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**FASHION BUYERS AND THEIR CUSTOMERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
CHOICE CRITERIA**

City University of New York

Ph.D. 1984

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FASHION BUYERS AND THEIR CUSTOMERS:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHOICE CRITERIA

by

JEROME GREENBERG

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Business in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
The City University of New York

1984

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Business in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

FASHION BUYERS AND THEIR CUSTOMERS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHOICE CRITERIA

by

Jerome Greenberg

Advisor Professor Leon G. Schiffman

This research explores the fundamental issue of the degree to which retail buyers of fashion merchandise are attuned to the wants of their target customers. In the course of this study, it was necessary to develop a methodology for identifying and quantifying those decision criteria used by the target customer groups, and then to compare these with the decision criteria used by the buyers.

Through use of the techniques of the Repertory Grid and Multidimensional Scaling, it was possible to accomplish the stated objectives and to create two empathy variables (Empscores). These Empscores, which measured the buyer's congruence, could then be compared with a series of independent variables.

With the cooperation of a major department store, a large-scale study was conducted during which the above methodology was empirically tested and demonstrated to be feasible. In-store interviews were carried out using matched samples consisting of customers of selected

departments and the buyers responsible for those departments. Assistant buyers and department managers were also interviewed.

The data collection was carried out in two phases--the first involving a questionnaire with demographic and psychographic items, and the second phase utilizing the Repertory Grid method during which a group of eight dresses served as stimuli. Each of these two phases yielded separate Empscores, which were then designated Empscore A (attitudinal) and Empscore B (behavioral).

The formal hypotheses were presented in three groups: those relating to the customer sample itself, those concerned with aspects of the buyer/customer congruence issue, and those involving the customers' fashion choice criteria.

Customers fashion attitudes were summarized by three factors: fashion self-confidence, fashion conformity, and fashion involvement. These three factors were then tested against a series of demographic and store-related independent variables. A similar comparison was undertaken with customers' adopter categories. Results indicated that the psychographic items were better predictors of fashion attitudes than the demographics, except for age and marital status.

The two Empscores furnished the input for testing the congruence of merchandisers with their target customers. Independent variables based on experience, position and department were examined for associations with the Empscores. In addition, these were compared with independent performance ratings of the merchandising personnel. Results of some of these tests were inconclusive owing to certain limitations of the sample.

Although the performance ratings correlated poorly with the congruence scores, significant results were noted for the experience variable, for departments and for differences between department managers and buyers.

Analysis of customers' choice criteria indicated significant differences between the customers of the three departments, and a general finding that silhouette was the most important criterion for customers of all departments.

It is concluded that the analytical tools developed in this study have potential application in the selection, training and evaluation of fashion buyers, as well as offering a new insight into the purchase behavior of fashion consumers.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the long and arduous journey culminating in the production of a doctoral dissertation, many individuals provide the patient understanding and guidance which help the weary pilgrim/researcher across the rough spots. Others provide the type of impatient prodding which may be equally needed at other stages of the work. This researcher was fortunate enough to have both types of assistance at those times when they were needed and wishes to express his gratitude to the individuals who were the providers thereof.

Gratitude in full measure is owed to the members of my committee--Dr. Leon Schiffman, Dr. Edward Wolf and Dr. David Rachman--each of whom generously assisted me "above and beyond the call of duty."

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the memory of my father, Irving Greenberg, who practiced the art of retailing wisely and well. Under him, I served my apprenticeship and learned to understand the difference between knowledge and wisdom.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The Art of Merchandising and Channels of Distribution

The merchandising function is defined as "Marketing the right merchandise or service at the right place, at the right time, in the right quantities, and at the right price." (Report of the Definitions Committee, American Marketing Association, 1948). Although this merchandising task is one which may be performed several times within a channel, it is generally agreed that effective performance of the merchandising function is essential for success in any retailing operation (Markin, 1977). Implicit in this merchandising function is the element of prediction -- a relatively routine task when applied to staple goods, but highly uncertain when fashion merchandise is involved.

Considering the typical channel through which fashion goods move, it is readily apparent that a critical decision role is played by the retail store buyer. The buyer's function may be viewed in several ways:

1. As a filtering agent or gatekeeper, selecting styles from among those offered by vendors.

2. As a purchasing agent for the consumer -- attempting to forecast the consumer's future desires, possibly before the customer is even aware of them.

3. As a potential agent in the process of fashion creation -- assuming a quasi-design function by bringing ideas or adaptations to a manufacturer and thereby exerting a direct influence on what is produced.

The work of some buyers may include all three of these tasks.

To retail managers, fashion merchandising presents both opportunities and problems. Among general merchandise retailers, the fashion goods classifications (traditionally understood as apparel and accessories) are considered to be of prime importance both from a profit and from a store image viewpoint. The problems inevitably arise as a result of the difficulty of predicting consumer demand for these volatile categories. It is axiomatic that the opportunities for profit in a given merchandise category are usually directly proportional to the fashion risk associated with that category. These are the facts of life which shape the environment in which the fashion buyer works.

The Measurement of Buyer Performance

The department store, since its emergence as a dominant retail form in the late 19th Century, has undergone numerous structural changes. One of the most profound of these changes dates from the late 1920's with the implementation of the Mazur Plan. Paul Mazur, recognizing the key role performed by the buyer in a department store organization, proposed a system whereby full responsibility for both buying and selling (in a given department) was assigned to the buyer. The buyer then, subject to allocation of all relevant costs for the department, was encouraged to strive for maximum profitability in a highly entrepreneurial environment. The department became, in effect, a profit center-establishing simultaneously a direct and effective means of evaluating buyer performance.

The Mazur Plan worked admirably and was widely adopted by department stores in all parts of the country from its inception in 1927 until the early 1950's. By that time, the phenomenon of suburban branching had so expanded the number of selling locations in most department stores that buyers could no longer effectively oversee the selling function. As a result, the buying and selling responsibilities in the largest of the department store chains were again split, creating the

need for alternative measurements of buyer performance, apart from department profitability (Bingham and Yunch, 1965).

It is primarily this problem -- i.e., the need for an alternate approach to the question of buyer performance appraisal -- which provides a point of departure for this dissertation.

It is recognized that a retail buyer's success depends on many factors, but chief among these must be an ability to perceive accurately the target customer's wants and motivations. The trait most commonly associated with this ability is empathy -- which will be here utilized as the basis for a new method of measuring and predicting a retail buyer's skills in merchandise selection.

Development of Research Questions

A major determinant of a buyer's effectiveness, it can be argued, is the buyer's understanding of and empathy with the target market. Consistent with a marketing approach to the buyer's function, it is obvious that the fashion buyer's success will, in large measure, be closely correlated with the ability to perceive and anticipate the decision criteria which are used by the target customers in the selection of fashion merchandise.

The buyer's job, of course, consists of many elements other than merchandise selection (e.g, negotiation, merchandising, pricing, and promotion), but this task is the one which has so far been least amenable to systematic analysis. To this end, it is likely that identification of those relevant product attributes utilized by consumers and buyers (whether conscious or unconscious) would be of great value.

The main purpose of this dissertation is to identify those relevant criteria which are commonly used by consumers in making fashion purchase decisions and to examine the association with the criteria used by retail fashion buyers of comparable merchandise. The following questions therefore present themselves for consideration to be developed into hypotheses:

1. What are the salient fashion attributes which determine a retail buyer's choice of fashion merchandise? (controlling for all non fashion-determined factors such as vendor reliability, product quality, profit potential, etc.)

2. Using a similar approach, can the fashion attributes which are important to a given customer group be identified? In particular, can this inquiry be applied to the customers of a given buyer?

3. Comparing the matched results of 1) and 2) above, what are the interrelationships of the buyer's choice criteria with those used by the target customers?

4. Examining the consumer groups, are there significant differences based on demographics, fashion involvement, adopter categories and other variables which can be related to their fashion attitudes and behavior?

5. Examining the buyers, are there significant differences in their empathy scores based on position and length of service.

6. If an appropriate external measure of buyer performance is applied, what is the association with the other factors?

Scope and Limitations of the Study

This section will discuss the research in its broader outlines, with separate sections devoted to the product class chosen and the subjects to be interviewed.

The Products

Prior research (Tigert, Ring and King, 1976; Granzin and Painter, 1974) has shown that females consistently score higher than males on fashion awareness or fashion involvement. It is therefore desirable that the products to be selected as stimuli for this study be items of feminine apparel. Within this general category, dresses offer two additional

advantages for the purposes of the research: 1) dresses have a relatively high fashion -- as opposed to functional -- content, and 2) dresses are generally sold within narrowly defined merchandise classifications, thereby yielding relatively homogeneous customer groups from which samples may be drawn.

In order to focus on the fashion effects of the purchase decision, garments were presented to the subjects without manufacturers' labels, price tickets or size tickets.

The Subjects: Consumers and Buyers

To conduct the above investigations, the researcher sought to develop matched blocks of subjects - retail buyers of clearly defined merchandise categories and the customers for whom they are buying. Fortunately, it was possible to secure the cooperation of a large eastern department store chain which provided an appropriate environment for in-store interviewing of customers, buyers, assistant buyers and department managers. Three selling departments were chosen and customer interviews conducted in four of the branch stores. Buyer interviews were carried out at the executive offices in the flagship stores.

Buyers' decision criteria normally include such variables as markup, turnover possibilities, vendor

reliability, advertising allowances, etc. None of these factors, however, are directly perceived by consumers and therefore it is necessary to isolate the non-fashion factors when questioning the sample of buyers. This research is concerned chiefly with the fashion attributes of the products under consideration to the exclusion of the other elements of the buying decision process, since it frequently happens that fashion considerations can override all the other elements when it comes to buying decisions of the ultimate consumer.

Definition of Terms

Following the definitions of Nystrom (1928), a style is defined as "a characteristic or distinctive mode or method of expression, presentation, or conception in the field of some art." A fashion is defined simply as the prevailing style at any given time. The critical point implicit in this definition is that there may be a multiplicity of styles extant at any given time in the field of apparel, but that fashion implies a certain measure of public acceptance. Operationally, a style will be defined as a distinct lot number offered for sale by a particular manufacturer, possessing a number of identifiable components or style features -- such as color, fabric, silhouette, or detail.

For the purpose of this research, the term "buyer" will denote that individual within a retail organization who exercises the decision-making authority with respect to selection of styles for resale. Operationally, this may include assistant buyers and merchandise managers as well as those who bear the title of buyer.

Organization of the Dissertation

This Introductory chapter has outlined the environmental background of this study, in particular focusing on the retail fashion buyer as a key link in the channel of distribution. Need for the research was discussed in the context of the problem of buyer performance appraisal.

Chapter II presents a review of previous research on the subjects of the fashion consumer, the retail fashion buyer, and the role of empathy in retail merchandising. Specific studies are examined in the areas of fashion theory, diffusion of innovations, and on the role of the fashion buyer. The next section of the chapter points out gaps and limitations of the previous research and the ways in which the present study hopes to resolve these gaps. Finally, there will be outlined a method for developing an empirical measure of congruence (apart from merchandising results) whereby a buyer's empathy can be measured.

Chapter III covers the research design and methodology of the dissertation. The first section describes relevant characteristics of the subject store including its organization, type of clientele, and characteristics of the buyers. The following section includes a description of the merchandise areas chosen for the study and a brief description of the other variables involved. The design of the study is then discussed in detail, followed by an account of problems encountered during the pre-test and changes which were made as a result of these experiences. A subsequent section is devoted to the Repertory Grid technique of interviewing as developed by the psychiatrist George Kelly and adapted for this research.

The latter part of Chapter III is devoted to a listing and discussion of the separate hypotheses together with an account of the statistical techniques used for analysis of the data.

Chapter IV contains the findings which have emerged from analysis of the empirical data. These are grouped into two sets of measures -- a) internal measurements describing the customer groups and the buyer groups separately, and b) congruence measures describing relationships between relevant buyer groups and their customers.

Chapter V is titled "Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations" and also discusses opportunities for further research as well as managerial applications of the research results.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

OVERVIEW

Fashion and the Diffusion of Innovations

Fashions may be considered as a special case under the general heading of innovations. Although conforming to many of the recognized characteristics of innovations in general, the adoption and diffusion of fashions does differ in important respects.

1. Fashion is purely cosmetic -- not to be confused with functional change. Although fashion objects can and do possess functional qualities, the fashion element of the product must be based on qualities other than functional utility.

2. Fashion is a dynamic process, involving almost constant change, obsolescence, and eventual replacement by newer fashions. As such, the fashion diffusion process differs clearly from the latter phase of Rogers' paradigm for the individual decision process for innovations in general.

3. Fashion diffusion is more dependent on visual influence than on verbal interpersonal influence.

4. Because of the fashion industry's competitive structure and the prevalence of style piracy, the process of parallel diffusion can be much more rapid than in the case of other innovations. (Midgley (1974) pp. 104-105, and Greenberg (1978) pp. 14-15)

This dissertation focuses on a critical phase of the marketing of apparel fashions -- the interface between the retail buyer and the consumer, with emphasis on the decision processes of both actors.

Early writing which treated the subject of fashion adoption and diffusion in a scientific manner was carried on largely within the disciplines of sociology and psychology. Beginning with the work of Simmel (1904) and continuing with Fluegel (1930) and Sapir (1931), it was established that fashion movements were something more than a random process and that fashion behavior of groups and individuals did follow recognizable patterns. Kroeber (1919) and Richardson and Kroeber (1940) further documented the fashion cycle and the evolutionary nature of fashion changes.

More recently, several writers in the marketing field have interested themselves in the phenomenon of fashion and its relation to the marketing mix. Among these are Nystrom (1928), McNair (1949), and Robinson

(1958, 1961). Intrinsic to much of this work is the understanding that fashion movements are inexorable as well as cyclical (in particular, see Robinson, 1975). An essential point -- not universally acknowledged by marketers -- is the fact that fashion is an external variable (i.e., uncontrollable) to the marketing mix. Nevertheless, the myth that fashion is created by the industry dies hard - cf., King (1963).

The publication of Rogers & Shoemaker's Diffusion of Innovations in 1962 provided an appropriate theoretical framework within which the study of fashion and fashion behavior could be carried on. Much research dating from this period did touch on the subject of fashion, researchers recognizing that apparel fashions afforded an ideal vehicle for conducting innovation studies. For example, see Darden and Reynolds (1972, 1974), Baumgarten (1975), Painter and Granzin (1976), and Tigert, Ring, and King (1976).

Unfortunately, in the view of this writer, almost all of these studies focused on the innovator rather than on the innovation. A notable exception to the trend is the work of Lyman Ostlund (1969, 1974). Ostlund's approach, although applied to packaged goods products -- a far cry from the realm of fashion -- does have implications for the purpose of this research. In considering

the characteristics of the innovation as well as those of the innovator, Ostlund suggested that product attributes (as perceived by the adopter) are at least as significant as the characteristics of the adopter. In the past, theories of buyer behavior have chiefly focused on consumer characteristics to the neglect of product characteristics; one of the aims of this research is to redress this imbalance by an emphasis on fashion product characteristics as perceived by buyers.

Support for this viewpoint may be found in Day, Shocker, and Srivastava (1979). In this article, the authors stress the necessity of defining product-markets and their boundaries in terms of consumer judgments and perceptions.

Ultimately, all product market boundaries are arbitrary. They exist because of recurring needs to comprehend market structures and impose some order on complex market environments ... One reason is the wide variety of decision contexts which dictate different definitions of boundaries.

Obviously the above statement can be readily translated into the context of retail merchandising via the well-established concept of classification merchandising (see Wingate, Schaller, and Miller, 1972 -- pp. 248-252).

Many attempts to measure consumer perceptions of fashion items have been carried out, including:

Frederick Rahr (1953), Schutz and Phillips (1976), Jenkins and Dickey (1976), Winokur and Goings (1973), and Jacobi and Walters (1958). One limitation shared by all of this research is the fact that the choice criteria applied to the fashions in question were invariably suggested by the researchers. Obviously, such a research design must inevitably be open to question since there is no assurance that the consumer-respondents might not be affected by other product attributes beyond those selected by the researcher.

Several researchers have focused, in particular, on the case of the retail store buyer. Dickinson (1966) discussed the department store buyer's work in the context of game theory and, in his 1967 monograph, he identified those variables which exert pressure on the buyer's decision making process. The "gatekeeper" aspect of the buyer's role was emphasized by Edwin Gross (1967). McClure and Ryans (1968) compared retailers' and consumers' perceptions of major appliances, and Douglass White (1976) attempted a similar comparison utilizing apparel items while pre-specifying the evaluative criteria for both groups (i.e., customers and merchandisers).

The paper by Alexis, Haines, and Simon (1968) -- "Consumer Information Processing: The Case of Women's

Clothing" -- deserves consideration for several reasons other than the fact that it uses a fashion product as the subject of analysis. Empirical findings showed that price, although important as a purchase decision variable, was not the most important factor. The conclusions indicated that factors such as style and color often preceded the price variable and implicitly assumed greater importance in the consumer's mind. The implications of these findings for the present research are considerable:

1. It is apparent that consumer decision making when applied to fashion products may operate in a significantly different manner from the case of non-fashion products. To generalize from the one to the other class of products can be dangerous.

2. It is clear that additional research which might further clarify the non-price (i.e., fashion) attributes is strongly indicated here.

3. Further, it is likewise evident that a chief limitation of the Alexis, Haines and Simon study stems from their use of the protocol methodology of data collection. The protocol is defined as "a transcript of the verbalized thought and action of a subject when the subject has been instructed to think or problem-solve aloud."

(Alexis, et al. -- 1968). Two serious drawbacks are inherent in the use of the protocol technique. First, samples are invariably small, often limited to only two or three subjects. Secondly, the protocol methodology, although minute in its detail, can tap only the conscious processes.

As will be discussed later, this dissertation seeks to overcome several of the above limitations by utilizing the Repertory Grid technique of data collection -- a methodology hitherto untried in the area of fashion research.

Fashion Products and Fashion Cycles

Although fashion is generally equated with apparel, it has been recognized that a fashion component exists in a wide variety of consumer products. Robinson (1958) and Wolpert (1980) demonstrated that furniture, appliances, home decor and automobiles all contain significant elements of fashion. Robinson (1975) further pointed out that the fashion aspect of a product consists of those attributes which are purely cosmetic as opposed to functional and which are subject to periodic, evolutionary, and cyclical changes.

