INTRODUCTION

How and why people shop and what influences them has been studied by researchers for many years. To the fashion industry it is important knowledge for designers, retailers and marketers to identify target groups, tailor communication and maximise return on investment. The goal of this paper is to review the consumers’ decision making process, with focus on fashion clothing, using Kotler’s Buyer Behaviour Model (2009) to explain the stages consumers go through and the factors that influence them in the overall process. It then explores how age, gender and social influencers affect consumers’ decision making and analyses similarities and differences between literature. Other factors of the model will not be discussed.

THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The decision making process is one of the most complicated consumers reasoning processes according to Orison and Connelly (1993) who define the process as “a series of cognitive operations performed consciously, which include the elements from the environment in a specific time and place”. Narayan and Corcoran-Perry (1997) interpret it to be problem solving within a specific environment and further Sproles and Kendall (1986) define it as consumers choices and their fixed foreseeable “personality” (1986, p.267 cited in Blakewell and Mitchell, 2003). Lizarraga et al manage to summaries these definitions “as the interaction
between a problem that needs to be solved and a person who wishes to solve it within a specific environment” (2007 pg. 381).

Kotler’s buyer behavioural model (2009) offers a framework to better understand the decision making process consumers go through and the factors that influence the process. The model identifies 6 stages in the decision making process, from problem solving to evaluation, which are influenced by both internal and external factors (Figure 1). Age and gender are internal personal factors whereas social factors are external influencers.

**Figure 1: Buyer behaviour model (Kotler, 2009)**

**DECISION MAKING IN FASHION**

Fashion is of great importance to many consumers, it is defined as “the process of social diffusion by which a new style (of fashion clothing) is adopted by some group(s) of consumers” (Solomon 2007, p.589 cited in Atik and Firat, 2012). Fashion influences many aspects of our lives, it has both economic- and social value and provides individuals with a tool to express themselves and create an identity. It is therefore important to understand the process of decision making within the fashion industry. Researchers have found that individuals have different preferences based upon age and gender which affects the decision making process considerably. In today’s society “fast” fashion characterises the fashion industry with rapid style changes focusing on drawing consumers in who are increasingly faced with numerous alternatives but whether the fashion industry can actually dictate

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Literature studies have identified that gender differences exist within fashion and further that gender similarities and differences are important factors to consider as they affect individuals decision making (Lizarraga et al 2007). Researchers agree that women are more involved with fashion than men (O’Cass 2000, Tiger et al 1980, O’Cass 2004, Blakewell and Mitchell 2003, Rocha et al 2005) and Rocha et al (2005) further identifies that women are more fashion concerned, they worry more about their bodies and they use clothes to express themselves to a greater extent than men. Women also consider themselves to be more innovative when it comes to fashion and their behaviour and position in society differs from men in relation to fashion (Goldsmith et al 1996, Bakewell and Mitchell 2003, Hogg et al 1998).

Women are also more concerned with how they feel while making fashion decisions. Blakewell and Mitchell (2003) among others have found that women enjoy and spend more time shopping than men who are generally more concerned with getting shopping over and done with as soon as possible. For men, shopping is a task that needs to be solved but for women it is leisure time that they enjoy. However differences in information collection, processing the information and monitoring do not seem to be different between women and men (Hogg et al 1998). A new study by Campaignlive.com has identified that women born between 1980-1995 are becoming more demanding and expect to have personal relationships with brands, the research shows that 95% of women feel that brands should “adapt to my needs” (Lerner, 2014).

The findings from this chapter might indicate that the fashion industry focuses more on women than men and therefore identifying gender differences and the different influencers is critical in mapping the decision making processes for fashion purchases.
AGE DIFFERENCES IN THE DECISION PROCESS

Many researchers have identified age to be an important influencer in fashion decision making (Rocha et al. 2005). According to the child development theory age does matter in regards to decision making as children develop their consumer behaviour early in their lives and are influenced especially by family purchasing behaviours as well as brand recognition and brand preference “decision making skills emerge throughout childhood, with the complexity of strategies developing in tandem with age” (Atik and Firat, 2012). Therefore, young consumers are also an important target group to the fashion industry and they have enormous influence on the expenditure in fashion and clothing (Hogg et al. 1998).

Fashion brands are important to all age groups but researchers agree that there are severe differences between age groups in fashion clothing purchasing decision (Hogg et al. 1998, O’Cass 2004, Auty and Elliott 1998, Fairhurst et al. 1989, O’Cass 2000). A study by Rocha et al. (2005) shows that lifestyle factors like fashion, durability, quality, brand and price and physical factors such as body shape does seem to have an impact with age and therefore need to be considered when designing and selling fashion clothing to young consumers. Whereas identity, like mood, colour, taste and personal style, does not seem to change with age. However, personal style and look is more important to younger consumers and they are more involved in fashion clothing compared to older consumers and therefore consider shopping for clothes as something to enjoy in their free time (O’Cass 2004, Rocha et al, 2005).

