Unpacking the Role of Consumer Bricolage in Consumer Identity Construction: A Restrictive Consumer Society

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Abstract

With the advent of increasing connectivity and social interaction, consumers are becoming more concerned about their self and social identities. They want to create identities that help them to establish their unique position in society. Consumer identity reflects the consumption patterns through which individuals describe and express themselves in their social environment. Consumers construct their identities through different products categories such as fashion clothing. Young consumers (hereafter referred to as consumers), particularly in closed or restrictive societies (i.e., South Asia), are fixated with creating unique identities through the latest or Western fashion styles. They consider that identity construction using Western styles signifies that they belong to liberal and elite families. However, identity construction through Western fashion is problematic in restrictive societies since the majority of the social values of these societies contradict with Western fashion styles. Because of differences in social values, consumers face serious social ramifications, including physical assault, when they adopt Western styles. Although consumers in socially restrictive environments are obsessed to create their unique identities through Western fashion, they need to adhere to their cultural and religious values to cope with social pressures. In such a situation, consumers combine and integrate their current social clothing with Western fashions to ensure adherence to their social values and decrease the risk of adopting Western fashion norms and values. For this purpose, the concept of 'consumer bricolage' is introduced in this thesis.

Here, consumer bricolage is conceptualised as a consumer's capability to creatively mix, match, combine, and customise different fashion elements (e.g., clothes, footwear, watch, handbag, purse, belt, glasses, and jewellery) to construct the desired identity. Apart from consumers engage in bricolage to align Western styles with their social values, they also use their bricolage skills to form their unique identity through personalised fashion styles. Despite

the prevalent adoption of bricolage in consumer behaviours, prior literature remains silent as regards unpacking the role of consumer bricolage in consumer identity construction. Also, the literature which examines how and why consumers engage in bricolage to construct their desired impressions is scarce. The purpose of this research is to unpack the consumer identity construction process and examine the role of consumer bricolage practices in this process, as well as to identify the factors that encourage consumers to engage in consumer bricolage.

This thesis follows the thesis by publication approach and develops three distinct but inter-related studies. The first study explores the role of consumer bricolage in consumer identity construction and examines the ways through which bricolage help consumers to cope with their social pressures in their restrictive social environments. This study further identifies the underlying reasons that stimulate consumers to engage in consumer bricolage. Data were sourced from South Asian consumers through 40 face-to-face in-depth semi-structured interviews and 138 open-ended online surveys. The findings shed light on seven stages in the consumer identity construction process and five bricolage practices that consumers use in the identity construction process. Further, the results identify specific factors that motivate consumers to engage in bricolage. This study advances the literature of bricolage and consumer identity by unpacking the role of consumer bricolage practices in the consumer identity construction process.

The second study focuses on the conceptualisation, operationalisation, and measurement of bricolage in the context of fashion clothing. To conceptualise and measure consumer bricolage, a series of studies were conducted. First, a qualitative study was conducted, study 1, which interviewed 25 fashion designer and fashion conscious consumers to conceptualise and work toward operationalising consumer bricolage and to generate a pool of items. The item development process was followed by conducting three quantitative studies:

study 2, scale purification ($N = 327$); study 3, scale validation ($N = 407$); and study 4, nomological validity ($N = 325$). Findings demonstrate that consumer bricolage is a second-order multidimensional construct with four first-order dimensions. The results indicate that consumer bricolage occupies a unique position in the nomological network of its related constructs such as fashion consciousness and identity distinctiveness. This study contributes to the bricolage literature by measuring it in a consumer behaviour context.

The third study draws on impression management theory to investigate how environmental stimuli (i.e., social media influence and susceptibility to interpersonal influence) encourage fashion conscious consumers to engage in consumer bricolage. This study also empirically investigates the role of consumer bricolage in creating consumers' desired impressions. To address the purpose of this study, data were sourced from a survey of 626 consumers in Pakistan. The results indicate that the impact of consumer fashion consciousness on consumer bricolage is contingent on social media influence and susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Further, findings demonstrate that consumer bricolage significantly contributes to creating consumers' impressions of fashion innovativeness, identity distinctiveness, and fashion opinion leadership. This study contributes to the debate of bricolage in consumer behaviour from an interpretive discussion to an empirical investigation.

These three integrated studies, that are the foundation of this thesis, will advance the consumer behaviour literature by identifying the consumer identity construction process, revealing consumer bricolage practices, proposing a multidimensional consumer bricolage scale, and empirically examining the consumer bricolage model in socially restrictive societies such as South Asian countries.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work embodied in this thesis, "***Unpacking the Role of Consumer Bricolage in Consumer Identity Construction: A Restrictive Consumer Society***" has not been previously submitted for any other higher degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University. To the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by other person except where due reference is made. The co-authors included in the earlier versions Chapter 3, 4, and 5 were involved in the research at a supervisory level.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by University of Tasmania Ethics Committee (Reference number: H0016390, on 24th of April, 2017), and transferred and approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Reference number: 5201700629, on 13th of June, 2017).

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