Greenberg et al. (1981) examined the interaction of this differential fashion content of a product with the fashion attitudes of individual consumers, and developed a quantitative measure called an "Index of Perceived Fashion Content." By applying this measure to a list of consumer products ranging from neckties to telephones, they were able to quantify the fashion element in each of the products, as perceived by the sample of consumers.

Given the dynamics of the fashion process, it is not surprising that the rise and fall in popularity of fashion products tends to be highly volatile. Although Young (1937), Greenberg (1973), Wills and Midgley (1974) and Robinson (1976) have carried out longitudinal studies on fashion cycles, much more work is required in this important area.

With our present state of knowledge, therefore, the unpredictability of fashion movements (and consequently, of fashion demand) may be identified as the central problem in fashion merchandising.

Fashion Products and Fashion Consumers

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) offer a useful perspective for examining those special characteristics of fashion behavior which distinguish it from consumer behavior in general. As defined by these researchers,

"hedonic products" are those which are purchased in large part as subjective symbols rather than for objective reasons. This view had been expressed earlier by Levy (1959) -- "People buy products, not only for what they do, but also for what they mean." Holman (1981) made a similar point in her paper titled, "Apparel as Communication."

Gibbins (1969) explored in some depth the use of fashions as a means of communication, emphasizing the complex nature of the encoding and decoding processes. Holman, in her comprehensive 1981 review, examined the topic of product use as communication considering a diverse group of products as communication vehicles, but primarily focusing on fashion apparel.

While beyond the scope of this dissertation, the above line of research does serve to reinforce two propositions which are of great importance to this study: (a) Consumer fashion behavior and, in particular, the selection of fashion products is strongly affected by motivations which are in large part unconscious, and (b) This selection process is an exceedingly complex one. Consequently, it may be said that fashion behavior is less well understood than that of consumer behavior in general. Several representative examples of recent research in the area of fashion behavior may be briefly noted here.

1. Leaver (1974) did research in the United Kingdom on women consumers and their attitudes toward clothes. In this study, as in those cited previously, one of the salient findings is that the woman's attitude toward her clothes is exceedingly complex. Further, the study revealed a large discrepancy between the respondents' stated fashion attitudes and their actual behavior.

2. Gutman and Mills (1982) carried out a large-scale survey ($n > 6000$) in the Los Angeles area. This study related the life-style dimensions of the customer sample (women) to their fashion orientation and shopping behavior. Consumers were classified primarily according to their degree of fashion leadership and fashion interest.

3. Tatzel (1982) identifies two basic dimensions affecting shopping behavior for fashion apparel, i.e., shopping skills and motivation. Although revealing some interesting insights, the study (which is not empirical) exhibits some flaws -- chiefly that of grouping males and females together.

In summary, it may be observed that the above line of research takes the customer as the unit of analysis and seeks bases for segmentation, generally concluding

that psychographics yield better results than demographics.

Taste and Fashion

The relationship of taste and fashion has been a source of some confusion among researchers as well as among the general public. Sapir (1931) stated that fashion is not so much reconciled with taste as substituted for it (p. 139). Jacobi and Walters (1958) in their study of the consumer choice process for women's fashions commented on the interdependence of taste with other underlying forces. Gibbins (1969) also noted the limitations of using consumers' stated preferences when attempting to evaluate the "fashionableness" of a given garment.

It should therefore be recognized that any research into the question of fashion decision-making which centers on customer tastes (or preferences) will perforce run the risk of inadequacy. For the research to have more lasting value, it is necessary to seek more stable criteria than simple preference.

Given the stated complexity and unconscious nature of consumer motivations involved in fashion behavior, the difficulty of researching the fashion selection process becomes apparent. If one wishes to ascertain a consumer's

reasons for selecting a particular fashion item, it is probably fruitless to simply ask her. It is precisely at this point that most of the previous body of research on the subject falls short and which this dissertation will attempt to deal with by use of a specific interview technique hitherto unused in this field.

Fashion Buying and Fashion Merchandising

As has been noted in the foregoing section, the environment in which the retailer of fashion products operates is shaped by two underlying factors: a) a highly perishable product; fashion change can erode merchandise values just as surely as the passage of time can change fresh bread into stale, and b) a customer who is subject to a complex set of motivating forces, many of which she is not fully aware of herself.

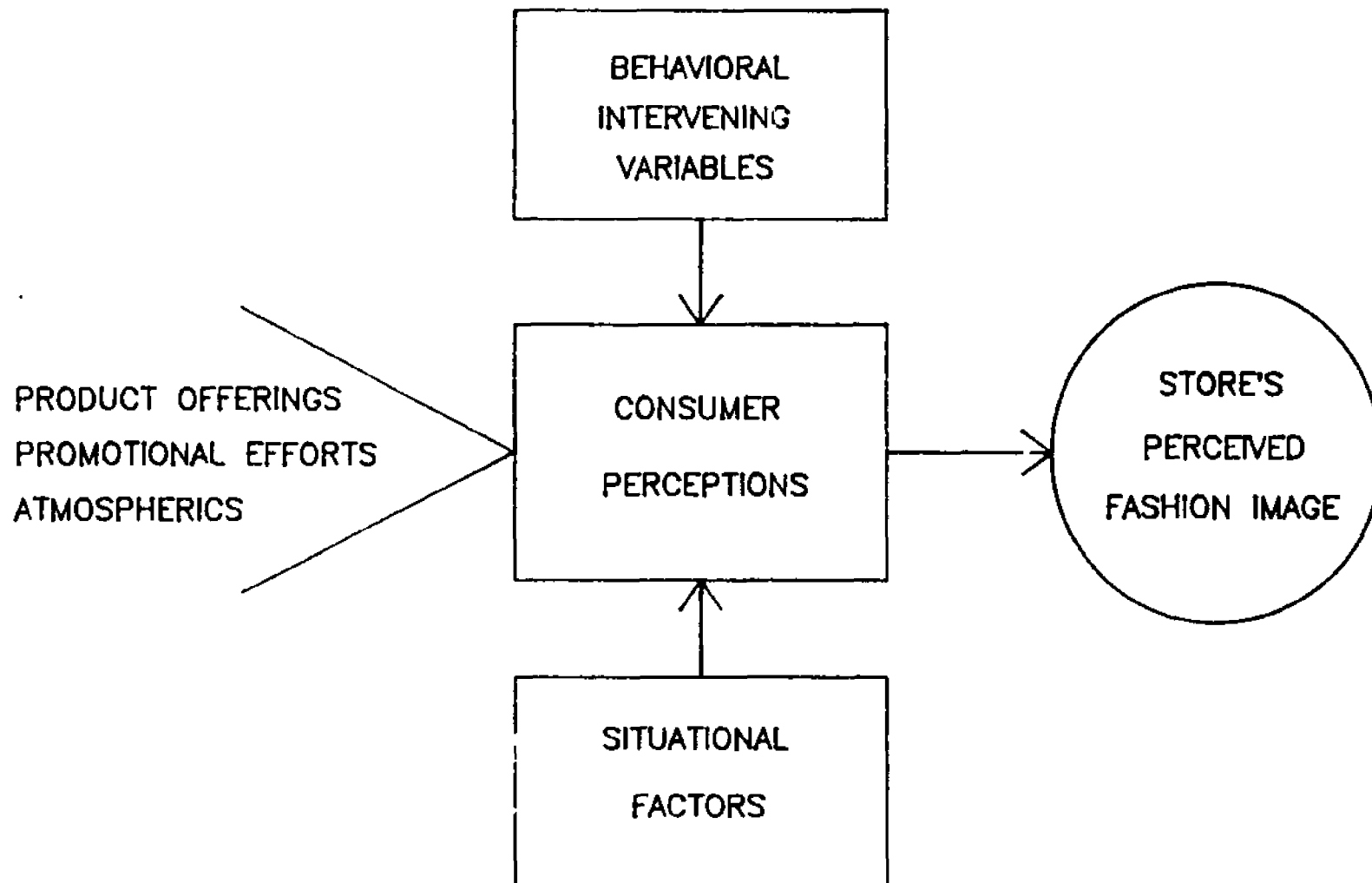
If one views the above fundamental factors as the chief uncontrollable (external) variables in the fashion merchandising environment, then the output might be conceptualized as the store's fashion positioning (planned) or fashion image (actual) as perceived by its customers. To achieve a fuller understanding of the form and structure, of the fashion merchandising process, however, it is useful to look at an important intervening variable which often can

be responsible for the gap between a store's intended fashion position and its actual fashion image as perceived by its target customers.

This variable may be conceptualized as the aggregate of customers' Perceived Fashion Content (PFC) evaluations of the merchandise offered for sale (see Figure 1). The PFC variable is based on the proposition that a wide range of products contain elements of fashionability, as opposed to purely functional elements. In general, this fashion content may be viewed as complementary to the functional element of the product and can be measured along a continuum ranging from almost pure function (e.g., a toothbrush) to almost pure fashion (e.g., a necktie). As described by Greenberg, Sherman, and Schiffman (1981), it is apparent that individuals perceive this element of fashion content in varying degrees for the same products. For example, to some people a pair of jeans may be a product with a very high fashion content while to others it is merely a functional garment used for gardening.

Subject to this important intervening variable, the fundamental task of fashion merchandisers (in common with those who deal in non-fashion goods) is the familiar one of attempting to anticipate and serve the needs and wants of a chosen market. The fashion merchandiser

FIGURE 1: A SIMPLIFIED MODEL OF THE DETERMINANTS
OF PERCEIVED FASHION IMAGE



thus shares all of the risks and vagaries experienced by his non-fashion peers in addition to those special conditions which have been outlined above.

As has been observed, a central role in this highly dynamic process is filled by the retail buyer -- occupying the key position at the interface between the consumer-oriented retail structure and the product-oriented manufacturer. In fulfilling this linkage function, the buyer performs two types of inter-related tasks -- a) style selection and b) demand estimation. As seen by Wills and Midgley (1974) --

The range of garments to be sold is selected almost entirely on the basis of experienced, but nonetheless subjective, judgement. No use of market research techniques appears to be made ... (p. 178)

What Wills and Midgley are implying is well-known in the fashion industry although generally not explicitly acknowledged (i.e., that almost no one is attempting to study the consumer directly). The reasons for this almost total lack of formalized research in a multi-billion dollar industry need not occupy us at this point, but it will be useful to look at some of the alternate techniques which are commonly used by fashion retailers in the style selection process.

1. They may rely on manufacturers' recommendations and/or scheduled promotions on the theory that if it's heavily promoted, it will sell. (Past experience

has frequently demonstrated the folly of this approach.)

2. Stores which have positioned themselves as fashion followers, may use other stores (for example, the avant-garde boutiques) as leading indicators. The weakness of this technique is that not all fashions which meet with success at an early level of the adoption cycle will succeed in the mainstream stores.

3. The store may "test-market" small quantities of a new style on the selling floor, getting the reaction of the store's own customers before ordering in quantity. (This approach, of course, suffers from the limitations of all small-sample studies [i.e., very low confidence levels for the results]).

4. The store may rely on past sales history. The utility of this method, however, is inversely related to the rate of fashion change.

5. Extrapolate from early season sales to the remainder of the selling season. This method, although used successfully by some mail-order retailers who feature classic styles (not subject to rapid fashion change) is difficult to apply for most fashion stores.

While the above list is neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive, it does give a picture of the common methods

actually in use by many fashion retailers today.

It may thus be concluded that the basic marketing research tasks (i.e., identification of those factors which motivate consumers and prediction of their behavior) are, in the case of fashion products, not being adequately performed. Since the manufacturer has, in effect, not assumed this responsibility, the primary marketing research task has fallen by default to the fashion retailer -- who performs it poorly, if at all.

The Role of Empathy in Retail Merchandising

One of the axioms of retail merchandising is that the buyer's task is best performed when he or she is acting as a purchasing agent for the consumer. Although true for all classes of merchandise, this principle is most critical for the buyer of fashion merchandise, who must assiduously avoid the twin traps of being unduly influenced by the vendor's point of view or by the dictates of his own preferences.

The single quality which best summarizes those skills needed by a fashion buyer is that of empathy -- an ability to understand the inner workings of the customer's mind, her motivations, and her likely reaction to the merchandise offered for sale.

Empathy has been defined as "an apprehension of the state of mind of another person without feeling

(as in sympathy) what the other feels," (English and English, 1958).

Considerable attention has been given by psychologists to the study of empathy (e.g., see Lindzey and Aronson, 1969 and Mehrabian and Epstein, 1972). Relevant applications are found in the fields of social work, therapy, teaching, and nursing. Although no examples of previous research linking the quality of empathy explicitly to retail buyers was unearthed by this researcher, it is possible to cite several references which refer to selling. Thompson (1966) emphasizes the importance of empathy in the work of the salesperson. Mayer and Greenberg (1964) make the following point:

Empathy, the important central ability to feel as the other fellow does in order to be able to sell him a product or service, must be possessed in large measure. Having empathy does not necessarily mean being sympathetic. One can know what the other fellow feels without agreeing with that feeling. But a salesman simply cannot sell well without the invaluable and irreplaceable ability to get a powerful feedback from his client through empathy.

The selling function, of course, is inextricably bound up with the retail buyer's job and, therefore, one may easily affirm the relevance of empathy to buying as has been done implicitly in the following two works.

Kaminstein (1979) implied a high degree of empathy in the buyer's fundamental need to understand the target market:

Buying to a specific target market is something that is done by many buyers almost instinctively, although perhaps it would be more successful if it were done consciously. The buyer must know the customer for whom he or she is buying, and must know this customer well enough to be able to anticipate what will be wanted well in advance.

Duncan, Phillips, and Hollander (1972) pointed out that the exercise of empathy requires the suppression of a buyer's own personal taste:

Actually, all successful purchasing begins with a clearcut idea on the buyer's part of what is wanted, or at least what the buyer thinks will be wanted when it is called to the attention of potential customers. The buyer's personal likes and dislikes are unimportant; he is the "purchasing agent" of the customers. (p. 237)

Although the literature reveals general agreement on the importance of empathy in the several pursuits mentioned above, the search for operational measures and tests of this trait has produced very mixed results over the years (see Lindzey and Aronson, 1969, p. 409). Most tests for empathic ability have taken the form of comparing the self-ratings of a subject with the ratings a judge thought the subject would use. After considerable search for a suitable scale which could be used in the study at hand, this

researcher concluded that none of the available tests would be appropriate. The solution to the problem as discussed in Chapter III, following, was to devise a direct measurement reflecting the congruence between the retail buyer and the relevant customer segment.

The preceding section of this chapter has focused on the background and environmental factors which shape the world of fashion merchandising. In particular, the environment is seen from the perspective of a key actor in the process--the buyer of fashion merchandise. The following section will be devoted to a closer examination of the major relevant studies which bear on this subject and will thus serve to define the context for the empirical phase of this dissertation.

The Retail Buyer: A Closer Look

In this section, a critical appraisal will be made of the more significant research focused on the work of the retail buyer.

Nature of the Buyer's Job and Its Importance

Dickinson (1967) investigated the retail buyer's decision-making process within a department store environment. Among the variables examined in the work were: influence of the market, store management, legal factors, competitive position of the store, and individual characteristics of the buyer.

One interesting aspect of this work was the development of a classification schema for types of buyers based on their behavioral and subjective characteristics. Since the subjects for Dickinson's research were drawn from the field of hard-goods buyers, much of this work is not applicable to the fashion goods area. The research does, however, complement the work of Dalrymple (1966 and 1969) which takes a more mechanistic approach to the buyer's work. These two latter papers are discussed more fully in the following section of this chapter.

Gross (1967) examines the buyer's role as a "gatekeeper" within the bureaucracy of the large retail organization, emphasizing the key role which buyers play in the selection or rejection of merchandise for resale.

Dickinson's 1967 article, "Game Theory and the Department Store Buyer," yields some interesting insights into the negotiating aspect of the buying process. While these propositions could be equally applied to the buying of fashion goods or staples, the article raised some important implications relating to the differences between these two types of buying.

For example, the fashion buyer goes into the market seeking saleable styles, which can usually be

acquired from a number of alternate resources. Typically, the choice of style desired precedes the choice of vendor. As compared with the buying behavior in non-fashion goods, the fashion buyer is, in effect, engaged in a new-task buying situation almost every time.

One can conclude, therefore, that the negotiation process for fashion merchandise is often less important than the question of how the style choices are determined.

One of the more influential works on the importance of the buyer in a department store organization was Claude Martin's 1973 Journal of Retailing article, "The Contribution of the Professional Buyer to a Store's Success or Failure."

In this study, Martin compared the buyers of two stores -- one successful and the other unsuccessful -- on a number of demographic and behavioral dimensions. He concluded that there were significant differences in the age variable and in the following behavioral dimensions: aggressiveness, self-confidence, and fashion leadership. He further contended that these buyer differences were, in large part, responsible for the success or failure of the subject stores. As expressed by an executive who was quoted in the article -- "The bulk of the answer lies with who does the buying for the store and what they buy. If you don't have the goods the

customer wants, you cannot be successful!"

Prediction and Evaluation of Job Performance

The 1964 monograph by Dalrymple, "Measuring Merchandising Performance in Department Stores," takes an in-depth look at the effects of diverse control measures on management performance and examines how these differing criteria may be balanced against each other. The research is positioned within the broader area of merchandise control systems and specifically addresses the question, "What are the most useful measures for evaluating performance of merchandising personnel in large retail organizations?" His survey data were collected by personal interview with merchandising executives from 11 firms at three levels -- buyer, divisional merchandise manager, and general merchandise manager.

Among the results of the study, the following are of most interest for the purposes of this dissertation:

1. In the opinion of the sample of respondents, the most important merchandising control factors were -- promotions, sales volume, stock control, markdowns, markon percentage, profits and stock turnover.

2. Although relative rankings of these factors differed according to level of executive, it is noteworthy that profit was not the first choice for any

of the groups and was actually ranked sixth by both buyers and divisional merchandise managers.

3. As might be expected, the compensation methods used to pay merchandising personnel tended to influence the performance measures used by them.

4. Dalrymple noted a shift away from the traditional markon approach as an evaluation measure. Some dominant measures were identified as net sales, gross margin, stockturn, and contribution return on inventory investment.

