaudoin et al., 2003), less price-sensitive (Goldsmith et al.,

2005), and tend to compete for status (Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012; Rogers, 1995), and thus this trait might enhance the effect of shopping motivations on prestige sensitivity. Furthermore, the need for uniqueness is related to fashion innovativeness (Sarıcam & Erdumlu, 2016; Workman & Caldwell, 2007), which might enhance the impact of recognition enhancement and aesthetic expression motivations on prestige sensitivity. In addition, Anić et al. (2018) suggest that

fashion innovativeness is associated with hedonic, recreation, and sexual attraction motivations. Hence,

H9: Fashion innovativeness positively moderates the effect of recognition enhancement motivation (H9a), aesthetic expression motivation (H9b), sexual attraction motivation (H9c), and recreation motivation (H9d) on prestige sensitivity.

The research model is presented in Fig. 1.

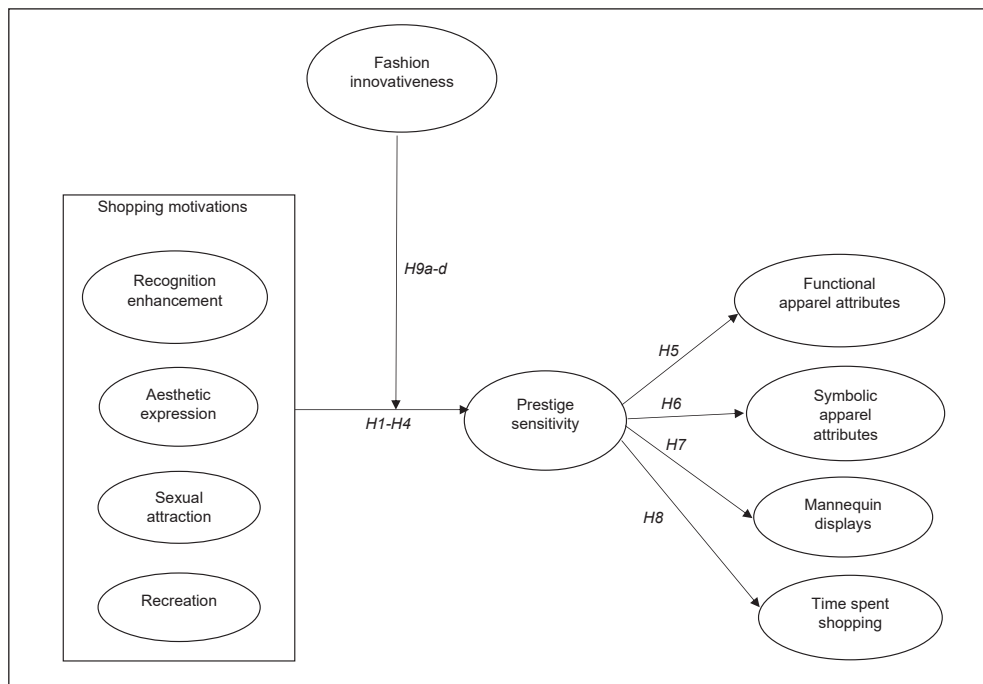


Fig. 1: Research model

Source: own

3. Research methodology

This study relies on a telephone survey (CATI). To determine the sample, we used a systematic random sampling technique by picking numbers of individuals from Croatia's telephone directory of residential and mobile phone numbers, with the target of collecting 300 surveys. The Institute of Economics, Zagreb, with four trained interviewers, collected the data from adult respondents. The interviewers were instructed

about the survey and prestige sensitivity questions. They asked the respondents if they were older than 18, briefly described what prestige brands are, provided some examples of prestige fashion brands, and asked if they had been shopping for such prestige brands in the past 12 months. Only individuals who bought at least one prestige brand participated in the survey. The pre-test was carried out on 20 respondents. In total, 337 questionnaires were completed,

Tab. 1: Sample characteristics (*N* = 289)

| | <i>N</i> | % |
|---|----------|------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 144 | 49.8 |
| Female | 145 | 50.2 |
| Age (years) | | |
| 20–29 | 60 | 20.8 |
| 30–39 | 60 | 20.8 |
| 40–49 | 57 | 19.7 |
| 50–59 | 64 | 22.1 |
| 60–69 | 48 | 16.6 |
| Education | | |
| Primary school or less | 11 | 3.8 |
| Secondary school | 152 | 52.6 |
| College, university or more | 126 | 43.6 |
| Average monthly household income (HRK) | | |
| Up to 3,000 | 13 | 4.5 |
| 3,001–4,000 | 22 | 7.6 |
| 4,001–6,000 | 46 | 15.9 |
| 6,001–8,000 | 52 | 18.0 |
| 8,001–10,000 | 57 | 19.7 |
| 10,001–13,000 | 55 | 19.0 |
| 13,0001–16,000 | 30 | 10.4 |
| 16,001–20,000 | 8 | 2.8 |
| More than 20,000 | 6 | 2.1 |

Note: *HRK stands for Croatian Kuna; the exchange rate of EUR 1 to HRK is 7.48 (<http://www.hnb.hr>, 01.01.2021).

