



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

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Table of Contents

Abstract	I
Statement of Candidate	IV
Acknowledgements	V
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Research Background and Theoretical Development	2
1.2 Research Gaps, Questions, and Contributions	7
1.3 Research Context	17
1.4 Research Method	18
1.5 A Synopsis of the Studies	19
1.6 Definitions of Key Constructs	22
1.7 Outline of the Thesis	23
1.8 Conclusion	24
References	25
Chapter 2: Methodology and Research Design	30
2.1 Introduction	31
2.2 Research Paradigms	31
2.3 Research Design	32
2.3.1 Study 1: The role of consumer bricolage in consumer identity construction	35
2.3.1.1 Data collection approaches	35
2.3.1.2 Data analysis of interviews and open-ended survey	39
2.3.2 Study 2: Scale development of consumer bricolage	41
2.3.2.1 Step-1 Semi-structured interviews	43
2.3.2.2 Step-2 Scale purification	47
2.3.2.3 Step-3 Scale validation	50
2.3.2.4 Step-4 Nomological validity	51
2.3.3 Study 3: Empirical investigation of the consumer bricolage model	53
2.3.3.1 Measures adopted from literature	53
2.3.3.2 Measure developed for consumer bricolage	55
2.3.3.3 Survey design	57
2.3.3.4 Sampling strategy	58
2.3.3.5 Data collection and analysis	58
2.4 Conclusion	59
References	60

Chapter 3: Consumer Bricolage in Identity Construction Process: A Perspective of Restrictive Social Environment	70
Abstract	71
3.1 Introduction	72
3.2 Research Context: South Asia – Pakistan	75
3.3 Theoretical Context	76
3.3.1 Consumer identity construction	76
3.3.2 Consumer bricolage	79
3.4 Research Method	80
3.4.1 Data collection approach and sampling strategy	80
3.4.2 Data analysis	82
3.5 Findings	83
3.5.1 The consumer identity construction process	84
3.5.1.1 Consumer self-preparation	86
3.5.1.2 Self-presentation	90
3.5.2 Consumer bricolage	93
3.5.3 Concluding remarks on the use of bricolage in consumer identity construction	98
3.5.4 Underlying reasons to engage in consumer bricolage	98
3.5.4.1 Self-preparation	99
3.5.4.2 Self-presentation	103
3.5.5 Concluding remarks on the reasons for using consumer bricolage	106
3.6 Discussion and Conclusion	107
References	113
Chapter 4: Consumer Bricolage: Conceptualisation and Measurement	119
Abstract	120
4.1 Introduction	121
4.2 Theoretical Background	124
4.2.1 The concept of bricolage	124
4.2.2 Consumer bricolage in fashion consumption	126
4.3 Research Design and Methods	129
4.3.1 Conceptualisation and scale development and validation	129
4.3.2 Identification of consumer bricolage dimensions	131
4.3.2.1 Study 1: Semi-structured interviews	131
4.3.3 Item generation and reduction	133
4.3.3.1 Item generation	133
4.3.3.2 Judging content validity and item reduction	134

4.3.4 Study 2: Scale purification and initial validation	135
4.3.5 Study 3: Second stage CFA	138
4.3.6 Study 4: Nomological validity	142
4.4 Discussion and Conclusion	146
References	153
Chapter 5: Consumer Bricolage in Fashion Clothing: An Empirical Perspective Exposing the Fashion Clothing Bricoleur	160
Abstract	161
5.1 Introduction	162
5.2 Theory and Hypothesis Development	166
5.2.1 Moderating effects	169
5.2.2 Outcomes of consumer bricolage	173
5.3 Method	178
5.3.1 Sample and data collection	178
5.3.2 The consumer bricolage measure development process	179
5.3.3 Measures of other constructs	181
5.4 Analysis and Results	182
5.4.1 Measurement results	182
5.4.2 Path analysis	186
5.5 Discussion and Conclusion	188
References	195
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion	203
6.1 Introduction	204
6.2 Synthesizing the Research Findings	205
6.3 Implications	211
6.3.1 Theoretical implications	211
6.3.2 Managerial implications	221
6.4 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research	224
6.5 Conclusion	227
References	229
Appendices	234

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Table 1.1. Construct Definitions	22
Chapter 2: Methodology and Research Design	30
Table 2.1. Scale Development Process	42
Table 2.2. Consumer Bricolage Dimensions	44
Table 2.3. Cut-Off Values Used for Model Fit Indices	51
Chapter 3: Consumer Bricolage in Identity Construction Process: A Perspective of Restrictive Social Environment	70
Table 3.1. Classification of Consumer Bricolage Factors	107
Chapter 4: Consumer Bricolage: Conceptualisation and Measurement	119
Table 4.1. Overview of Bricolage Application in Management and Marketing Literature	125
Table 4.2. Scale Development Process	129
Table 4.3. Consumer Bricolage Dimensions	133
Table 4.4. Final results of EFA	137
Table 4.5. Confirmatory Factor Analysis	139
Table 4.6. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Factor Correlation	141
Table 4.7. Model Fit Indexes for Competing Measurement Models	142
Table 4.8. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Factor Correlation	144
Table 4.9. Path Analysis	145
Chapter 5: Consumer Bricolage in Fashion Clothing: An Empirical Perspective Exposing the Fashion Clothing Bricoleur	160
Table 5.1. CFA- Estimates, Inter-Item Consistency (A), and Composite Reliability	183
Table 5.2. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Factor Correlation	186
Table 5.3. Path Analysis	187

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Figure 1.1. Role of Consumer Bricolage in Consumer Identity Construction and its Measurement	16
Chapter 2: Methodology and Research Design	30
Figure 2.1. Data Collection Methods	34
Chapter 3: Consumer Bricolage in Identity Construction Process: A Perspective of Restrictive Social Environment	70
Figure 3.1. Western, Eastern (or South Asian), and Modern Styles	78
Figure 3.2. Seven-Stage Consumer Identity Construction Model	86
Figure 3.3. Five-Dimensional Consumer Bricolage Model	94
Figure 3.4. Reasons for Using Consumer Bricolage	99
Chapter 4: Consumer Bricolage: Conceptualisation and Measurement	119
Figure 4.1. Nomological model of consumer bricolage	142
Chapter 5: Consumer Bricolage in Fashion Clothing: An Empirical Perspective Exposing the Fashion Clothing Bricoleur	160
Figure 5.1. Conceptual Framework of Consumer Bricolage	168
Figure 5.2. Path Analysis of Consumer Bricolage Model	187
Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion	190
Figure 6.1. Role of Consumer Bricolage in Consumer Identity Construction and its Measurement	206

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).

Muhammad Abid

(45015295)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'M. Abid', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

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