5. There was recognition of a continuing problem with the choice of a measurement which would be appropriate to the level of executive being evaluated. In a sense, this problem reduces to the classic management principle of matching levels of responsibility, authority and accountability.

When the respondents were questioned as to their perception of their most important duties and responsibilities (p. 44), it is interesting to note that the first item in a list of 19 was "selection of the right merchandise." They estimated that 24% of their time was devoted to this task and that the subsequent sales and markdown results could be directly attributed to the successful performance of this merchandise selection

job. This finding suggests that the buying function is perceived as more important than selling and tends to confirm the ancient retailing aphorism -- "goods well bought are half sold."

In his 1966 monograph, "Merchandising Decision Models for Department Stores," Dalrymple moves from the descriptive to the normative. Implicitly deploring the lack of attention given by practitioners to the more sophisticated performance measures, he has developed a profit-maximizing regression model as a function of ten separate merchandising variables. The model was tested in a single department store at both departmental and store levels.

Although the technical achievement of developing the model is commendable, Dalrymple himself acknowledged its shortcomings in practice. In the paper he states:

The relationship among markup, markdown, sales, and profits are a maze of interaction that defies analysis by the typical merchandising executive. For example, is it more important for the executive to control the amount of initial markup obtained on merchandise or to concentrate on taking markdowns on slow-moving merchandise so that money invested can be recovered and reinvested in new merchandise? Further, are high markups associated with high markdowns and are prices directly related to markups?
(p. 4)

In considering the results of these two important studies, one cannot help but conclude that the

function of merchandise selection deserves further attention since here is obviously where the whole process starts.

Johnston (1969) continued the above line of research with particular emphasis on the aspect of the proliferating number of store branches and its effect on the buyer's job. He was interested in determining which aspects of buyer knowledge were most important for successful job performance.

In the opinion of the department store executives surveyed, the top categories included customer demand and potential demand, market buying sources, and merchandise or product knowledge. Although the weights assigned to these separate factors varied by number of store branches, Johnston concluded that the buyer must continue to know the customer's demands in order to do a successful buying job. Interestingly, the importance of selling as a factor declined as the number of branches increased.

However, for the sources of essential buyer knowledge, the sample respondents ranked "customers" as a knowledge source well down on the list, generally below such categories as subordinates and assistants, vendor and market information, and statistical records. The inference here is that, although customer demand is

recognized as an important aspect of buyer knowledge, in practice it was not among the major direct sources of buyer information. We may speculate on the reasons for this discrepancy, but one likely explanation is that the buyers, although conscious of the overriding importance of customer demand, nevertheless felt the means to apprehend it directly were not available and therefore were forced to rely on secondary sources for that information.

In another recent study of buyer performance, Joseph (1977) took a more behaviorally oriented approach to the topic, attempting to correlate a selected list of personality traits with success as a buyer.

Using a sample of buyers drawn from a single large department store in Texas, Joseph pursued and extended the research line of Claude Martin (1973). Whereas Martin had looked at only two personality variables -- aggressiveness and self-confidence -- Joseph's list of predictors included assertiveness, efficiency, emotional stability, need for autonomy, perseverance, and dogmatism. The absence of empathy from this list is regrettable, but may be explained by the lack of a suitable scale for measuring this trait.

A Corollary Issue: The Question of Congruence

As indicated by the foregoing research, the buyer's merchandise decisions are a prime determinant of a store's success. While true for all categories of merchandise, the rule holds doubly true in the case of fashion merchandise, owing to the smaller margin for error in that field.

While much discussion in the literature has been devoted to finding suitable a posteriori measures of buyer performance, much less is available in the area of a priori measures; after careful search, this writer found very little of relevance in the literature.

Clearly, if we seek a standard against which to measure a buyer's merchandise choices, there is only one proper criterion -- i.e., the choices which would be made by the store's target customers. The congruence between a buyer's choice criteria and those of the potential customers is therefore the best a priori measure of a buyer's skill.

The following articles are representative of the available research on this topic.

The McClure and Ryans article (1968), despite some serious flaws, is seen as one of the rare attempts to quantify the extent to which retail buyers understand customers' decision criteria. The study used two

separate samples in one major city: a random sample of consumers and a group of dealers selling major appliances. The dealer sample constituted a virtual census of stores handling this type of product in the city.

The major thrust of the study was to compare the relative importance placed by each of the sub-samples on a selected group of product attributes (including price). By measuring the congruence of the retailers' responses with that of the customer group, the authors sought to demonstrate the degree of accuracy of retail buyers' perception of the customers' decision process.

The research design may be criticized on several grounds:

First, although the authors speak of "retailers and their customers," both samples were, in effect, undifferentiated aggregates. No attempt was apparently made to match up customers with particular stores. Indeed, the paper gives no indication that any of the customer respondents had recently purchased or were in the market for the products in question. Secondly, the choice of attributes was pre-specified by the researchers and contained some items which might be sources of bias, as was pointed out by Semon (1969) in his critique of the article.

Several later studies moved from the product area to the question of store image -- measuring the congruence of customers' perceptions versus that of store management. Typical of this line of research are May (1972) and Pathak, Crissy, and Sweitzer (1975). O'Neill and Hawkins (1980) extended the analysis one step further by comparing perceptions of two separate retail shopping areas (a revitalized downtown shopping mall and a suburban mall shopping center). Here again, responses of retail managers were compared with those of customers.

Research Concerning Buyer Decision Criteria

Two recent studies more narrowly focused on the choice criteria used by retail buyers of fashion goods are examined in greater depth in this section.

The Frank/Hirschman Study

The origin of this research was a 1980 MBA thesis -- "Buying for Department and Chain Stores" -- written by Jeffrey Frank under the supervision of Elizabeth Hirschman. Hirschman subsequently published a separate analysis of this data in 1981, titled "An Exploratory Comparison of Decision Criteria Used by Retail Buyers." These two papers will be evaluated together.

Hirschman observed that those buyers who responded to supply characteristics (i.e., what the vendor can provide) are less customer-oriented than those who are influenced primarily by demand factors (i.e., what the customer wants).

To address this very fundamental question, the objective of the research was to identify the decision criteria used by a sample of retail buyers and to determine whether those criteria varied by type of retail organization or by department. Data were collected by a mail survey of buyers of three categories of fashion-related soft goods: ladies robes and loungewear, children's wear, and misses sportswear. They were further grouped by type of organization (i.e., chain stores or department stores). To supplement the questionnaire data, personal interviews were conducted with a limited number of the buyers. The research questions thus centered on the differences in choice criteria among the three departments as well as between the store types.

Respondents were asked to name those criteria which influenced them most under separate headings for choice of vendor and choice of styles. Among the conclusions were: a) Most buyers are more supply-oriented than demand-oriented, b) Criteria used by chain store

buyers differ considerably from those used by department store buyers; longer lead times needed and other organizational constraints create greater interest in such factors as vendor reliability, c) Department store buyers appear to be more fashion-oriented than chain store buyers, d) The degree of autonomy exercised by buyers varies considerably. In many firms, the critical decisions are made at higher levels, the buyer merely functioning as a technician.

Individual criteria named by the respondents were then aggregated by Frank and grouped into several broad categories such as esthetics (fabric, color, print), vendor-related factors (reliability, service), price and markup, product-related technical factors (fit, quality), marketability, and business conditions (external).

The following criticisms of this research may be made.

1. Although the decision criteria were respondent-specified, the final choice of categories included some that were probably irrelevant (i.e., business conditions) and one -- marketability -- which was probably a function of some of the other items.

2. The criterion data as originally collected were ordinal, rather than interval. The results, however,

were displayed as percentages (based on a frequency count of the number of times a given item was mentioned), leading to a possibly erroneous impression of the relative importance a buyer accords to a particular criterion. For example, a respondent might list the following in order of importance: price, fit, fashion, and vendor reliability. Actually, the buyer might assign price in his mind twice the weight of the next important item. The inferences drawn from the data can therefore be quite misleading.

3. Although the study focused on fashion products, it did not attempt to isolate the fashion-related aspects of the product from other, purely merchandising considerations.

4. Perhaps the most serious shortcoming of the study is the failure to deal with the vital issue of buyer/customer congruence directly. To accomplish this, of course, it would be necessary to survey a sample of customers as well as buyers.

The Douglass White Study

White noted in 1976 -

Inventory management systems measure and analyze sales that are made, not sales that are lost. Such systems determine what customers are buying, but not what customers want to buy and can't find. (p. 9)

In common with the other research discussed earlier, White thus pointed out the essential problem in fashion merchandising. He sought answers via a survey conducted among customers and buyers of five stores located in Pennsylvania, using women's fashion apparel as the stimuli. Results of the research were included in a Ph.D. dissertation titled, "Importance of Selected Clothing Attributes to Consumers Compared to Retail Buyers' Perception of This Importance."

White surveyed a sample of 391 female customers on their perceptions of the importance of a list of pre-selected attributes in their choice of apparel. Three types of garments were specified -- a winter coat, a daytime dress, and a pants suit. A sample of 61 buyers and assistant buyers from the same stores was also surveyed and their responses compared with those of the stores' customers.

White's research design involved distributing the questionnaires at random in the subject stores and having the respondents return the forms by mail to the researcher. He specified seven merchandise characteristics ("attributes") which had been subjectively chosen from a review of the literature, viz., price, fashion, size or fit, material, color, quality, and construction.

Customers were required to score each of these attributes for the three types of garments, using a six-point interval scale which designated the degree of importance the subject attached to the given attribute. Results were tabulated for both customer and buyer samples and tested for significant differences using the Mann-Whitney U statistic. The results showed fairly good congruence when the data for all stores were combined (i.e., matching the entire customer sample versus the entire buyer sample). However, when the analysis was done by store (matching each store with its own customer base), many significant differences did appear. This result, of course, reflects the experience of McClure and Ryans where individual store differences can be masked in the aggregate data. Recognizing the essence of market segmentation by retailers requires the researcher to be always aware of this potential problem. White's study, as contrasted with the previously analyzed work, did provide for the possibility of separate analysis -- matching up discrete customer samples with the buyers who buy for them.

A second phase of the analysis looked at the effects of several demographic variables -- viz., age, income and education -- on the dependent variable of buyer/customer congruence. In the opinion of this

writer, White's approach to this phase of the analysis reveals a serious conceptual error. By treating the congruence measure as a dependent variable and the demographics as independent variables, White seems to lose sight of the fact that it is the buyer's responsibility to respond to the customer's wants and not vice-versa.

Several additional criticisms may be made of the White study:

1. The questionnaire design did not allow customers to introduce any attributes other than those pre-specified by the researcher. Obviously, this precluded any possible effects of unconscious buying motives.
2. Some of the attributes were ambiguous (e.g., "fashion") or were not mutually exclusive (e.g., "color" and "material" may well be components of fashion; "quality" and "construction" may often overlap).
3. The random selection of customer respondents did not provide for screening out browsers or people who might have been shopping in other departments of the store. In other words, we have no indication of how many of these people had actually made a purchase in the subject departments.
4. Buyers and Assistant Buyers were both surveyed, but the results were not segregated, thus missing an

opportunity to look at significant differences between these groups.

Despite these shortcomings, this research does represent an advance over the preceding work in the field, for the chief reason that the design provides for a matching of customer groups with the buyers who buy for them, thus lending a greater degree of validity to the final results.

The Unanswered Questions: Gaps and Limitations in the Theory

This section will summarize and integrate the foregoing research and particularly seek to identify those areas where the theoretical base is incomplete and further work is required.

The Roots of Fashion Behavior

Early research from the disciplines of psychology and sociology has illuminated much of what shapes the individual's fashion behavior; many of its determinants, however, are still poorly understood. Among those principles upon which academicians generally agree are the following:

1. The phenomenon of fashion pervades many product areas other than apparel -- notably furniture, home decor, architecture and automobiles.
2. Given the proper economic and social conditions,

fashion will arise spontaneously and cannot be suppressed. Fashion also involves constant change -- although the rate of change can and does vary. The resultant demand cycles are therefore extremely difficult to predict.

3. Individuals differ in their propensity to adopt new fashions and their general interest or involvement in fashion. Rogers' category of adopters schema may be easily applied to fashion adopters.

4. In current times, it has been demonstrated, females generally have greater interest and involvement in fashion than do males. It has also been demonstrated that fashion interest is generally inversely related to age.

5. Although consumers may be aware of their fashion involvement, they are seldom fully cognizant of the unconscious motivations which underlie their choice of fashion products. If asked to articulate the reasons for a fashion choice, they will often be unable to do so.

The Fashion Industry: Vendors, Products, Market Research

The fashion apparel industry -- at both the manufacturer and retail levels -- is highly fragmented. Many, if not most, producers are small and poorly financed.

At the manufacturer level, the emphasis is on flexibility and response to rapidly changing trends; lacking the patent protection available in other industries, style piracy is rampant.

The resulting channel structure is quite different from that of the package goods sector, for example. In the absence of the market direction which would be furnished by a channel captain, the marketing research task is seldom carried out formally in the fashion field. Where intuition must be relied on to guide production and distribution, the potential for inefficiency, excessive risk and unnecessary losses inevitably increases.

Manufacturers must market their goods through retailers. The retailer, having the obvious advantage of being closer to the consumer, should perceive her likes and dislikes better, but frequently does not (see McClure and Ryans). In the case of fashion apparel, the problem is even more acute because of the following factors: a) volatility of the product -- short demand cycles, b) high emotional/psychological component of the product, c) brand names less important than in other categories of goods and d) marketing research insignificant at the manufacturer's level.

The net result of these conditions is that retail buyers' decisions are often the most critical factor in the success or failure of the channel's merchandising efforts.

The Retail Buyer Revisited

Recognition of this key function performed by retail buyers has given rise to considerable research on the topic. One approach views the buyer as performing a linkage function between the production system and the consumer -- anticipating and translating consumer wants into merchandising decision. Another, more product-oriented, view looks at the buyer as gatekeeper -- controlling the acceptance or rejection of styles which are to be offered for sale. In either case, the quality of empathy has been shown to be a necessary trait for successful performance of the buyer's task.

In comparing the fashion buying task with that of buyers of non-fashion merchandise, research has emphasized the higher risks associated with the former, tending to balance the higher profit potentials. The buying of fashion goods typically constitutes a new-task buying situation, as contrasted with the rebuy patterns prevalent in other merchandise areas.

In the post-World War II period, a watershed occurred in the buyer performance evaluation process for large retail organizations. Immediately prior to that time, the evaluation process was marked by widespread use of the Mazur Plan, introduced in the late 1920's and adopted by most department store organizations shortly thereafter. The Mazur Plan, which unified responsibility for buying and selling within the department, was a brilliant innovation -- simultaneously effective as an incentive device, a measure of performance, and a means of encouraging the entrepreneurial spirit of the buyer.

Appraisal of buyers' performance under the Mazur Plan was direct and simple: profitability. The problem arose when the centrally located downtown department stores had to adapt their organizational structures to the addition of suburban branch stores.

As Johnston (1969) put it:

Buyers insist that without customer contact they cannot buy properly. In dealing with the unique markets (of the various branch units) and with more frequently changing fashions, the problem of maintaining customer contact becomes more acute with the increasing number of branch stores. (p. 93)

The growth and dispersal of retail organizations gradually reduced the use of the direct profitability measure and necessitated other appraisal elements. As pointed

out by Harris and Mills (1981), when we move farther away from the really essential criteria of retail performance, the evaluation process becomes less satisfactory.

Alternate Approaches in the Post-Mazur Era

The research devoted to the buyer-appraisal question in the current period (post-Mazur Plan) may be grouped under three headings:

1. The Accounting Approach: Exemplified by the work of Dalrymple and Johnston, this line of research emphasized merchandise control, financial performance measures and the interaction of these criteria with buyers' compensation. The approach yielded some fairly sophisticated models, but also revealed a number of limitations. In the opinion of this researcher, the Accounting approach may be criticized on two grounds. First, the major thrust of the approach is historical; it fails to provide any a priori or concurrent insights on the buyer performance problem. Secondly, although the merchandise selection task is explicitly recognized as a prime determinant of buyer performance, this approach offers no way to measure this activity directly. It is merely assumed that effective merchandise selection will naturally result in optimum financial results -- an assumption which may be

open to serious challenge.

2) The Behavioral Approach: Illustrated by the work of Martin and Joseph, this research perspective looks at those personality traits which might be associated with success as a retail buyer. Several limitations of this line of research may be noted:

First, the experience of marketing researchers in the attempt to define links between specific personality traits and consumer behavior has been mixed at best (see Schiffman and Kanuk, 1983, p. 93). Secondly, the one trait which does show the most potential relevance to success as a buyer (i.e., empathy) is omitted. Finally, the papers which were examined failed to distinguish the buying of fashion goods from that of staple goods -- a distinction which, in the opinion of this writer, is essential.

3) A third perspective, which might be termed the Marketing Concept Approach, introduces an essential element which is either missing or given insufficient consideration in the other two groups of papers. As illustrated by the work of McClure and Ryans, Douglass White, and Frank/Hirschman, this research approach centers on the issue of congruence between the decision criteria of the buyer and those of the target customer.

Implicitly, it recognizes that the consumer's choices are the only ones which ultimately count and that the buyer's responsibility is to anticipate those choices as closely as possible.

Among the virtues of this research approach may be listed the following: a) It is the only approach which is explicitly consumer-oriented, b) It provides for an a priori measure of a buyer's aptitudes and skills -- a potentially predictive as well as evaluative measure, c) The issue of empathy between buyer and customer is an essential component of the approach and d) It is especially well suited to fashion merchandise. The existing body of research using this approach is admittedly sparse. Additionally, it suffers from several limitations, viz., specifying the merchandise attributes (or customer decision criteria) by the researcher; failure to capture possible unconscious motivations of fashion consumers; in some cases poor matching of customer and buyer samples (for example, McClure and Ryans). Given the centrality of the congruence issue, it is imperative that this matching phase of the research be as precise as possible.

It is the conviction of this researcher that this latter research approach (i.e., the Marketing Concept

perspective) is the most promising route for the further extension of our knowledge in the area of fashion buying.

Focus of the Dissertation: Filling in the Gaps

The literature, as well as real-world experience, confirms that the world of fashion merchandising is shaped by these factors: rapid and constant fashion change, unpredictable demand, and a lack of effective market research at the manufacturer's level. In such an environment, the burden of the market information function often falls on the retailer. The retail merchandise decisions must be made by the buyer -- who is required to not only interpret the consumer's desires, but to anticipate them.