Source: own

out of which 48 were incomplete with missing data, and we excluded those questionnaires from further analysis, as Tabachnick and Fidell (2013) suggested. The final sample included 289 respondents and is representative and proportional to the total population in 21 Croatian counties concerning gender and age (Tab. 1).

The questionnaire was designed based on a literature review. We selected the relevant items that other scholars validated in past research. Some of the items were modified to fit the context better based on the suggestions by marketing scholars during the process

of pre-testing for face and content validity. Items taken from the literature were translated from English into Croatian and then back to English.

We measured prestige sensitivity with five items taken from the sensitivity subscale of the price perception scale developed by Lichtenstein et al. (1993). This original scale measures the tendency to buy prestige products in general. We adopted the original scale to the fashion context to measure individuals' enjoyment and to feel good and attractive when buying expensive fashion brands. We asked respondents to rate their agreement

on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Shopping motivations included 18 statements. Fifteen statements were taken from Chen-Yu and Seock (2002) and Shchudro (2011), while the authors developed three statements considering relevant consumer behavior theory, i.e., feeling desirable to the opposite sex, showing social standing, and looking the best when buying clothes. The items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

We measured fashion innovativeness with the domain-specific innovativeness scale developed by Goldsmith and Hofacker (1991). It includes nine items describing individuals' interest in new and original fashion items. The scale indicates consumers' desire to look at new fashion and learn about it and the tendency to be the first to buy new and original fashion products when they appear. We used a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

We asked respondents to indicate the importance of 16 apparel attributes that are relevant for purchasing fashion products, such as quality, price, fit, fashionability, natural fiber content, brand name, appearance, styling, image, and care/maintenance. The items were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important). Measures of consumers' tendency to respond to visual merchandising, based on Kim (2003), include window displays, mannequin displays, promotional signage, and floor merchandising. We added music and store

personnel to the original items. The items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

We examined the perceived time consumers spend browsing, evaluating merchandise, selecting items, and waiting at a counter to purchase. The respondents were asked how much time, on average, they spent in the store shopping for clothing products, coded as (1) less than one hour, (2) 1–3 hours, (3) 4–6 hours, and (4) more than six hours.

Before the main data analysis, we checked data for common method bias. To assess common method variance (CMV), we have performed several (ad-hoc and post-hoc) procedures. At the beginning of the survey, respondents were informed that there were no right or wrong questions and that participation was confidential. Then, during data analysis, particularly multi-collinearity check, VIF values achieved the recommended thresholds, i.e., VIF values below 3.3. Further, we have conducted Harman's single-factor test, and the results indicated that the total variance extracted by one factor was below the suggested threshold of 50%. Hence, all tests performed suggest that CMV does not disrupt our model assumptions, i.e., that our data is free from common method bias.

4. Research results

4.1 Descriptive statistics

The data were analyzed in SPSS (v23) and AMOS for descriptive insights and to perform confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and

Tab. 2: Descriptive statistics

| Variable | Mean | Standard deviation |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Enhancement motivation | 2.168 | 1.078 |
| Aesthetic motivation | 2.771 | 1.140 |
| Sexual attraction motivation | 3.107 | 1.192 |
| Recreation motivation | 3.600 | 1.299 |
| Fashion innovativeness | 2.328 | 0.975 |
| Prestige sensitivity | 1.857 | 1.055 |
| Functional product attributes | 4.611 | 0.554 |
| Symbolic product attributes | 2.631 | 1.095 |
| Mannequin displays | 2.226 | 1.118 |

Source: own

structural equation modeling (SEM). Descriptive statistics research results (Tab. 2) show that the respondents in the sample were below average prestige-sensitive ($M = 1.85$) and fashion innovative ($M = 2.32$), and they scored low on the response to mannequin displays ($M = 2.22$). Regarding the shopping motivations, the respondents did not score high on buying clothes to enhance their status ($M = 2.16$) or improve their aesthetic appeal ($M = 2.77$). However, they scored moderately high on buying clothes for recreation ($M = 3.60$) and slightly less on buying clothes to be sexually attractive ($M = 3.10$). Regarding product attributes, respondents valued functional attributes more ($M = 4.61$) than symbolic attributes ($M = 2.63$). Most respondents (59.9%) purchased up to five clothing items during 12 months. Unplanned purchases were about 2.7 items on average. Individuals (53.6%) spent between one to three hours in the store, 38.8% less than one hour, and 7.6% more than three hours.