Young fashion consumers are affected more by the external environment, especially from social influencers and latest trends and they are also more involved and more creative when it comes to fashion than older consumers (Attic and Firat 2012, Lizararaga et al. 2007, Rocha et al. 2005). This is supported by Sproles and Kenndall (1986) who have identified the importance of understanding different decision making styles among age groups. Young consumers, born after 1977, have different shopping styles due to influences of external factors which have changed dramatically over the past years. Table 1 summaries the key differences between younger and older consumer caused by changes in the external environment. As the table shows, younger consumers have more ways of shopping to choose from, like online through web and mobile, and more delivery options, like free home delivery and free click and collect, which are all factors that influence consumers in their decision making process. Marketers have also influenced younger consumers much earlier in their life and from more sources than older consumers like social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).
and Blogs) which impacts younger consumers purchasing decisions and behaviour tremendously. Purchasing options and information available has increased severely which can make younger consumers more confused than older consumers. Younger consumers are also likely to put more emphasis on quality and do not seem to save money before purchasing as much as older consumers, if they don’t have the money they simply buy it on credit terms (Blakewell and Mitchell, 2003, Sproles and Kendall 1986).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table II Comparison of childhood environmental influences on Generation X and Ys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>UK Generation X</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer and conventional shopping channels and restricted shopping hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment of restricted credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acculturated into an environment of less materialism/income inequality, social class judged by what a person does</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receive advertising and marketing information from traditional media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer gender-role blurings, i.e. females interested in and shop for personal goods and clothing, males interested in shop for cars, home maintenance goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More likely to have grown up in traditional family unit with greater socialisation from parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Bakewell and Mitchell 2003

Differences in expectations towards fashion products by age groups also need to be considered, younger children are more interested in shape and colour whereas older children are more driven by taste (Roedder John and Sujan, 1990). Younger children

“tend to use fewer dimensions to compare and evaluate brands..., use simple choice mechanisms based on single attributes rather than employing compensatory choice strategies..., and tend to rely on dominant perceptual features (versus functional features) of products in gathering information and making choices...” (Gregan-Paxton and Roedder John, 1995, p.567 cited in Hogg et al 1998).
SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON DECISION MAKING

The purpose of this section is to explore how modern society, especially social influencers, influence consumers’ decision making in fashion. Fashion clothing plays not only the role of covering up and keeping warm but it is used to express one’s identity and influence how others will perceive you and therefore plays an important role in today’s society (O’Cass, 2000). Consumers’ decision making within fashion is influenced by the information available in the society from many different sources like advertising, magazines, celebrities, online, friends, family and bloggers. Further, a fashion purchase is a devoted task that requires more detailed involvement from consumers than a routine purchase like buying milk (Bettman et al, 1980).

Differences between generations have been identified by Bakewell and Mitchell due to changes in society and social influences as well as similarities within each generation (2003). In today’s society social influencers, like journalists, celebrities, bloggers, magazines and brand advocates, are regarded as “the most powerful force in the fashion marketplace” (Silverman 2001 cited in Wiedman et al, 2012, pg. 142). They impact customers purchasing decisions based on their personal opinion, ability and position and are often considered experts in their field by consumers. Social influencers therefore have a great deal of influence on consumers purchasing decisions and can influence what becomes a trend and a “must have” fashion as consumers tend to copy their style and believe that they are the experts within the product category. Consumers in today’s society are therefore influenced by social influencers to a greater extent than before. Wiedman et al (2012) identifies 3 types of social influencers in fashion (Figure 3), the fashion super spreaders, the narrative fashion experts and the helpful friends. Fashion super spreaders have the lowest fashion involvement of the three, the narrative fashion experts are excited about fashion and enjoy shopping and the helpful friends are most concerned with the risk involved in the fashion purchase and therefore they all influence consumers in a different way. Consumers do not associate fashion purchases to be of high risk and therefore don’t necessarily have or expect strong ties with the social influencers.
Even children are influenced by social influencers like pop stars and sport stars and a study by Hogg et al (1998) identified that children link brands strongly in fashion clothing. “When a celebrity endorses a product in an advertisement, associations are formed so that the culturally derived meanings may be transferred to the product” (Atik and Firat, 2012). Celebrities can therefore influence fashion decision making and raise awareness and create interest for a new fashion product and trends. Further, “Women who are fashion conscious don’t just look anywhere and everywhere or at anyone in the street to find the indicators of trends, but institutionalised elements in society serve a key role in their decision making” (Atik and Firat, pg. 849, 2012). Fashion magazines and advertisements within the magazines are considered to be a reliable medium by consumers as a source for the latest trends and must haves within fashion and are used as an inspiration for fashion purchases. Retailers and fashion brands use these sources to influence consumers by creating a need for the product or style of the moment (Atik and Firat, 2012, O’Cass 2004). Wiedman et al (2012) further identified that consumers satisfaction is the key force in whether a new style is accepted as a new trend or not.
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to gain a better understanding of how gender, age and social influencers affect consumers decision making within fashion. However these factors were discussed and reviewed individually, not how they interact with each other. As we have seen both men and women, different age groups and influencers in society impact consumers’ in the decision making for fashion clothing.

From the review it is clear that younger women are an important and demanding target group that expects brands to adapt to their needs and to build strong relationships with them. Therefore an interesting area for future research is how designers, retailers and marketers can adapt to their needs and build strong relationships with them. In addition, research on how changes in society affect the marketing tools used and how designers, retailers and marketers can maximise return on investment. Research on how different social media channels, like Facebook, Instagram, Blogs and Pinterest, affect consumers differently in relation to age and gender would be extremely valuable.
REFERENCE LIST


IMAGES


Figure 2. Bakewell, C. and Mitchell, V.W. 2003. *Comparison of childhood environmental influences on generations X and Ys.* Generation Y female consumer decision making styles.

Figure 3. Wiedman, K.P. et al. 2012. *Typology of social influencers.* Spreading the word of fashion: Identifying social influencers in fashion marketing.