In the absence of formal market research, buyers usually fall back on subjective judgment (or intuition) in making merchandise choices. Duncan, Phillips, and Hollander (1977) illustrate the intuitive character of one buyer's decision-making as follows: "If I don't react to a garment immediately, I forget it. I know I will not be able to sell it." (p. 296)

Conversations with many other buyers in the course of this research confirm that the above procedure is quite common among fashion buyers. The fact that a parallel decision process is used by consumers in making fashion choices is obviously of great significance

for research purposes.

That market research which has been conducted in the fashion area is usually based on stated consumer preference for given styles -- a technique of limited value when dealing with fashion products. Since fashions can and do change each season, decisions based on past customer preferences would be obsolete by the time they are implemented. In addition, there is the problem that much of the motivation which governs a consumer's fashion choice behavior is experienced below the level of full consciousness. If a woman were to be asked why she chose one particular dress rather than another, quite similar, one, she might often respond "I don't know; it just hit me." One, therefore, can discern the unconscious at work in both the buyer's and the consumer's decision process.

In a sense, the task of merchandise selection is the essence of the buyer's job; if performed well, then profitability is likely to follow. One can therefore build a strong case for measuring buyer performance at the level of buyer/customer congruence when the profitability measure is not feasible. Such a congruence measure, when operationalized and quantified, could have several advantages beyond its value as a performance measure -- viz., an aid to

reduction of the area of intuitive decision-making in fashion buying, a more stable measure for understanding consumer fashion behavior (as opposed to shifting preferences), a sensitivity to differing market segments, and a selection and training device for new buyers.

The research objectives of this dissertation may therefore be restated in the following general terms:

1. To develop and test an empirical measure of congruence, apart from merchandising results, by which a buyer's empathy can be measured.

2. By restricting the investigation solely to fashion-related criteria and omitting all other merchandising factors, to gain a deeper insight into the buyer's decision process.

3. As a secondary goal, to identify and investigate the fashion choice criteria used by customers and to analyze these for demographic and psychographic differences.

4. To examine the unconscious -- as well as the conscious -- motivations influencing the consumers' and buyers' fashion decisions, insofar as this may be possible.

The following chapter will describe in detail the empirical study which was carried out in order to achieve these objectives.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Setting - Description of Subject Store

The department store which agreed to cooperate in this study is a major retail organization with more than 20 branches located over several states in the eastern part of the United States. Each of the branches carries a full line of department store merchandise at moderate price points, with a major emphasis on fashion apparel. The marketing strategy has been described as strongly consumer-oriented and expansion-minded; they are dominant in most of the geographical markets which they serve. The store's fashion emphasis, while not avant-garde, might be termed "updated contemporary" for the most part.

Executives and buyers describe the customer base as quite homogeneous over the many branches, with less than a ten percent variation between stores, as to income levels and fashion orientation. These differences were such that management felt they could be safely disregarded in establishing buying policies.

The Buyer's Career Path

The store's buyers are normally developed in an executive training program whose members are recruited from graduates of four year colleges; average age of buyers therefore tends to be relatively young. The first position in the executive training program is that of sales manager or assistant sales manager, with responsibility for a single department within one of the branches. The next step is to the position of assistant buyer based in the flagship store, followed by a promotion to group manager--a store position with responsibility for several related selling departments in one branch.

The promotion to buyer would normally follow in due course if the individual has made satisfactory progress. Promotion policies in this store often permit a trainee to advance to the buyer's level in as short a time as four years.

Areas of Responsibility

The merchandise groupings that are normally assigned to a single buyer can vary considerably and seldom coincide with merchandise classifications. As in most department stores, the size or width of an area assigned to one buyer will depend on several factors, among which are (a) the ability of one individual to effectively manage the merchandise area (a span-of-control problem), (b) the element of customer demand and its trend over time, (c) customer life styles, and (d) price levels of the merchandise.

The new buyer is typically assigned to a less important merchandise area--usually one which is smaller in sales volume, requiring less merchandise expertise, and consequently affording a greater margin for error.

The effect of the state of customer demand and rate of classification growth may be illustrated by several recent examples:

1. The activewear department which now has separate buyers--one for men's and the other for women's--grew out of two other departments: sporting goods and women's sportswear.

2. Moderate priced dinnerware and glassware, originally handled by one buyer, have now become separate responsibilities.

3. TV and home video equipment have now been split into separate buying areas.

4. In some cases an individual vendor can become so important that a single buyer will be assigned to only one (or possibly two) manufacturers. Two current examples are Liz Claiborne and Evan Picone.

In general, it can be seen that the question of establishing boundaries between merchandise groupings is a dynamic one requiring periodic reevaluation.

Interviews with buyers and assistant buyers revealed considerable variation in the degree of autonomy granted to the assistants. In some cases assistant buyers

functioned primarily as technicians; in others they were given the authority to select merchandise styles and even to choose vendors on their own. It appears, therefore, that in some cases a buyer and his/her assistant might be functioning as a team, while in others there was a clear-cut superior/subordinate relationship.

The merchandise administrator to whom the buyer reports (equivalent to divisional merchandise manager) is the next highest position in the merchandising hierarchy. This individual is seldom concerned directly with selection of merchandise, but rather acts in a financial control capacity. The result of this organizational structure is to place greater emphasis on the authority and responsibility of the buyers.

Because of the increasing number of branches, it proved to be difficult for a buyer to physically visit the branch stores on any regular basis. Interviews confirmed that a typical buyer was able to visit each branch only twice a year. The contact between buyer and branches therefore depends on telephone and written communications, plus a comprehensive point-of-sale computer network.

Performance Evaluation and Compensation Policies

Over time the store has developed a sophisticated system for evaluation, compensation and promotion of buyers. In practice, it appears that this system is working well--having achieved buyer motivation, accountability and a fair amount of flexibility.

Merchandising factors are the most heavily weighted items in the buyer's performance evaluation--chiefly sales volume, maintained markon, shortages, markdowns, and net advertising costs. Profitability is measured at the gross margin level, taking into account those fixed costs which have been allocated to the department.

The overall unifying element for the entire evaluation process is the seasonal plan, which has been developed by the buyer in consultation with the merchandise administrator to whom he/she reports. This plan serves as the benchmark by which the buyer's merchandising performance will ultimately be measured. It can be seen, therefore, that this evaluation system, in addition to establishing the buyer's department as a profit center, also combines elements of management by objectives.

Plan fulfillment by the buyer largely determines salary increases as well as promotions, but in some cases allowances are made for external variables such as economic conditions, competitive environment, or the department's physical location within the store.

Respondent Samples - Customers and Merchandisers

Interviews with 180 customers were completed over a period of approximately eight months in four of the branch stores. Within each of these stores, 15 customers were interviewed in each of three departments--Budget, Junior and Misses' dresses (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2: CUSTOMER INTERVIEW DISTRIBUTION

DEPARTMENT	STORE 1			STORE 2			STORE 3			STORE 4		
	MISSES	JUNIORS	BUDGET	MISSES	JUNIORS	BUDGET	MISSES	JUNIORS	BUDGET	MISSES	JUNIORS	BUDGET
CUSTOMERS	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
• BUYERS	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
• ASSISTANTS	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
DEPARTMENT MANAGERS	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

• BUYERS AND ASSISTANTS TOTALS WERE 15 INDIVIDUALS EACH
(FIVE EACH FOR THE 3 DEPARTMENTS ACROSS ALL STORES)

Two qualifying restrictions were imposed for respondents: (a) the woman must have made at least one purchase during the last six months in the given department, and (b) she must be over 16 years of age. Customers were approached by the interviewer on the selling floor of the subject department and invited to participate in a "fashion survey." If they consented, they were then conducted to a nearby room where the interview took place. Selected characteristics of the customer sample are shown in Table 1. Department managers of the above departments were also interviewed in each of the respective stores.

The second wave of interviews was conducted at the flagship store and involved 15 buyers and 15 assistant buyers who purchase merchandise for the customer groups previously interviewed in the stores. This symmetrical research design permitted the creation of a measure of congruence for each buyer and assistant--an empathy score which could ultimately be compared with an independent measure of performance (see Figures 3 and 4). Table 2 displays selected characteristics of the merchandiser sample.

The choice of departments for the study reflected the need for a product with a high degree of fashion content as well as the likelihood of getting a customer sample with a variation of demographics. By drawing the sample from three dress departments--Juniors, Misses and Budget--it was felt that a suitable age and income range would result.

TABLE 1
SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF CUSTOMER SAMPLE

	Number	Percent		Number	Percent
<u>AGE</u>			<u>MARITAL STATUS</u>		
under 25 yrs.	48	26.7	single*	79	44.4
25 - 44 yrs.	71	39.4	married	99	55.6
45 and over	61	33.9			
<u>EDUCATION LEVEL</u>			<u>CATEGORY OF ADOPTER</u>		
some h.s. (or less)	13	7.3	innovators	6	3.3
h.s. completed	46	25.7	early adopters	44	24.6
some college	71	39.7	early majority	87	48.6
college grad.	35	19.5	late majority	29	16.2
post grad. degree	14	7.8	laggards	13	7.3
<u>FAMILY INCOME (1980)</u>					
\$10,000 or less	17	9.6			
10,001 to 20,000	31	17.4			
20,001 to 40,000	73	41.0			
40,001 to 50,000	25	14.0			
over 50,000	32	18.0			

*Single category includes widowed and divorced.

FIGURE 3: DEVELOPMENT OF AN ATTITUDINAL
MEASURE OF CONGRUENCE
"EMPSCORE A"

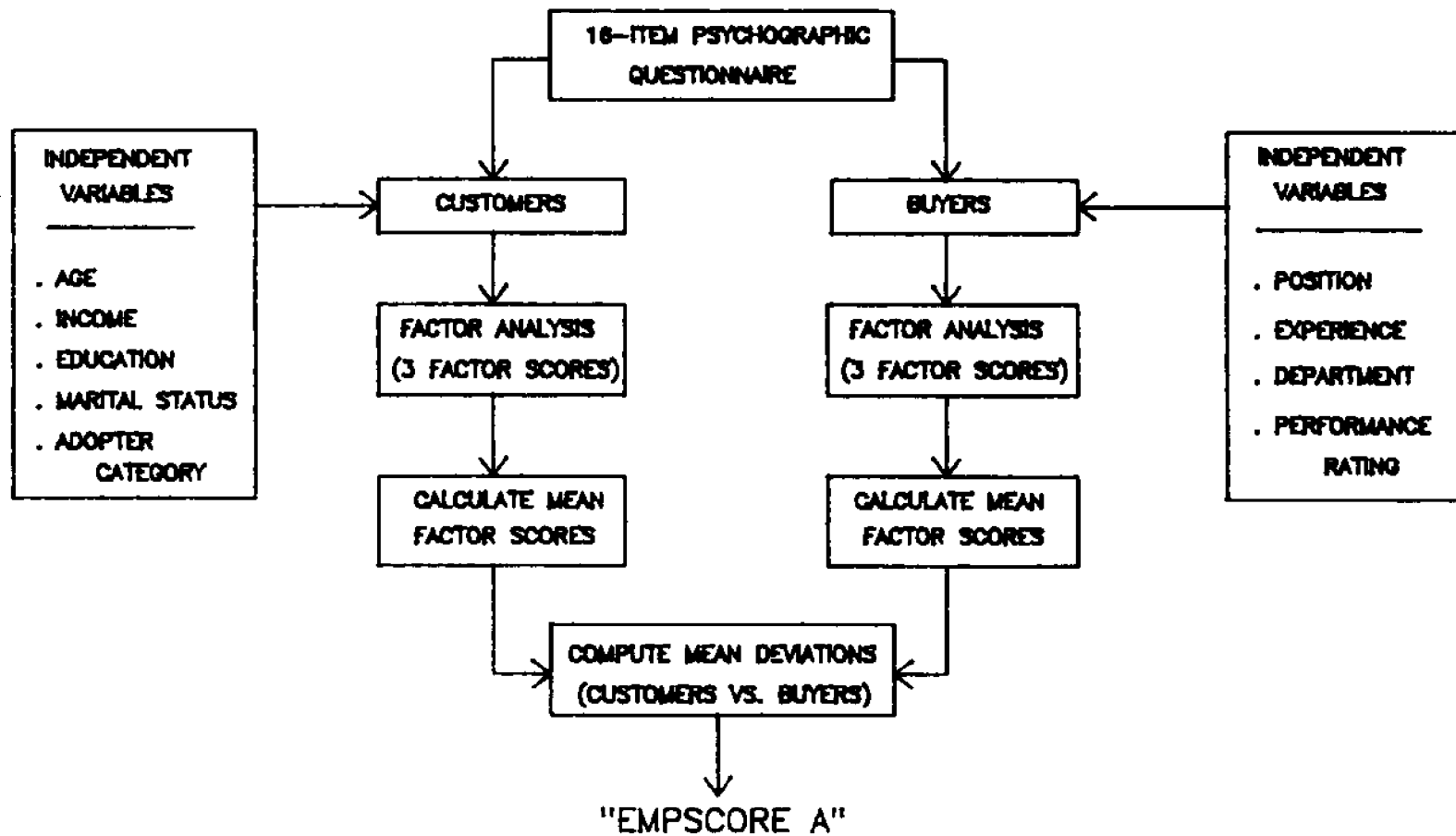


FIGURE 4: DEVELOPMENT OF A BEHAVIORAL
MEASURE OF CONGRUENCE
"EMPScore B"

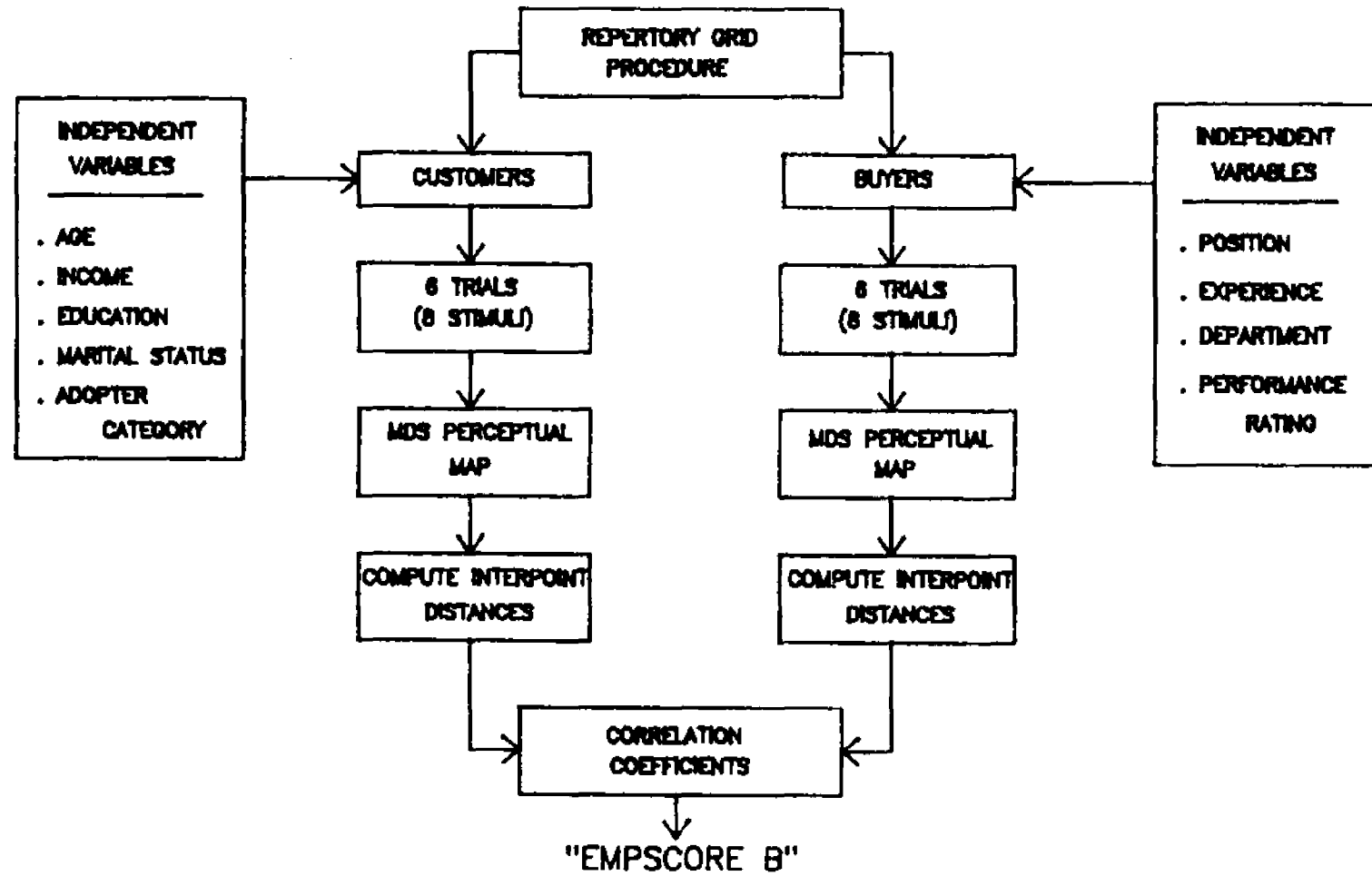


TABLE 2
SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF MERCHANDISER SAMPLE^a

	n	%
<u>AGE</u>		
25 or less	11	26.2
26 - 30	20	47.6
31 - 40	7	16.7
over 40	4	9.5
<u>JOBTIME^b</u>		
12 mos. or less	21	50.0
GT 12 mos. LT 3 yrs.	14	33.3
2 yrs. - 5 yrs.	5	11.9
over 5 yrs.	2	4.8
<u>RETAILTIME^c</u>		
12 mos. or less	2	4.8
GT 12 mos. LT 5 yrs.	17	40.5
5 yrs. - LT 10 yrs.	13	30.9
10 years or more	6	23.8

^aincludes buyers, assistants and dept. managers.

^btotal time in present job.

^ctotal time in retail employment.

The choice of four separate branches, it was hoped, would reveal any possible geographic differences.