4.2 Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

A confirmatory factor analysis was employed to assess the scales' reliability, validity, and unidimensionality. The measurement model was created based on the relevant principles (Kline, 2011) using the maximum-likelihood method for parameter estimation. The CFA shows that the measurement model has a good fit ($\chi^2/df = 359.329/231 = 1.556$, $TLI = 0.956$, $CFI = 0.966$, $IFI = 0.966$, $RMSEA = 0.044$), which also confirms the unidimensionality of the measures. We excluded several items from the analysis due to low factor loadings, including two items from the prestige sensitivity scale, eight items from shopping motivation, six items from the fashion innovativeness scale, and eleven items from apparel attributes and visual merchandising. The final measurement model relied on high (>0.6) and significant factor loadings. CFA results (Tab. 3) indicate that the measurement scales show the characteristics of reliability and convergent validity.

Tab. 3: CFA results – Part 1

| Factor/items | Factor loadings | Composite reliability (CR) | The average variance extracted (AVE) | Cronbach alpha |
|--|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| Recognition enhancement motivation (ENH) | | | | |
| I buy clothes to express who I am | 0.874 | 0.821 | 0.696 | 0.817 |
| I buy clothes that show my social standing* | 0.793 | | | |
| Aesthetic expression motivation (AES) | | | | |
| I spend much time finding the garment that looks best on me | 0.772 | 0.717 | 0.559 | 0.716 |
| Looking the best you can is worth the effort* | 0.722 | | | |
| Sexual attraction motivation (SAT) | | | | |
| I want my clothes to appeal to the other gender sex | 0.848 | 0.897 | 0.744 | 0.895 |
| When buying attractive clothes, I feel more desirable to the opposite sex* | 0.906 | | | |
| Dressing to appeal to the other gender is important to me | 0.831 | | | |
| Recreation motivation (REC) | | | | |
| I enjoy shopping for clothes | 0.938 | 0.892 | 0.737 | 0.885 |
| Shopping for clothes put me in a good mood | 0.917 | | | |
| Shopping for clothes is boring (<i>r</i>) | 0.701 | | | |

Tab. 3: CFA results – Part 2

| Factor/items | Factor loadings | Composite reliability (CR) | The average variance extracted (AVE) | Cronbach alpha |
|--|-----------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|
| Fashion innovativeness (FI) | | | | |
| I like to buy fashions that look fresh, new, and original | 0.653 | 0.749 | 0.500 | 0.744 |
| If I heard that a new fashion was available in a store, I would be interested enough to buy it | 0.783 | | | |
| I like to buy fashions put out by brand new designers | 0.679 | | | |
| Prestige sensitivity (PS) | | | | |
| Buying a high-priced brand makes me feel good about myself | 0.905 | 0.911 | 0.775 | 0.906 |
| Buying the most expensive brand of a product makes me feel classy | 0.929 | | | |
| I enjoy the prestige of buying of a high-priced brand | 0.801 | | | |
| Functional apparel attributes (FAA) | | | | |
| Quality | 0.657 | 0.820 | 0.603 | 0.809 |
| Comfort | 0.815 | | | |
| Fit | 0.756 | | | |
| Symbolic apparel attributes (SAA) | | | | |
| Brands | 0.796 | 0.767 | 0.622 | 0.766 |
| Image | 0.781 | | | |
| Mannequin displays (MA) | | | | |
| I get an idea of what I want to buy after looking through mannequin display | 0.735 | 0.874 | 0.700 | 0.854 |
| When I see clothing featuring a new style or design on a mannequin display, I tend to buy it | 0.907 | | | |
| When I see clothing that I like on a mannequin display, I tend to buy it | 0.859 | | | |

Note: Sources for ENH, AES, SAT and REC were taken from Chen-Yu and Seock (2002) and Shchudro (2011), PS from Lichtenstein et al. (1993), FI from Goldsmith and Hofacker (1991), FAA and SAA from (Shchudro, 2011), MA from Kim (2003), while items marked by * were developed by the authors based on the relevant literature, i.e., theory.