List of Variables and Their Relationships

The central variables of interest in this study are the set of decision criteria which the separate samples of consumers and store buyers utilize in making fashion decisions. The design attempts to control for all extraneous (non-fashion related) factors, e.g., price, store choice, brands, fit, and so forth, and thus to develop a set of factors which represent the purely fashion elements of the purchase decision process. Since these elements are the ones which are least understood, this study endeavors to thereby contribute to a better understanding of fashion behavior.

The respondent data were derived from two sources: (a) a 16-item attitudinal questionnaire which was ultimately reduced by factor analysis to three underlying factors summarizing the individual's fashion attitudes, and (b) a Repertory Grid experiment using eight dresses as stimuli. The resultant data were transformed by multi-dimensional scaling into a perceptual map for each subject, permitting the computation of interpoint distances between the stimuli. (These procedures are described in detail in a subsequent section of this chapter).

Both sets of respondents were subjected to the same interview procedures; however, the buyers were

instructed to respond to the attitudinal questionnaire as they felt their typical target customers would do. The final dependent variable developed from each of the two data sources was a measure of congruence between buyers and their customers. This was termed an "Empscore"--a measure of empathy--and was calculated separately from each of the two data sources: Empscore-A (attitudinal) resulting from the 16-item attitudinal scale, and Empscore B (behavioral) resulting from the Repertory Grid experiment.

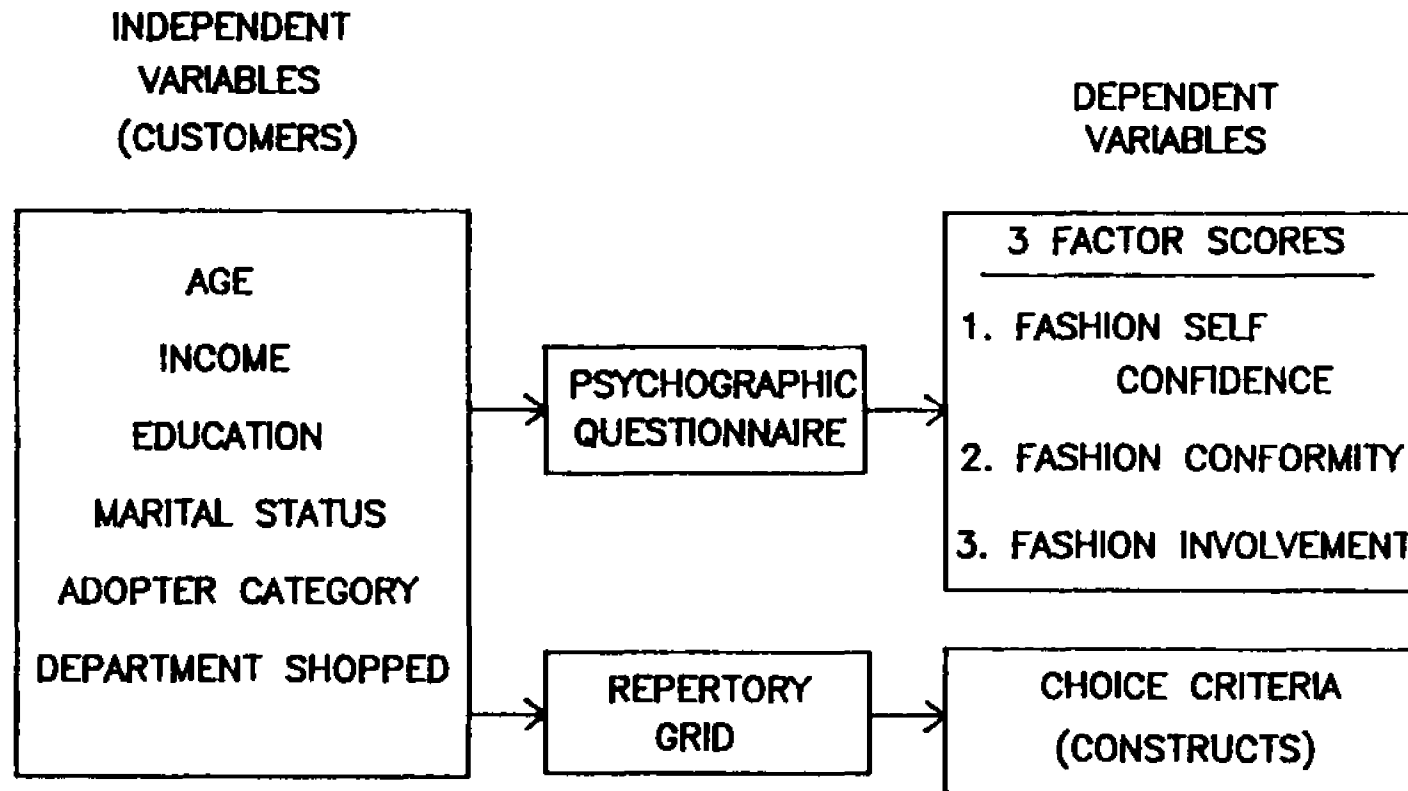
The relationship of the major variables is depicted in the series of schematics designated Figures 3, 4, 5 and 6. Similar data collected from the department managers were analyzed separately based on the fact that these subjects did not have decision power on merchandise selection.

Two additional analyses were also performed:

a. A series of internal measures within the customer sample. These examined the subjects' three-factor scores for differences related to a group of independent variables. These relationships are depicted in Figure 5.

b. The Repertory Grid data yielded a total of 136 constructs--i.e., the specific choice criteria which had been named by the respondents. This list of constructs, reduced to nine broad categories, was then examined for differences based on the set of independent variables. Separately, the results from the buyers with relatively low empscores were

FIGURE 5: MODEL SHOWING RELATIONSHIP
OF CUSTOMER VARIABLES



examined to point out those specific areas where they were not in tune with their customers (see Figure 6).

Design of the Study

This section is devoted to a description of the store interview setting and procedures, together with a review of the research instruments and stimuli.

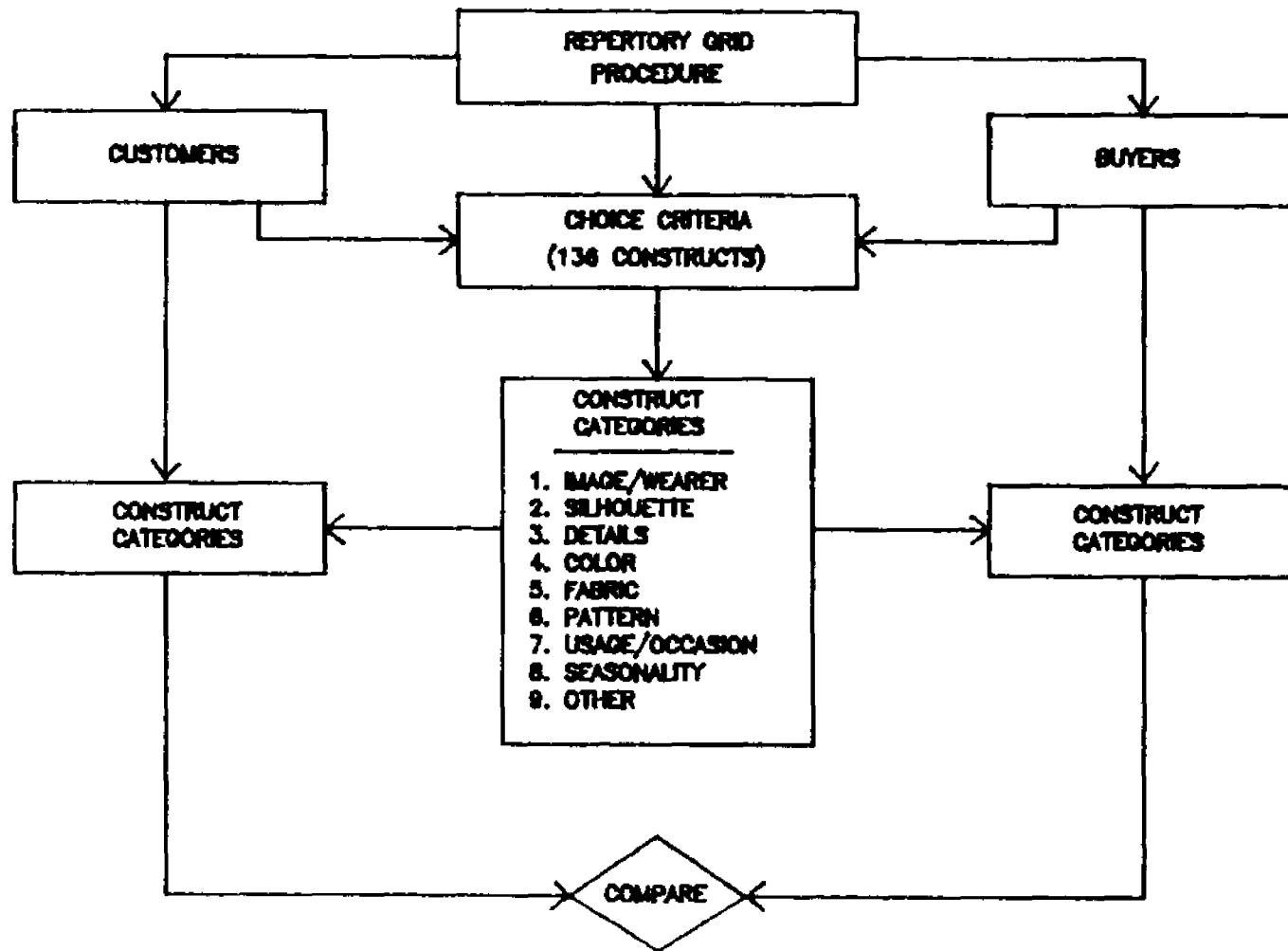
The customer interview phase of the research was conducted in four branches of the store, separated from each other by distances of up to 75 miles. About half of the interviews were conducted by the researcher personally--the balance by several assistants who had been selected and given careful training in the technique. These individuals worked under supervision before being permitted to interview on their own.

Interviewers were stationed on the selling floor in the subject dress departments, and generally approached customers who had just completed a purchase--inviting them to participate in the study. Those who consented were then taken to a nearby office where the interview took place. The total time devoted to each interview averaged about 45 minutes, and the subjects were rewarded with a small incentive.

Interview Phase 1

The questionnaire was filled out under the guidance of the interviewer who was able to interpret or explain any of the items where necessary. The primary research

FIGURE 6: MODEL SHOWING DEVELOPMENT
OF CONSTRUCT CATEGORIES



instrument was a four-part questionnaire (see Appendix A), the first part being a series of 16 items reflecting the subject's fashion attitudes. These were scaled on a four-point, forced choice Likert scale. Results for this section provided the input to the three factor scores. The other sections contained questions relating to the individual's fashion interest, personal data, and demographics.

Interview Phase 2

The second phase of the customer interview consisted of the Repertory Grid procedure. Rather than resorting to written descriptions or pictures to serve as stimuli for this phase (as is commonly done in this type of research) it was decided to use actual garments, thereby introducing the maximum amount of reality to the experiment. The decision was made to use dresses, rather than other types of fashion garments, because the dress embodies a maximum number of fashion elements in one garment and is generally complete in itself--not needing complementary items, as would be the case with sportswear.

Eight dresses were selected as stimuli. Photographs of these dresses are included in Appendix B. Two main considerations guided the choices for stimuli. First, it was necessary that the group of dresses be as heterogeneous as possible; in effect, they had to differ from each other on as many dimensions as possible in order to allow for a maximum variety of customer responses. Second, it is important to

keep in mind that the customer responses should not involve personal preferences, the basis for the Repertory Grid technique being perceptions of similarity or dissimilarity.

It was therefore determined, after the pre-test to use styles which were not currently in fashion. Instructions to the subjects made it clear that they were to disregard personal likes and dislikes in framing their responses. The great majority of respondents were able to manage this, under direction of the interviewer. The few who found it impossible to suppress their own tastes were eliminated from the sample.

The dresses were displayed on hangers, without price tags, brand labels or sizes, and the subjects were accordingly instructed to ignore all of these factors, as well as their own preferences. Each dress was simply labelled with a large identifying letter ranging from A through H. Customers were encouraged to examine and touch the garments before starting the procedure. Instructions given to the customer-subjects are reproduced in Appendix C.

Interviewing the Merchandisers

Department managers were interviewed in the store branches where they worked in a manner similar to that used with the customers. As with the buyers, however, the managers were instructed to fill out the questionnaires as they felt their typical target customers would do. Department managers had not been originally included in the research

design, but they were added to the sample after the pre-test for the purpose of testing the hypothesis that proximity to the customer will affect empathy.

The buyers and assistants were interviewed in the flagship store after completion of the customer interview phase. As with the managers, they were instructed to respond to the questionnaires from the point-of-view of their target customers.

For the Repertory Grid phase, it was recognized that buyers' decision criteria normally include such variables as markup, turnover possibilities, vendor reliability, advertising allowances, and so forth. Since none of these factors are directly perceived by consumers, however, it was necessary to isolate these non-fashion factors when questioning the sample of buyers. These subjects were therefore cautioned at the start of the procedure that the research was concerned solely with the fashion attributes of the products to the exclusion of the other elements of the buying decision process. After a brief explanation of this constraint, the buyers were all able to carry out the Rep Grid experiments without any problems.

The Pre-Test

Prior to the full-scale interviewing, a pilot study was conducted in one of the branch stores in order to evaluate the interview procedures and the research instrument.

This study involved four sessions and 24 subjects, resulting in several minor changes in the questionnaire format and a major change in the second (experiment) phase of the interview. The questionnaire changes included rewording or elimination of several items which had proved to be redundant or poorly understood by the respondents.

As for the second phase of the interview, however, major changes proved to be necessary. Originally, the plan called for customers to be interviewed in groups of up to ten individuals at one time, using a stepwise sorting procedure adapted from Kruskal and Wish (1978).

The design called for ten dresses as stimuli, each respondent to be furnished with a deck of 45 cards containing all possible pairwise combinations of the ten objects. Through a sequential sorting procedure, the subjects were then required to rank the stimulus pairs from most similar to least similar. The results of these individual rankings furnished the input for the multi-dimensional scaling perceptual maps. The chief benefit of this method would have been the time saved through group interviewing; in practice, however, serious problems were experienced in implementing the procedure.

The most serious problem was the subjects' difficulty in comprehending the sorting task and consequent loss of interest in the experiment about half-way through the one-hour period required for completion. The researcher noted that many of the subjects seemed to be sorting the

cards almost mechanically without any real thought after the first few minutes. A secondary problem was perceived in connection with the questionnaires, where respondents would tend to compare answers with their neighbors.

After two sessions using this method the researcher recognized that it was not workable and it was abandoned. The Repertory Grid technique (described in detail below) did turn out to be a highly satisfactory means of data collection, yielding the proximity data in a more efficient manner. This was used for the final two sessions of the pre-test phase.

The one limitation, unfortunately, was that the interviews had to be conducted individually, rather than in groups. The entire period devoted to customer interviews consequently consumed about eight months, plus an additional period of time for buyer interviews. One minor fringe benefit of this lengthy time span, however, was the opportunity to examine seasonal effects on the responses.

The incentives offered to the customer-respondents were originally state lottery tickets. After several months, leather key cases, which proved to be much more acceptable, were substituted. The buyers and managers were rewarded with copies of a pocket dictionary of textile terms, which were quite well received.

The Repertory Grid Methodology

The Repertory Grid technique is a data collection methodology which was originally developed by George A. Kelly

in 1955 as an integral part of the Personal Construct Theory. Kelly, a psychiatrist, used it as a short-cut device in psychotherapy. Subsequent researchers applied the technique to various attitudinal and consumer behavior situations. In a number of studies, the Rep Grid technique proved very useful in uncovering the hidden structure underlying complex behavior patterns. A few marketing research studies have also made use of this methodology (e.g., Frost and Braine, 1967) but it has not until now been employed in fashion research.

Among the advantages which make this technique admirably suited to the study of fashion behavior are: (a) the salient choice criteria of the subjects (the constructs) are determined without direct questioning and are elicited without any verbal constraints, thus avoiding the problem of vocabulary variance; (b) the technique permits the measurement or quantification of every stimulus on each dimension, thereby allowing the use of advanced statistical procedures with the data; and (c) the mode of administering the Rep Grid encourages attentiveness and interest during the interview, thus minimizing respondent fatigue.

In this study the data collection was carried out as follows:

1. A set of eight dresses was selected as stimuli--each dress varying from the others on as many dimensions as possible. All markings were removed from the dresses, including price, size and labels. They were then marked with large identifying tags lettered A through H.

2. Customers were informed that the dresses were not from the store stock and that they were not current styles. It was emphasized to the subjects that we were not seeking their preferences (likes or dislikes). They were reminded by the interviewer to ignore such factors as size, fit, price, and so forth, and to concentrate exclusively on the style or fashion elements.

3. The dresses were then presented to the subject on hangers in groups of three (triads) in a predetermined random order. Subject was asked the question: "In what way are any two of these dresses alike and different from the third?" The response was recorded on the sheet (Appendix C) in bipolar form (i.e., emergent pole and contrast pole) and the subject then rated all the dresses on a five-point scale according to the expressed criterion.

4. This procedure was then repeated with different triads, subject to the restriction that the customer could not repeat the same idea twice. The interview continued through ten triads, or until the subject ran out of ideas.

As for the merchandising personnel (buyers, assistant buyers and department managers) they were exposed to the identical procedure, but were requested to ignore all merchandise considerations in viewing the dresses and attempt to look at the stimuli through their customers' eyes.

It should be understood that the nature of the stimuli used in this type of research is not of primary importance. The essential requirements are that the group

of dresses should be as heterogeneous as possible and that all subjects be exposed to the same stimuli. Given these conditions, what we are chiefly concerned with is the individual's perception of salient characteristics. As with other projective techniques, the dresses in this case are relatively unimportant; they play a similar role to the ink blots in a Rorschach test.

The outcome of the Rep Grid procedure was analyzed in two separate forms:

1. The total of 136 separate constructs (or verbal criteria) was reduced to nine broad construct categories which were then subjected to further analysis.

2. The individual customer ratings of the stimuli were used to develop perceptual maps via multi-dimensional scaling. These data were then aggregated, interpoint distances were computed, and comparisons were made with the buyers' results, yielding the congruence scores described earlier.

The statistical methodology will be discussed in detail in the following section of this chapter, following a formal exposition of the hypotheses.

Hypotheses and Statistical Methodology

The research hypotheses for this dissertation are divided into two main groups: (1) those concerned with aspects of the customer segment itself, and (2) those relating to the congruence between the buyers and their customers.

In formulating the hypotheses, the following rules have been applied: Where there is no prior research to serve as a foundation for the hypothesis, a non-directional alternative hypothesis will be used. However, where prior research or conventional wisdom can suggest specific behavioral direction, a directional (i.e., one-sided) alternative will be employed.

Group I Hypotheses: Relating to the Customer Segment Alone

A. On the Relationship Between
Fashion Attitudes and Income

As detailed in Appendix D (Development of Factor Analysis), the data resulting from the 16-item psychographic scale which was administered to the customer sample was ultimately reduced to three underlying factors which best summarized the fashion attitudes of these subjects. These factors are: fashion self-confidence, fashion conformity, and fashion involvement. Hypotheses 1 through 18 are devoted to testing the relationship of each of these factors individually against a series of independent variables--viz: income, marital status, age, education level, store department shopped, and store branch.

Ho₁ - Customers' fashion self-confidence scores are independent of income.

Ha₁ - Customers' fashion self-confidence scores will increase as income increases.

Ho₂ - Customers' fashion conformity scores are independent of income.

Ha₂ - Customers' fashion conformity scores are related to income.

Ho₃ - Customers' fashion involvement scores are independent of income.

Ha₃ - Customers' fashion involvement scores will increase as income increases.

Conventional wisdom suggests that fashion self-confidence and fashion involvement should be directly related to income, while fashion conformity would be independent of income.

B. On the Relationship Between
Fashion Attitudes and Marital Status

Ho₄ - Customers' fashion self-confidence scores are independent of marital status.

Ha₄ - Customers' fashion self-confidence scores are related to marital status.

Ho₅ - Customers' fashion conformity scores are independent of marital status.

Ha₅ - Customers' fashion conformity scores are related to marital status.

Ho₆ - Customers' fashion involvement scores are independent of marital status.

Ha₆ - Fashion involvement scores of single customers will be higher than those of married customers.

Conventional wisdom suggests that fashion conformity and self-confidence do not vary significantly with marital status, but that fashion involvement (owing to the important role played by fashion in the seduction process) will be higher for singles.

C. On the Relationship Between
Fashion Attitudes and Age

Ho₇ - Customers' fashion self-confidence is independent of age.

Ha₇ - Customers' fashion self-confidence is related to age.

Ho₈ - Customers' fashion conformity is independent of age.

Ha₈ - Customers' fashion conformity is related to age.

Ho₉ - Customers' fashion involvement is independent of age.

Ha₉ - Customers' fashion involvement is inversely related to age.

Previous research has shown no significant link between fashion self-confidence or fashion conformity and age. Fashion involvement, however, has been shown to generally decrease as age increases.

D. On the Relationship Between
Fashion Attitudes and Education

Ho₁₀ - Customers' fashion self-confidence is independent of education.

Ha₁₀ - Customers' fashion self-confidence is related to education.

Ho₁₁ - Customers' fashion conformity is independent of education.

Ha₁₁ - Customers' fashion conformity is related to education.

Ho₁₂ - Customers' fashion involvement is independent of education.

Ha₁₂ - Customers' fashion involvement is related to education.

Previous research has not shown any significant relationship between fashion attitudes and level of education.

E. On the Relationship Between
Fashion Attitudes and Store Department

- Ho₁₃ - Customers' fashion self-confidence is independent of store department shopped.
- Ha₁₃ - Customers' fashion self-confidence is related to store department shopped.
- Ho₁₄ - Customers' fashion conformity is independent of store department shopped.
- Ha₁₄ - Customers' fashion conformity is related to store department shopped.
- Ho₁₅ - Customers' fashion involvement is independent of store department shopped.
- Ha₁₅ - Customers' fashion involvement is related to store department shopped.

F. On the Relationship Between
Fashion Attitudes and Store Branch

- Ho₁₆ - Customers' fashion self-confidence is independent of store branch.
- Ha₁₆ - Customers' fashion self-confidence is related to store branch.
- Ho₁₇ - Customers' fashion conformity is independent of store branch.
- Ha₁₇ - Customers' fashion conformity is related to store branch.
- Ho₁₈ - Customers' fashion involvement is independent of store branch.
- Ha₁₈ - Customers' fashion involvement is related to store branch.

The two above groups of hypotheses (E and F) are testing whether or not there are significant differences in fashion attitudes of the customers who shop the three departments of this store (i.e., misses, juniors and budget), and among the four branches in which interviews were conducted. Given the homogeneous nature of the customer base, there is no reason for prior assumptions on these hypotheses.

For Hypotheses 1 through 12 (Sections A, B, C and D), the MANOVA (Multiple Analysis of Variance) was first performed. Where the null hypothesis of no difference in the mean vectors was rejected, then the univariate hypothesis tests were performed on each factor score. Additional tests were done for interactions between the four independent variables. For Hypotheses 13 through 18, the appropriate test is Tukey's Multiple Comparison Test for pairwise comparisons.

G. On the Relationship Between Adopter Category and Selected Demographics

This group of hypotheses examines the relationship of age, marital status, income, and level of education with customers' fashion adoption category. The following group examines customers' fashion adoption category by department shopped.

The adopter category variable was self-reported, based on Rogers and Shoemaker's (1971) five-part schema, but using a slightly modified format to minimize response bias

(see Appendix A). In several cases, this five-part system was recoded into three groups (viz., earlier adopters, early majority, and later adopters) for statistical reasons.

It should be noted that respondents were asked for their fashion adopter category, although there is no reason to assume that this would vary significantly from a generalized adopter category measure.

On the relationship of age and marital status to category of adopter, research results are conflicting (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971, p. 352). Other research (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1983, p. 526) shows that earlier adopters tend to have higher income than later adopters.

Ho₁₉ - Customers' adopter category is independent of age.

Ha₁₉ - Customers' adopter category is related to age.

Ho₂₀ - Customers' adopter category is independent of marital status.

Ha₂₀ - Customers' adopter category is related to marital status.

Ho₂₁ - Customers' adopter category is independent of income.

Ha₂₁ - The income levels of earlier adopters will be higher than those of later adopters.

Ho₂₂ - Customers' adopter category is independent of level of education.

Ha₂₂ - Customers' adopter category is related to level of education.

H. On the Relationship Between Category of Adopter and Department Shopped

- Ho₂₃ - Customers' adopter category is independent of department shopped.
- Ha₂₃ - Customers' adopter category is related to department shopped.

For Hypotheses 18 through 23 the Chi-square test procedure will be used.

Group II Hypotheses: Relating to Buyer/Customer Congruence

Figures 8 and 9 show the development of the two congruence measures. It should be noted here that Empscore A is a measure of distance between buyers' and customers' scores and therefore the lower scores are optimal. Empscore B, however, is based on a correlation coefficient and therefore the higher scores are optimal for this measure. In the wording of the following hypotheses, the term "congruence score" will imply normally directed optimality.

A. Concerning Differences by Department

- Ho₂₄ - As measured by Empscore A, there is no difference in buyer/customer congruence scores by department.
- Ha₂₄ - As measured by Empscore A, there are differences in buyer/customer congruence scores by department.

Using the Empscore A as a measurement, this hypothesis examines the three subject departments of the store for significant differences. Test procedures to be used are Tukey's Multiple Comparison Test and the Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test.

Ho₂₅ - As measured by Empscore B, there is no difference in buyer/customer congruence scores by department.

Ha₂₅ - As measured by Empscore B, there are differences in buyer/customer congruence scores by department.

This hypothesis examines the same relationship as the previous one, using the behavioral measure (Empscore B) as the dependent variable. Test procedure to be used in this case is Tukey's Multiple Comparison Test.

B. Concerning Differences by Performance Rating

Ho₂₆ - As measured by Empscore A, there is no difference in buyer/customer congruence scores by performance rating.

Ha₂₆ - As measured by Empscore A, congruence scores of the low performance group will be lower than those of the high performance group.

Ho₂₇ - As measured by Empscore B, there is no difference in buyer/customer congruence scores by performance rating.

Ha₂₇ - As measured by Empscore B, buyer/customer congruence scores will vary directly with performance rating.

An independent evaluation of each buyer, assistant buyer, and department manager was obtained from the supervisors of these individuals. These performance ratings used a nine-point scale and were based on merchandising effectiveness solely, omitting all other criteria of performance. It should be noted that this researcher did not participate in compiling these ratings and that therefore it may be possible some subjective factors may have entered into the process.

Within each department the individual performance ratings were subsequently divided into two groups--high performance and low performance.

The test procedure used for H_{26} is the ANOVA; for H_{27} a t-test was employed.

C. Concerning Differences by Experience and Position

H_{028} - As measured by Empscore B there is no difference in buyer/customer congruence scores based on experience.

H_{a28} - As measured by Empscore B buyer/customer congruence scores will vary directly with the buyer's experience.

Experience is measured by two variables--retail time (total time the buyer has spent in retail employment) and jobtime (length of time the individual has been in present job). As with the performance rating variable, these data were also dichotomized for testing. Intuitive knowledge suggests that empathy scores should improve with experience. The t-test will be used to test this hypothesis.

H_{029} - As measured by Empscore A, there is no difference in buyer/customer congruence scores between buyers and assistant buyers.

H_{a29} - As measured by Empscore A, the congruence scores of buyers will be higher than those of assistant buyers.

Conventional wisdom suggests that buyers will achieve higher scores than assistant buyers. The t-test will be used to test this hypothesis.

- Ho₃₀ - As measured by Empscore A, there is no difference in congruence scores between buyers and department managers.
- Ha₃₀ - As measured by Empscore A, the congruence scores of department managers will be higher than those of buyers.

The buyer segment for this hypothesis will also include assistant buyers. Conventional wisdom suggests that department managers, being in closer contact with their customers, should be able to develop greater empathy with them.

Tukey's Multiple Comparison Test will be employed to test this hypothesis.

D. Concerning Choice Criteria
(Construct Categories)

- Ho₃₁ - There is no difference between customers' fashion choice criteria by department.
- Ha₃₁ - There are differences in customers' fashion choice criteria by department.

The construct categories derived from customers' repertory grids will be examined for differences between the three departments and tested for statistical significance by a chi-square test. A supplemental analysis will be conducted comparing the choice criteria used by those buyers who achieved low Empscores. By comparing these results with those of the relevant customer group, it is hoped to point out the specific areas where the buyer is deficient.

Statistical Methodology

The major statistical problem faced in this study was that of developing a suitable measure of congruence between buyers and their target customers which would be based on their salient fashion choice criteria. Eventually two methodologies--the Repertory Grid Technique (Rep Grid) and Multidimensional Scaling (MDS)--were used in combination to achieve the desired result. Each of these methodologies will be discussed in the following sections.

The Repertory Grid Technique

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Rep Grid procedure proved to be very useful for the data collection phase of the research. This technique made it possible to elicit the subjects' choice criteria without direct questioning, and thus permitted the hidden structure of their perception of fashion products to emerge.

The earliest use of the Rep Grid was by George A. Kelly (1955) as an adjunct to his personal construct theory. An important use of this system of constructs was to reduce the complexity with which individuals relate to their external environment. Relating the individual's constructs to each other, it was claimed, would result in a total perceptual system which could shed light on the complexities and variability inherent in human behavior.

As for the applicability of this technique to the present research, two important factors stand out. First, the Rep Grid procedure provides a way of exploring a person's personal construct system--the structure which underlies his or her basis for making judgments. Secondly, as an open-ended format that allows consumers to express their experiences in their own terms, the Rep Grid resolves the controversy over elicited versus supplied criteria.

It is primarily because of these advantages that Kelly's methodology lends itself so well to the purposes of this research. As has been noted, fashion behavior is marked by its complexity and by the inability of consumers to fully articulate their motivations. The Rep Grid appears to effectively deal with these problems.

The Rep Grid technique was first used extensively in clinical research in the United Kingdom (Fransella and Bannister, 1977). Later applications were found in consumer behavior related fields--e.g., Riley and Palmer (1976) and Honikman (1976). One of the earliest marketing research applications of the technique was also in Great Britain (Frost and Braine, 1967). In the United States, a prominent advocate of the Rep Grid is Jonathan Gutman, who has utilized the technique in several studies (Gutman and Reynolds, 1979; Gutman, 1983; Gutman and Reynolds, 1983).

In the present application, the grid is a two-way table (see Appendix C) with the stimuli (or elements) in

columns representing the eight dresses designated A through H. These stimuli are displayed to the subject in groups of three (triads). The rows of the grid consist of the salient attributes (constructs) of these stimuli as perceived by the subject. These constructs, shown in bipolar form, constitute the subject's responses to the question, "In what way are any two of these dresses alike and different from the third?" The response to this question is listed along the grid's left margin under the heading emergent pole. The right-hand margin of each row (contrast pole) contains the subject's response to the second question, "In what way is the third dress different from the other two?"

In this manner, the subject articulates the bipolar constructs which together form a hierarchical listing of the fashion selection criteria most salient to that individual. Following the listing of each set of bipolar constructs, the subject is requested to rate each of the stimuli on that attribute, using a five point scale. Thus, the entry in each cell shows how the given construct applies to the element concerned. The Rep Grid technique permits individual analysis of each respondent's grid, or the combination with others to form a consensus grid for further analysis. In this study, the data resulting from the Rep Grid procedure were further analyzed by the multidimensional scaling technique.

Multidimensional Scaling

Multidimensional scaling has been described as a data reduction technique specifically designed to uncover the "hidden structure" of a data base. The input is in the form of proximities or similarities among a set of stimuli. The chief output is a spatial representation of points, each point representing one of the stimuli. In the course of this procedure, the non-metric similarities data are converted into metric (interval-scaled) output (Kruskal and Wish, 1978).

The subjects' judgments are shown as points in geometric space, the axes of these perceptual maps being commonly labelled to describe the relevant dimensions. Since the objective of the present research was, however, to derive a quantitative measure of congruence by comparing the separate subject group judgments, the axis-labelling step was omitted and the analysis focused primarily on the calculation of interpoint distances between the stimuli.

By developing correlation matrices for the two groups being compared, it was possible to create the congruence scores which were the desired statistical result. Green and Rao (1972, p. 42) describe a similar procedure in which the bipolar scales are first developed by Rep Grid and subsequently analyzed by MDS. In this research, the congruence between the various two-space configurations was measured by computing interpoint distance correlations between the sets of solutions.

The MDS procedure has been widely used in various marketing research contexts, including product development and product positioning (Schiffman, Reynolds and Young, 1982); development of advertising themes (Lautman, Percy and Kordish, 1978); sales management (Turner, 1971) and others. Holbrook (1982) noted the ability of MDS to represent the complex relationships inherent in consumers' choice of esthetic products. Although the subject of Holbrook's study was jazz records, a similar argument may be made in the case of fashion apparel.

The initial phase of MDS normally calls for respondents to engage in a lengthy card-sorting procedure in order to produce a rank-ordering of all the possible pairs of stimuli being considered. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the pre-test of the present study proved this procedure to be unworkable, leading to a substitution of the Rep Grid procedure.

Combining these two techniques--the Rep Grid and MDS--provided an optimal solution to the statistical problem of creating the desired congruence measures.

A number of computer programs are available to carry out the MDS procedure; the KYST program was chosen as most suitable for this study. KYST, as described in Schiffman et al. (1982) uses a least squares algorithm in terms of distances to develop the initial stimulus configuration. Through an iterative process, the goodness-of-fit stress

measure is progressively minimized until a satisfactory solution is reached. A typical perceptual map illustrating the KYST output is shown in Figure 7.

Factor Analysis: Developing the Three Factors

The data derived from the 16-item fashion attitude scale (see Appendix A) was reduced by factor analysis to three underlying factors which best summarized the fashion attitudes of the customer sample. This section describes the steps by which the three factors were developed. Supporting data are displayed in Appendix D.

The 16 items comprising the fashion attitude scale were designated by the following labels, listed here in the same order in which they appear on the questionnaire:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------|
| 1. SHOPTIME | 9. EMULATE |
| 2. HAIRTIME | 10. INNERDIRECTED |
| 3. FURNITURE | 11. IMPULSE |
| 4. DRESSLIKE | 12. TRYONCE |
| 5. PARTY | 13. FUNCTIONAL |
| 6. LATESTYLE | 14. EARLY MAJORITY |
| 7. CONSPIRACY | 15. NO NOTICE |
| 8. INDIVIDUAL | 16. ADVICE |

After trying three, four and five factor patterns, it was decided that the three factor pattern would be most effective. The factor loadings (after varimax rotation) are as follows: (Items loading less than .48 are omitted).

FACTOR 1

ADVICE	.68
INDIVIDUALITY	.62
TRYONCE	.56
HAIRTIME	.54

This factor was designated Fashion Self-confidence. It would relate to an individual's desire to have a friend or spouse accompany her when shopping. The customer with a low score on this factor would typically be indecisive and might welcome advice from sales people.

FACTOR 2

DRESSLIKE	.70
EARLY MAJORITY	.66
EMULATE	.51
INNER DIRECTED	-.48

This factor was designated Fashion Conformity. The customer who is high in fashion conformity would be strongly influenced by reference groups and is likely to be an early or late majority adopter. She might also be more store loyal than other customers.

FACTOR 3

FUNCTIONAL	-.67
FURNITURE	.66
LATESTYLE	.52
PARTY	.51

This factor was designated Fashion Involvement-- a measure of fashion interest and activity; it measures the extent to which fashion is important to the individual and worth spending money on. It is well to note that this dimension can be independent of adopter category and only weakly related to income.

Developing the Dependent Variables
Empscore A and Empscore B

The two major dependent variables of this study--attitudinal and behavioral measures of empathy--were developed through a multi-stage statistical procedure which is outlined in Figures 8 and 9.

Attitudinal

Figure 8 depicts the data analysis phases leading to Empscore A. Input data were the customer responses to the 16 item psychographic scale which produced a 16 x 16 correlation matrix. This matrix, in turn, served as input to the factor analysis procedure which ultimately produced the three underlying factors: fashion self-confidence, fashion conformity, and fashion involvement. The resultant factor weights were then used to compute three-factor scores for each of the subjects. These scores were then aggregated into the various units of analysis--customers, departments, buyers, assistant buyers, department managers, and so forth. The following formula was then applied to derive a mean deviation score for each of the units of analysis.