Source: own

Moreover, the CFA shows that the measurement scales have achieved discriminant validity (Tab. 4).

4.3 Structural equation modelling and testing the hypotheses

Structural equation modelling was covariance-based (CB-SEM), whereas two models were

assessed, constrained (without moderator – Model 1) and unconstrained (with moderator – Model 2) model, both showing good model fits (Tab. 5). The parameters were analyzed using the maximum-likelihood method. Model 1 encompassed main effects with moderating effects fixed to 0, while Model 2 included main and moderating effects freely

Tab. 4: Discriminant validity

| Factor | ENH | AES | SAT | REC | FI | PS | FAA | SAA | MA |
|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|--------|-------|
| ENH | 0.834 | | | | | | | | |
| AES | 0.233** | 0.747 | | | | | | | |
| SAT | 0.206** | 0.254** | 0.862 | | | | | | |
| REC | 0.197** | 0.422** | 0.202** | 0.858 | | | | | |
| FI | 0.344** | 0.414** | 0.276** | 0.422** | 0.707 | | | | |
| PS | 0.327** | 0.186** | 0.268** | 0.165** | 0.478** | 0.880 | | | |
| FAA | 0.091 | 0.210** | 0.156** | 0.226** | 0.141* | 0.162** | 0.776 | | |
| SAA | 0.250** | 0.322** | 0.286** | 0.129* | 0.434** | 0.553** | 0.184** | 0.788 | |
| MA | 0.281** | 0.233** | 0.165** | 0.332** | 0.272** | 0.236** | 0.140* | 0.147* | 0.836 |

Note: *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level; **correlation is significant at the 0.01 level; ENH – recognition enhancement; AES – aesthetic expression; SAT – sexual attraction; REC – recreation; FI – fashion innovativeness; PS – prestige sensitivity; FAA – functional apparel attributes; SAA – symbolic apparel attributes; MA – mannequin displays.

Source: own

Tab. 5: SEM results – Part 1

| | Model 1 (constrained model) | | Model 2 (unconstrained model) | |
|---|--------------------------------|---------|----------------------------------|---------|
| | Std. estimate | p-value | Std. estimate | p-value |
| Main effects | | | | |
| H1: Recognition enhancement motivation → Prestige sensitivity | 0.163 | 0.000 | 0.181 | 0.000 |
| H2: Aesthetic expression motivation → Prestige sensitivity | -0.050 | 0.309 | -0.054 | 0.261 |
| H3: Sexual attraction motivation → Prestige sensitivity | 0.138 | 0.000 | 0.130 | 0.002 |
| H4: Recreation motivation → Prestige sensitivity | 0.063 | 0.164 | 0.107 | 0.027 |
| H5: Prestige sensitivity → Functional apparel attributes | 0.183 | 0.007 | 0.182 | 0.007 |
| H6: Prestige sensitivity → Symbolic apparel attributes | 0.886 | 0.000 | 0.888 | 0.000 |
| H7: Prestige sensitivity → Mannequin displays | 0.279 | 0.000 | 0.277 | 0.000 |
| H8: Prestige sensitivity → Time spent shopping | 0.659 | 0.000 | 0.674 | 0.000 |

Tab. 5: SEM results – Part 2

| | Model 1 (constrained model) | | Model 2 (unconstrained model) | |
|--|--------------------------------|---------|----------------------------------|---------|
| | Std. estimate | p-value | Std. estimate | p-value |
| Moderating effects | | | | |
| <i>H9a: Fashion innovativeness × Recognition enhancement motivation → Prestige sensitivity</i> | | | 0.075 | 0.070 |
| <i>H9b: Fashion innovativeness × Aesthetic expression motivation → Prestige sensitivity</i> | | | -0.059 | 0.178 |
| <i>H9c: Fashion innovativeness × Sexual attraction motivation → Prestige sensitivity</i> | | | -0.079 | 0.054 |
| <i>H9d: Fashion innovativeness × Recreation motivation → Prestige sensitivity</i> | | | 0.107 | 0.022 |
| Model properties | | | | |
| $\chi^2/D.F.$ | 190.594/103 | | 259.725/151 | |
| $\Delta\chi^2/\Delta D.F.$ | | | 69.131/48 | |
| RMSEA | 0.054 | | 0.050 | |
| TLI | 0.944 | | 0.933 | |
| CFI | 0.958 | | 0.952 | |
| IFI | 0.959 | | 0.953 | |

Source: own

estimated. We created moderating variables as interaction terms concerning the fashion innovativeness variable and shopping motivation predictors. Fashion innovativeness was tested as a relevant predictor of prestige sensitivity ($\beta = 0.386$, p -value 0.000). Given the significant model change, we used Model 2 for hypotheses testing (Tab. 5).

The results show that shopping motives related to recognition enhancement, sexual attraction and recreation shopping positively influence prestige sensitivity, supporting hypotheses *H1*, *H3* and *H4*. In contrast, the link with aesthetic motivation is not statistically significant, rejecting hypothesis *H2*. Furthermore, prestige sensitivity is positively related to the selection of symbolic apparel attributes but also functional attributes, and to mannequin displays, and time spent shopping (supporting hypotheses *H5*, *H6*, *H7*, *H8*). In addition, fashion innovativeness positively moderates the relationships between shopping recreation

and prestige sensitivity (supporting hypothesis *H9d*). However, fashion innovativeness does not significantly moderate the relationship between recognition enhancement, aesthetic expression, sexual attraction motivations and prestige sensitivity, rejecting hypotheses *H9a*, *H9b* and *H9c* ($p > 0.05$).

5. Discussion

This study contributes to the literature by developing and testing the model that examines motivational predictors of prestige sensitivity and its effects on buying behavior inside fashion stores. The results show that three out of four shopping motivations are positively associated with prestige sensitivity, including recognition enhancement, sexual attraction, and recreation. This is in line with the symbolic self-completion theory indicating that individuals who are prestige sensitive are committed to acquiring expensive clothing brands as material possession and symbols strongly related

to what they perceive as the ideal self to protect their self-identity and communicate it to others to be recognized in the society (Casidy et al., 2012a; Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2000). We found that they are driven by the need to acquire the distinctive style of unusual clothes and well-known brands to display personality (recognition enhancement) and to arouse sexual interest in other people (sexual attraction), which is crucial for building individuals' self-identity. These consumers shop for prestigious apparel brands for entertainment, fun, and joy.

Contrary to expectations, aesthetic expression is not significantly associated with prestige sensitivity, which can be explained by the notion that a beautiful and well-dressed appearance is not exclusively linked to acquiring the symbols (brands), impressing others, and enhancing self-identity but can be internally oriented motivation. In addition, nice and modern clothing does not necessarily need to be followed by expensive brands. This is supported by findings indicating that Croatian consumers, especially women, like to dress and groom nicely (Đaić, 2013) and have a great aesthetic sense (RTL, 2018), but many of them shop on sales due to low income (Hendal, 2020).

A further contribution of our study is the examination of fashion innovativeness as a moderator in the relationship between shopping motivations and prestige sensitivity. The findings show that fashion innovativeness moderates significantly and positively the effects of recreation motivation on prestige sensitivity. We confirmed that innovative consumers are hedonic-oriented shoppers looking for entertainment and fun. However, fashion innovativeness does not significantly moderate the relationship between aesthetic expression, sexual attraction, recognition enhancement motivations, and prestige sensitivity. Contrary to expectations, our results show that fashion innovativeness does not moderate the relationship between aesthetic expression motivation and prestige sensitivity. It cannot enhance the impact of motivations that are not closely related to improving prominence and status on prestige sensitivity. We see the reason for this in the explanation that having a good appearance could be internally motivated and not significantly connected to prestige sensitivity. This can be even more expressed in the case of fashion innovators due to their greater need for individuality or uniqueness (Saricam & Erdumlu, 2016; Workman & Caldwell, 2007).

Our results did not support the moderating effect of fashion innovativeness on the sexual attraction-prestige sensitivity relationship. It seems that the motivation for seeking sexual attraction is driven by individual preferences, attractiveness, and relationship characteristics and need not be influenced by the degree to which an individual is attracted to innovative fashion brands. Although the centrality of possessions to consumer's life and materialism related to status is proposed to be correlated with fashion innovativeness (Gautam & Sharma, 2018; Goldsmith et al., 2013), the insignificant moderating impact of fashion innovativeness on the recognition enhancement and prestige sensitivity link can be explained by the fact that some individuals may be highly fashion-innovative and view luxury brands as a means of self-expression. In contrast, others may prioritize the status or prestige associated with these brands regardless of fashion innovativeness.