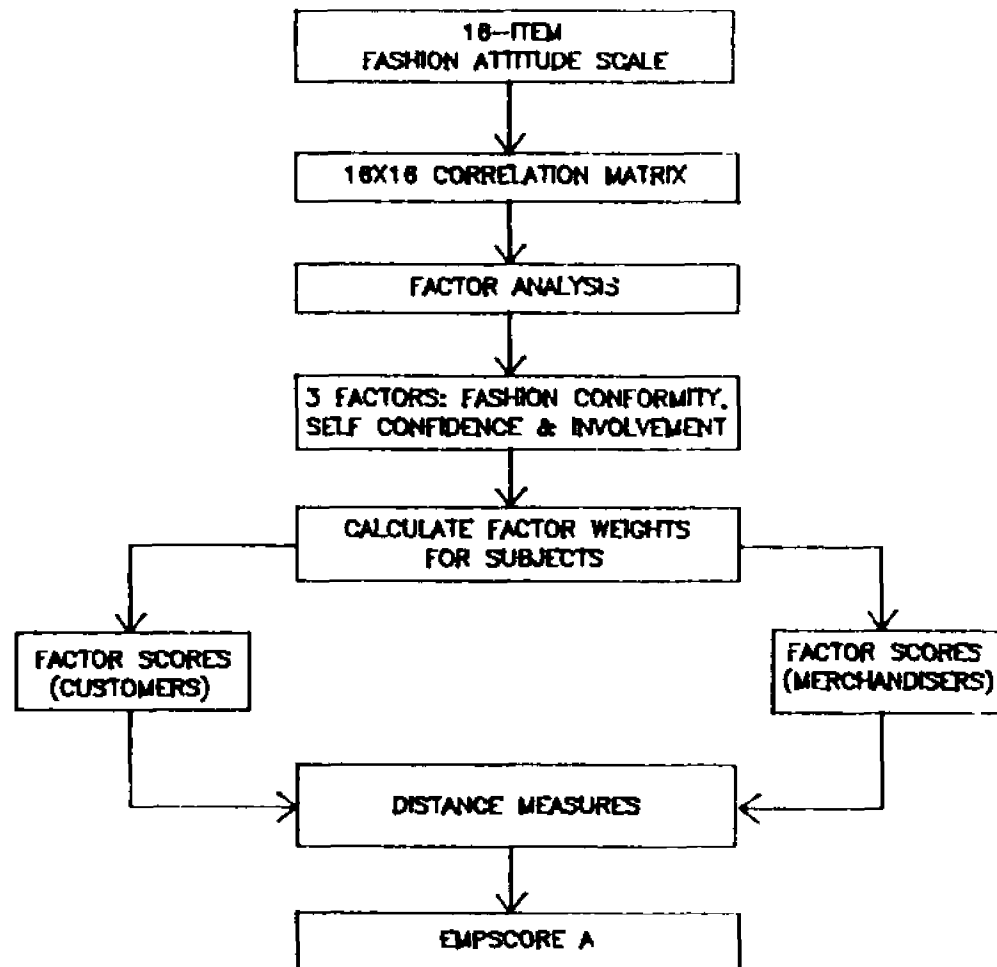
$$d = \sqrt{(F_1 - \bar{F}_1)^2 + (F_2 - \bar{F}_2)^2 + (F_3 - \bar{F}_3)^2}$$

d = mean deviation score

F_i = individual merchandiser's score on factor i

$\bar{F}_i$ = mean of customers' scores (for the relevant department on factor i)

FIGURE 8: STATISTICAL PROCEDURES FOR
COMPUTING EMPSCORE A



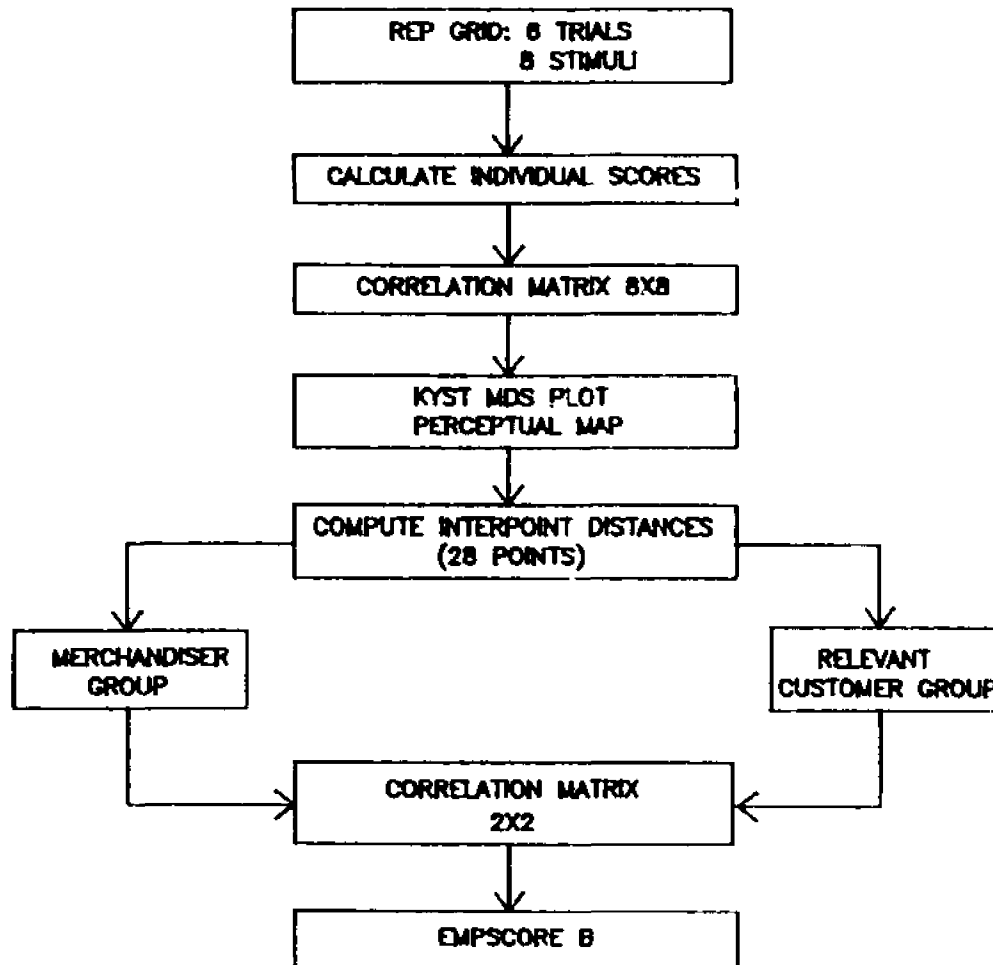
Individual distances were calculated separately for each factor, taking the merchandiser's score on that factor and subtracting it from the mean of the customers' scores for the relevant department. These distances are then squared and summed over the three factors. The square root of this sum represents the mean interpoint distance of the merchandiser from his or her target customers and is designated Empscore A.

Behavioral

Figure 9 shows the development of Empscore B. The input data were the subject responses on the Rep Grid experiment. Since the number of trials completed by each subject differed, only the first six trials were considered in tabulating results. Although this policy resulted in a small amount of missing data attributable to subjects who did not complete six trials, this was deemed to be inconsequential for the final outcomes.

The second stage of the analysis resulted in an 8 x 8 correlation matrix with the eight stimuli listed on each of the margins. This matrix comprised the input to the KYST Multidimensional Scaling procedure which, in turn, yielded a perceptual map for each of the relevant units of analysis. On these maps, each of the eight stimuli were plotted along two axes. The next phase consisted of calculating interpoint distances between each pair of stimuli based on the coordinates on the KYST plots and resulting in

FIGURE 9: STATISTICAL PROCEDURES FOR
COMPUTING EMPSCORE B



28 data points for each individual or aggregate group. By combining these 28 data points for the respective units of analysis (customers and merchandisers), there was produced a final numerical measure of congruence, a correlation coefficient which was designated Empscore B.

This chapter began with a description of the research setting for the study, followed by a listing of the research hypotheses. The next section described the primary statistical methodologies which were employed, and the chapter concluded with a listing of the sequential steps which produced the two major dependent variables. Chapter IV will be devoted to the tests of the individual hypotheses and a discussion of these results.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The findings of the empirical study described in the previous chapter were applied to test the research hypotheses. The outcomes of this hypothesis testing will be discussed in the following three sections:

Group I Hypotheses: Relating to the customer segment alone

Group II Hypotheses: Relating to buyer/customer congruence

Group III Hypotheses: Relating to choice criteria

Group I: Concerning the Customer Sample

The Group I hypotheses are concerned with selected attributes of the customer segment itself. The first section examines the association between customers' fashion attitudes and four demographic variables. The second section looks at store branch and department as to their effect on the fashion attitude variables. The final section examines the association between customers' fashion adopter category and the four demographic variables.

Fashion Attitudes and Demographics

The first 12 hypotheses examine the relationship between fashion attitudes of the customer sample (as measured by their scores on the three factors: fashion self-confidence, fashion conformity, and fashion involvement) and the demographic variables of income, marital status, age, and education. The univariate ANOVA procedure was used for testing these hypotheses; since the three factors are nearly independent, there was little to be gained by using MANOVA.

The model is as follows (for each factor):

$$F_{ijklm} = I_i + M_j + A_k + S_l + (IM)_{ij} + (IA)_{ik} \\ + (IS)_{il} + (MA)_{jk} + (MS)_{jl} + (AS)_{kl} + E_{ijklm}$$

I = income	i = 1,2,3
A = age	j = 1,2
S = education	k = 1,2,3
M = marital status	l = 1, 2,3
F = fashion attitude	m = number of subjects

In testing the above model on hypotheses 1 through 12, results proved to be not significant for Factors 1 and 2 (fashion self-confidence and fashion conformity) on all of the main effects and interactions. Factor 3 (fashion involvement) showed significant differences (at the .05 level) for marital status and age and for the interactions of age/marital status and income/marital status. Results are summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FASHION ATTITUDES AND DEMOGRAPHICS
(CUSTOMER SAMPLE--ALL DEPARTMENTS)

Independent Variables	Factor 1 F. Self-Conf.	Factor 2 F. Conform.	Factor 3 F. Involv.
Main Effects:			
INCOME	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
MARITAL STATUS	n.s.	n.s.	.0352*
AGE	n.s.	n.s.	.0275*
EDUCATION	n.s.	n.s.	.0541
Interactions:			
AGE/MARITAL	.0290*	n.s.	n.s.
INCOME/MARITAL	n.s.	n.s.	.0320*
*Significant at < .05			

Results

Hypothesis:	Outcome:
H ₁ - Income and F. Self-Confidence	H ₀ not rejected
H ₂ - Income and F. Conformity	H ₀ not rejected
H ₃ - Income and F. Involvement	H ₀ not rejected
H ₄ - Marital Status and F. Self-Confidence	H ₀ not rejected
H ₅ - Marital Status and F. Conformity	H ₀ not rejected
H ₆ - Marital Status and F. Involvement	H _a supported
H ₇ - Age and F. Self-Confidence	H ₀ not rejected
H ₈ - Age and F. Conformity	H ₀ not rejected
H ₉ - Age and F. Involvement	H _a supported
H ₁₀ - Education and F. Self-Confidence	H ₀ not rejected
H ₁₁ - Education and F. Conformity	H ₀ not rejected
H ₁₂ - Education and F. Involvement	H ₀ not rejected

Discussion

Looking at Factor 1 and Factor 2, test results indicate no significant effects of the four demographic variables on fashion attitudes. In general, this may be explained by the relatively homogeneous customer sample and by the pooling of subjects from the three departments.

Factor 3 (fashion involvement) does, however, reveal several significant results. Marital status and age both show significance at the .05 level and education is very close (.0541). The marital/income and marital/age interactions are also significant at the .05 level. Several observations may be made on these results:

1. Consistent with previous research (Gutman and Mills, 1982), the findings indicate that fashion involvement is inversely related to age.

2. Mean scores on F_3 for the two marital groups were: Singles 2.6273 ($n=75$); Married 1.7077 ($n=93$). The sharp difference here supports the alternate hypothesis (H_{a9}).

3. As to the age/marital interaction for F_1 (fashion-self-confidence), it appears that the singles' scores decline as they get older. The married's scores increase from age group 1 to 2 and then level off. Two possible explanations come to mind. First, it should be noted that the singles' group includes widows and divorced--both events likely to reduce self-confidence (see Table 4). Another possible

TABLE 4
 MEAN FACTOR SCORES FOR FACTOR 1 - FASHION SELF-CONFIDENCE
 SHOWING AGE/MARITAL INTERACTION
 (CUSTOMER SAMPLE)

	Age Group		
	16-28	29-44	45
SINGLE	4.46 (n=51)	3.84 (n=11)	3.70 (n=14)
MARRIED	3.39 (n=7)	4.06 (n=45)	3.80 (n=41)

reason for the disparity in the lowest age bracket could be a function of the lower level of generalized self-confidence leading to need for an early marriage (someone to lean upon).

4. Looking at the marital/income interaction (Table 5), one notes that the singles have greater fashion involvement across all income levels, as confirmed by H_6 , but that there is a much greater disparity at the highest income level. This is somewhat difficult to explain, but one might speculate that it could be accounted for by the increasingly important career woman segment. These are the women who have postponed marriage in favor of career and who find fashion a necessity in the workplace and a desirable luxury in their leisure life.

It may be concluded that income as a determinant of fashion involvement is not significant by itself, but when considered in combination with marital status it does become significant. One might infer, therefore, that income is a necessary (but not a sufficient) condition for fashion involvement.

In sum, it would appear that the profile of an ideal fashion customer from the store's point-of-view is a young, single, high-income female.

TABLE 5
 MEAN FACTOR SCORES FOR FACTOR 3 - FASHION INVOLVEMENT
 SHOWING INCOME/MARITAL INTERACTION
 (CUSTOMER SAMPLE)

	Income Group		
	20,000 or less	20,001 to 40,000	over 40,000
SINGLE	2.60 (n=30)	2.23 (n=29)	3.40 (n=16)
MARRIED	1.72 (n=14)	1.68 (n=39)	1.73 (n=40)

Fashion Attitudes and Store Variables

Hypotheses 13 through 18 examine the variables of store department and store branch in relation to customers' fashion attitudes, as measured by the three-factor scores. Results of Tukey's Multiple Comparison Test (Table 6) for department comparisons show a significant difference between the misses' and juniors' departments only on Factor 1. All others proved to be not significant.

Comparing the four store branches revealed no significant differences on any of the factors, which is consistent with management's perception of the customer base.

Fashion Adopter Category

Hypotheses 19 through 22 examine the relationships between four demographic variables (age, marital status, income, education) and customers' self-reported category of adopter. Hypothesis 23 looks at differences in adopter category by department. The test of these hypotheses was the chi-square and all results proved to be not significant at the .05 level, leading to acceptance of the null hypothesis in each case (see Table 7).

The conclusion that these independent variables are unrelated to category of adopter is contrary to expectations and therefore warrants closer examination. Some possible reasons for the discrepancy might be the self-report data, the fact that the data recording method was not sensitive enough, or possibly that the sample sizes were too small.

TABLE 6

COMPARISON OF CUSTOMERS' MEAN FACTOR SCORES BY DEPARTMENT
(TUKEY'S MULTIPLE COMPARISON TEST)

<u>Factor 1. - Fashion Self Confidence</u>			
	n	means	std. dev.
D ₁ - Budget	56	4.0124	.9146
D ₂ - Misses	57	3.8061	.9935
D ₃ - Juniors	58	4.2979	1.0174
(critical distance* = .4288, α = .05)			
differences:			
D ₁ - D ₂ :	4.0124 - 3.8061 = .2063 n.s.		
D ₁ - D ₃ :	4.0124 - 4.2979 = .2855 n.s.		
D ₂ - D ₃ :	3.8061 - 4.2979 = .4918 *		

<u>Factor 2. - Fashion Conformity</u>			
	n	means	std. dev.
D ₁ - Budget	56	5.3865	1.8454
D ₂ - Misses	57	5.7330	1.6973
D ₃ - Juniors	58	5.4946	1.6108
(critical distance* = .7546, α = .05)			
differences:			
D ₁ - D ₂ :	5.3865 - 5.7330 = .3465 n.s.		
D ₁ - D ₃ :	5.3865 - 5.4946 = .1081 n.s.		
D ₂ - D ₃ :	5.7330 - 5.4946 = .2384 n.s.		

TABLE 6-Continued

<u>Factor 3. - Fashion Involvement</u>			
	n	means	std. dev.
D ₁ - Budget	56	2.0771	1.9728
D ₂ - Misses	57	1.8092	1.8440
D ₃ - Juniors	58	2.4122	1.5783

(critical distance* = .7917, α = .05)

differences: D₁ - D₂: 2.0771 - 1.8092 = .2679 n.s.

D₁ - D₃: 2.0771 - 2.4122 = .3351 n.s.

D₂ - D₃: 1.8092 - 2.4122 = .6030 n.s.

TABLE 7
SUMMARY OF CHI-SQUARE RESULTS FOR ADOPTER CATEGORY

Adopter Category By:	Chi-Square Calculated	d.f.	<u>prob.</u>
EDUCATION	1.766	4	0.7786
AGE	2.493	4	0.6460
MARITAL STATUS	4.368	2	0.1126
INCOME	3.889	4	0.4212
DEPARTMENT	4.559	4	0.3356

Additionally, if the individual cells are examined for direction, several reassuring points do emerge. First, looking at the income variable (Table 8a), it appears that the relative percentages of each income group turn out as might be expected with one exception--the high income/early adopters' cell. In this case, rather than an increase from group 2, there appears a decline. A possible explanation for this non-linear effect could be that the highest income customers may tend to be less avant-garde than the middle-income group.

The marital status table (Table 8b) is very close to statistical significance ($p=.1126$) and does show percentages in the expected directions, although not of sufficient strength to qualify.

As for the department effect (Table 8c), the Budget Department seems to behave as one might expect--heaviest on the later adopters and lightest on the early adopters. The Juniors show a reverse pattern (as one would anticipate), however lacking any discrimination between the two later adopter groups.

Given the fact that customers of the store are fairly homogeneous to begin with, those differences in adopter category which do exist cannot be detected with the sample size used here. A larger sample size would likely show the differences at a statistically significant level.