Our study also contributes to the theory by clarifying the effects of prestige sensitivity on buying behavior inside retail stores. The results show that prestige sensitivity positively relates to symbolic and functional apparel attributes, whereas the impact is more substantial for symbolic attributes. Prestige-seeking consumers attain their goal by acquiring famous, well-known clothing brands that convey the desired image and represent the symbol for enhancing their self-identity (i.e., symbolic apparel attributes), which is in line with self-completion theory and past research (Mulyanegara, 2011; Phau & Leng, 2008). We also found that for prestige-seeking consumers, some functional and intrinsic aspects of apparel, such as the quality of the product, comfort in clothing, and fit, are also important but less important than the symbolic ones. It might be concluded that prestige-seeking consumers look for a product that signals the prominence and status of others, but they also want some basic features. Hence, prestige-sensitive shoppers perceive symbolic and functional aspects of apparel as complementary attributes.

A further contribution of our paper is investigating how prestige-sensitive consumers respond to in-store stimuli and how much time they spend shopping. The findings indicate that these consumers positively respond only to mannequin displays, as factor analysis generated only this factor among several visual merchandising items. As prestige-sensitive

consumers are goal-oriented, it is reasonable to discover that they engage more intensively with mannequin displays that highlight the unique collections of the store and satisfy the need for uniqueness.

Lastly, prestige sensitivity is positively associated with time spent shopping, suggesting that individuals with high prestige sensitivity will spend more time in the store. This can be explained by the fact that prestige-seeking consumers are hedonic, emotional, and fashion-conscious shoppers (Casidy, 2012a; Epuran et al., 2015). They are more likely to enjoy browsing, searching for desired brands, evaluating, and buying them.

Conclusions

Our study adds to the self-completion theory in fashion retailing by providing deeper and novel insights into underexplored shopping motivations and prestige-seeking behavior. The analysis showed that prestige-seeking individuals are highly motivated, goal-oriented, and driven by recognition enhancement, sexual attraction, and recreation motivations. These motivations lead consumers to acquire expensive fashion brands acting like status symbols that help them enhance their self-identity to be recognized in society. While in the store, consumers strive to find famous and well-known brands that display the desired image (symbolic apparel attributes) while having good quality, comfort, and fit (functional apparel attributes). Prestige-seeking consumers are more likely to respond positively to mannequin displays and spend more time searching for desired products in the store. This study enhances self-completion theory with new constructs of shopping motivations (recognition, sexual attraction, and recreation) and varying effects of fashion innovation across the relationships between shopping motivations and prestige sensitivity. A similar approach was not found in the existing literature.

The results provide several managerial implications for the retailers that offer prestige fashion brands. Considering the motivations of prestige-seeking consumers, retailers should carry famous, well-known, prestigious brands of high quality that provide comfort in the correct sizes. In selling prestigious brands, innovations, and quick changes are extremely important. New extravagant, easily recognizable, sexually attractive clothes must be introduced and

promoted regularly. Furthermore, retailers should design an in-store shopping environment that is more fun and entertaining. In this sense, visual merchandising, video, and social media can be used creatively to create a good mood for shopping. Retailers must know that mannequin displays have the strongest effect on prestige-seeking consumers. They can be used to promote new prestigious brands that elicit emotions and convey the desired image to consumers. Eye-catching mannequin displays should inform prestige-seeking consumers about new fashions and styles and stimulate them to browse the store and consider purchasing them. In addition, advertising should promote recognizable brands.

This study has several limitations. Although the applied sampling method helps prevent bias and ensures representativeness, it may result in difficulty accessing a preferred population. Namely, the study results indicate that most subjects (2/3 of individuals) are characterized by low to intermediate levels of prestige sensitivity. However, we believe we achieved the correct and adequate results concerning the utilized data collection method and given the explanation provided to the respondents by the interviewers.

Furthermore, the analysis did not consider actual total and impulsive consumer purchases. Future studies might expand the model with variables such as satisfaction, loyalty, purchase intentions, and actual and unplanned purchases. We also found that only mannequin displays were stable in the sample among visual merchandising stimuli, so future research might further test the applicability of this construct. Researchers might also examine the patterns of consumers' behavior concerning prestige brands across different brands and fashion products and various store types (e.g., department stores, discount stores, and specialty stores). Future studies might test this model across different cultures. Despite these limitations, our study is original and offers valuable insights into prestige-seeking consumers' motivations and shopping behavior.

Acknowledgments: *This work was made as part of the project "Determinants of Strengthening Technological Capabilities of Different Sectors" at the Institute of Economics, Zagreb and funded/co-funded within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026 – NextGenerationEU.*

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