TABLE 8

CHI-SQUARE TABLES FOR ADOPTER CATEGORY VS. INCOME, MARITAL & DEPT.

a. <u>INCOME</u>	Adopter Category*			
	<u>Early Adopters</u>	<u>Early Majority</u>	<u>Later Adopters</u>	<u>Total</u>
20,000 or less	(12) 25.0%	(23) 47.92%	(13) 27.08%	100%
20,001 to 40,000	(21) 29.17%	(31) 43.06%	(20) 27.78%	100%
over 40,000	(15) 26.32%	(33) 57.89%	(9) 15.79%	100%

Chi-Square = 3.889 (4 df); p = 0.4212 (ns)

b. <u>MARITAL STATUS</u>				
Single	(28) 35.44%	(35) 44.30%	(16) 20.25%	100%
Married	(21) 21.43%	(51) 52.04%	(26) 26.53%	100%

Chi-Square = 4.368 (2 df); p = 0.1126 (ns)

c. <u>DEPARTMENT</u>				
Budget	(12) 19.67%	(31) 50.82%	(18) 29.51%	100%
Misses	(17) 28.81%	(30) 50.85%	(12) 20.34%	100%
Juniors	(21) 35.59%	(26) 44.07%	(12) 20.34%	100%

Chi-Square = 4.559 (4 df); p = 0.3356 (ns)

*Note: Early Adopters include Innovators.
 Later Adopters include Late Majority and Laggards.

Group II: Buyer/Customer Congruence Measures

The second group of hypotheses examines the empathy measure, i.e., congruence between buyers and their customers. The two Empscores are compared with several independent variables: department, performance rating, experience, and position.

Difference by Department

H_{24} looks at department differences as measured by Empscore A. Here, the Misses' department and Budget department buyers emerge with the best scores--both showing significant differences over the Junior department buyers. Results of the Tukey's Multiple Comparison Test are displayed in Table 9. Testing the same hypothesis for the assistant buyers reveals no significant difference between the three departments (see Table 10).

As a final test of H_{24} , results for the buyers and assistants were pooled and again tested for department differences. Since the assumptions for Tukey's MCT could not be satisfied in this instance, the Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test was employed. This test showed no significant difference at the .05 level between any of the three departments, although D_2 versus D_3 was very close (see Table 11).

Considering the results shown in Tables 9, 10 and 11, the null hypothesis of no difference between departments cannot be rejected. Looking at the separate results for buyers and assistants, however, it becomes evident that

TABLE 9

EMPSCORE A : COMPARING BUYERS BY DEPARTMENT
(TUKEY'S MULTIPLE COMPARISON TEST)

department	n	std. dev.	means ^b
D ₁ - Budget	4 ^a	.9408	3.3383
D ₂ - Misses	5	.2593	2.9382
D ₃ - Juniors	5	.8237	4.9056

(critical distance between means (LSD) = 1.2659, α = .05)

Pairwise Comparisons - Buyers:

D ₁ vs. D ₂	3.3383 - 2.2.9382 = .4001	NS
D ₁ vs. D ₃	3.3383 - 4.9056 = 1.5673	*
D ₂ vs. D ₃	2.9382 - 4.9056 = 1.9674	*

NOTES: ^aIn the sum for department 1, one extreme value was eliminated. Including this value would have given a standard deviation more than twice as great as the other departments

^bThe lowest values are optimal.

*Significant at α = .05 level.

TABLE 10
COMPARING ASSISTANT BUYERS BY DEPARTMENT : EMPSCORE A
(TUKEY'S MULTIPLE COMPARISON TEST)

department	n	std. dev.	means ^a
D ₁ - Budget	5	1.3568	3.9841
D ₂ - Misses	5	.8967	2.7080
D ₃ - Juniors	5	1.6822	3.2003

(critical distance = 2.2775, α = .05)

Pairwise Comparisons - Asst. Buyers:

D ₁ vs. D ₂	3.9841 - 2.7080 = 1.2761	NS
D ₁ vs. D ₃	3.9841 - 3.2003 = .7838	NS
D ₂ vs. D ₃	2.7080 - 3.2003 = .4923	NS

NOTE: ^aLowest values are optimal.

TABLE 11

COMPARING BUYERS AND ASSISTANTS POOLED BY DEPARTMENT: EMPSCORE A

individual scores:			rank sums:					
D ₁	D ₂	D ₃	D ₁ vs D ₂		D ₁ vs D ₃		D ₂ vs D ₃	
2.2996	1.4711	1.7017	2	1	3	1	1	2
2.3420	2.3737	1.7497	3	4	4	2	4	3
2.8428	2.5016	3.0043	7	5	5	7	5	9
2.9212	2.5253	3.7766	8	6	6	9	6	14
3.6939	2.9447	3.7944	15	9	8	12	7	15
4.2163	2.9770	4.5062	16	10	10	13	8	16
4.4743	3.1216	4.8478	17	11	11	15	10	17
4.9422	3.1459	5.4825	18	12	14	17	11	18
5.5412	3.5447	5.7690	19	13	16	18	12	19
7.1149	3.6252	5.8973	<u>20</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>20</u>
			125	85	97	113	77	133
			125<137 ns		113<137 ns		133<137 ns	

critical value*, $\alpha = .05$; 137

the buyers for the Budget and Misses' departments have performed better on this measure than the Junior buyers. The assistants, on the other hand, do not show any significant difference between departments and tend to override the buyers' differences in the pooled data.

H_{25} examines the department effect on Empscore B with buyers and assistants pooled as the unit of analysis. Tukey's MCT is employed to test the hypothesis. The results (shown in Table 12) indicate a significant difference between departments 2 and 3, but not for any of the other comparisons.

Comparing the results shown in Table 12 (Empscore B) with those of Tables 9 and 11 (Empscore A), one is confronted with some inconsistency. While the behavioral measure shows a significant difference for D_2 versus D_3 --on the face of it a result compatible with the results of Table 11, where D_2 versus D_3 is very close to significance--actually, the direction of difference is reversed in the two sets of data.

As has been noted previously, those department differences which do exist are attributable to the buyers rather than to the assistants. As Table 9 (attitudinal data) shows, the D_1 and D_2 buyers do score significantly higher on this measure.

Given the small sample sizes here, it is quite possible that the procedure is not sensitive enough to detect differences and therefore it would not be wise to place

TABLE 12
 COMPARING BUYERS BY DEPARTMENT : EMPSCORE B
 (BUYERS AND ASSISTANTS POOLED--TUKEY'S MCT)

department	n ^a	std. dev.	means
D ₁ - Budget	6	.1769	.4867
D ₂ - Misses	6	.1778	.3713
D ₃ - Juniors	6	.1086	.6056

(critical distance, $\alpha = .05 = .1365$)

Pairwise Comparisons:

D ₁ vs. D ₂	.4867 - .3713 = .1154	NS
D ₂ vs. D ₃	.3713 - .6056 = .2343	*
D ₁ vs. D ₃	.4867 - .6056 = .1189	NS

note^a: n denotes number of trials.

too much weight on these results. It is worthwhile noting, however, the possibility of an inherent contradiction between attitude and behavior which may be involved here.

One may speculate that the Junior buyers (and possibly the assistants, too) are actually exercising their own taste when performing the Rep Grid experiment which is the origin of Empscore B. Thus, the dominant factor at work in this case would be homophily (see Rogers, 1983), rather than empathy. Support for this proposition may be found in the data shown in Table 13 (Age Gap Between Buyers and Customers). Looking at these figures, one sees that the Junior department buyers and assistants are much closer in age to their target customers than the buyers of the other departments studied.

Difference by Performance Rating

An independent evaluation of each of the 42 merchandiser subjects was obtained from the store's higher level merchandising executives. This rating, on a scale of 1 to 9, represented the managers' estimates of their subordinates' merchandising skills, omitting any other factors which would normally enter into a performance evaluation. The reason for using this restricted criterion was an effort to make the ratings as nearly comparable as possible to the dependent variables used in the study. This section looks at the results from the two Empscores as compared with the respective performance ratings.

TABLE 13
THE AGE GAP BETWEEN BUYERS AND CUSTOMERS

	Median Age (years)				Difference (yrs)
	customers (1)	buyers (2)	assts. (3)	buyers/assts. pooled (4)	(col. 1-4)
Dept. 1 (budget)	38	29	29	29	9
Dept. 2 (misses)	45	33	29	30	15
Dept. 3 (juniors)	25	28	24	25	0

H₂₆ examines the association between Empscore A and performance rating, using the ANOVA to test the hypothesis. Three salient facts emerge from the ANOVA (see Table 14): (a) The department effect is significant ($p=.0386$), but is not as important as the dependent relationship between department and group discussed below); (b) The overall group effect is definitely not significant ($p=.9749$); and (c) The department/group interaction is significant at a high level ($p=.0133$).

Noting these results, a closer analysis of the data by department was undertaken. These results (shown in Table 15) indicate the following:

1. For department 1, Empscore does correlate with performance rating.
2. Department 2 shows almost no difference between the HPR and LPR groups.
3. For department 3, the correlation is inverse.

In view of these inconclusive results, it must be determined that the data do not demonstrate any association between Empscore A and performance rating, and that for H₂₆ the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

H₂₇ examines the association between performance rating and Empscore B. The t-test is employed in this case and indicates no significant difference between departments 2 and 3, but does show significance for department 1 (see Table 16). These results are consistent with the Empscore A

TABLE 14
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR PERFORMANCE RATING AND EMPSCORE A
(BUYERS AND ASSISTANTS POOLED)

source	df	s.s	F	P
DEPT.	2	10.0583	3.76	0.0386*
GROUP	1	0.0014	0.00	0.9749
DEPT. x GROUP	2	14.0151	5.24	0.0133*

* - significant ($\alpha = .05$)

TABLE 15
COMPARING MEAN EMPSCORES WITH PERFORMANCE RATING BY DEPARTMENT

	Group 1 LPR	Group 2 HPR
Dept. 1	4.9472	3.2025
Dept. 2	2.8240	2.8222
Dept. 3	3.2003	4.9056

NOTES: (a) Buyers and assistant were pooled. The five subjects with lowest performance rating in each department constituted the LPR group; the five with highest performance rating constituted the HPR group.

(b) For the Empscore A ratings, lowest scores are optimal.

TABLE 16

T-TEST FOR DIFFERENCES ON EMPSCORE B BY PERFORMANCE RATING
(BUYERS AND ASSISTANTS POOLED)

	n	means	std. dev.	t
<u>DEPT. 1</u>				
HPR	6	.5308	.1296	4.1134*
LPR	6	.1935	.3801	
<u>DEPT. 2</u>				
HPR	6	.2765	.2839	0.6394 (ns)
LPR	6	.3210	.1885	
<u>DEPT. 3</u>				
HPR	6	.4527	.1902	0.4708 (ns)
LPR	6	.4247	.2207	

critical t - value (10 df, $\alpha = .05$) : 1.81*

outcome as seen in Table 15 and tend to support a similar conclusion to that of H_{26} --i.e., that an association between performance rating and Empscore B is not proved by the data and that therefore the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Difference by Experience and Position

This section considers the effect of experience on the two congruence measures and also looks at differences among buyers, assistant buyers and department managers.

Experience was operationalized by two variables: JOBTIME, which measures the length of time the individual has been in the present position; and RETLTIME, which considers total time spent in retail employment, regardless of the store. For testing H_{28} , the JOBTIME variable was employed. The distribution of buyers and assistants for this variable is shown in Table 17. Table 18 displays the means for the two JOBTIME groups by department.

H_{28} was tested separately for each of the three departments, using a t-test; results (shown in Table 19) reveal no significant differences for Departments 1 or 3. Indeed, Department 3 shows a reversal of the expected outcome, i.e., the JT_1 scores are actually better than those for JT_2 . Department 2, on the other hand, does show significant difference at the .05 level. The distorted outcome in the case of D_3 may be accounted for by the highly skewed distribution of the D_3 sample, as shown in Table 17. Here,

TABLE 17
DISTRIBUTION OF BUYERS AND ASSISTANTS BY JOBTIME

		JT ₁ [*]	JT ₂ [*]
<u>All Departments</u>			
	Buyers	3	12
	Assts. totals	$\frac{12}{15}$	$\frac{3}{15}$
<u>Dept. 1 (Budget)</u>			
	Buyers	1	4
	Assts. totals	$\frac{4}{5}$	$\frac{1}{5}$
<u>Dept. 2 (Misses)</u>			
	Buyers	0	5
	Assts. totals	$\frac{3}{3}$	$\frac{2}{7}$
<u>Dept. 3 (Juniors)</u>			
	Buyers	2	3
	Assts.	$\frac{5}{7}$	$\frac{0}{3}$

*Jobtime 1 = 12 months or less.
Jobtime 2 = over 12 months.

TABLE 18

MEANS FOR JOBTIME BY DEPARTMENT
(BUYERS AND ASSISTANTS COMBINED)

	JT_1 (in months)	JT_2 (in months)
Dept. 1 (Budget)	6.75	18
Dept. 2 (Misses)	8.67	55
Dept. 3 (Juniors)	8.90	21.3

TABLE 19

**T-TEST FOR DIFFERENCES ON EMPSCORE-B BY JOBTIME
(BUYERS AND ASSISTANTS POOLED)**

	N ^a	Means (r)	Std. dev.
<u>Dept. 1</u>			
JT ₁	6	.3879	.2527
JT ₂	6	.4335	.1850
calculated t-value = .7136 (ns)			
<u>Dept. 2</u>			
JT ₁	6	.2103	.1932
JT ₂	6	.3956	.1263
calculated t-value = 3.9342*			
<u>Dept. 3</u>			
JT ₁	6	.5310	.1237
JT ₂	6	.3283	.3225
calculated t-value = -2.8752 (ns)			

critical t-value = 1.81 (10df, = .05)

*significant at .05 level

^aN = number of trials

one sees that seven of the ten subjects fall in the JT_1 group, making the outcome heavily weighted on the three people in JT_2 . In the light of these inconclusive results, the overall null hypothesis (H_{02g}) cannot be rejected.

Since previous research (e.g., Thompson, 1966) affirms that empathy is a learned skill, one would assume that it should improve with experience. The outcomes of Table 19 appear to contradict this belief and therefore warrant a closer look at the data.

A possible explanation presents itself when one inspects the range of experience shown in Table 18. Here one may note that, for D_1 , less than one year separates the means of the JT_1 and JT_2 groups. In the case of D_3 , the difference is approximately the same. Only in the case of D_2 is there a substantial difference between the mean JOBTIME of the two groups and, interestingly, this is the only department where the test revealed a significant difference between the Empscores. As has been pointed out in Chapter III, the rapid promotion policy of the subject store is largely responsible for this somewhat skewed distribution between the two groups.

One may reasonably conclude, therefore that the effect of experience on empathy cannot be properly tested here since the sample (with the exception of D_2) does not provide a sufficiently wide range of experience for improvement in empathy to manifest itself.

Table 20 shows the results of Tukey's Multiple Comparison Test for differences in Empscore A among the three groups of merchandisers--buyers, assistant buyers, and department managers. These results were used to test H_{29} for differences between buyers and assistants and H_{30} for differences between buyers and managers.

For H_{29} , the results show a small, but not statistically significant, difference between the buyers and the assistants on the Empscore A congruence measure; the null hypothesis is therefore not rejected.

As for H_{30} , the difference between buyers and managers does prove to be significant at the .05 level. The alternate hypothesis is therefore supported, affirming that congruence scores of department managers are higher than those of buyers. This finding is consistent with the long-standing belief that empathy will tend to increase with proximity to the customer.

Group III: Construct Categories: Differences in Criteria

In computing the Empscores which comprised the main part of the foregoing analysis, the actual labels given to the constructs were less important than the relative position of each of the stimuli. This section examines the constructs by name and looks at the customer sample for differences by department.

TABLE 20

COMPARING BUYERS, ASSISTANTS, AND MANAGERS ON EMPSCORE A--ALL DEPTS.
(TUKEY'S MULTIPLE COMPARISON TEST)

	n	mean empscore ^a	std. dev.
BUYERS	15	3.9791	1.3842
ASSISTANTS	15	3.2975	1.3638
MANAGERS	12	2.7925	.9693

q critical value: (.95, 3, 39) = 3.44

least significant distance (LSD) = 1.1703

Pairwise Comparisons

Buyers vs. Assistants:	$3.9791 - 3.2975 = .6816$	NS
Buyers vs. Managers:	$3.9791 - 2.7925 = 1.1866$	*
Assistants vs. Managers:	$3.2975 - 2.7925 = .5050$	NS

^alow scores are optimal

*significant at $\alpha = .05$

The number of constructs which were elicited from customers in the course of the Rep Grid experiment totalled 136. These were then grouped into eight construct categories plus a ninth category for unclassified others. The eight named categories are listed in Table 21, together with examples of typical components as expressed in bipolar form by the subjects.

Those constructs which were mentioned most frequently by customers are listed below in order of frequency. The general category appears first and the specific item, as expressed by the subject, follows in parentheses:

1. Silhouette (sleeve length)
2. Detail (belted or not belted)
3. Silhouette (dress length)
4. Fabric
5. Silhouette (waistline or collar)
6. Wearer (youthful or matronly)
7. Pattern
8. Usage (daytime or evening)
9. Wearability (easy to put on)
10. Usage (dressy or casual)
11. Silhouette (neckline)

H₃₁ examines the customers' choice criteria for differences among the three departments, using a chi-square test. This analysis was carried out in three stages. First, the chi-square for all three departments was calculated, omitting category 9 ("others"). This proved to be significant at the .05 level (see Table 22A).

Next, three separate tests were carried out to look at pairwise differences between the departments (see Table 22B). Results of these tests indicated significant difference only between departments 1 and 3.

TABLE 21

LIST OF CONSTRUCT CATEGORIES (CUSTOMERS ONLY)
WITH TYPICAL COMPONENTS

I. <u>IMAGE OR WEARER</u>	V. <u>FABRIC</u>
sophisticated/ unsophisticated plain/flashy sexy/conservative understated/dramatic feminine/not feminine youthful/matronly	heavy weight/light weight smooth (not textured)/ rough (textured) clingy/stiff durable fabric/ delicate fabric flowing/stiff
II. <u>SILHOUETTE</u>	VI. <u>PATTERN</u>
short (street length)/ long (floor length) long sleeve/sleeveless waist line/no waist button front/zipper back low neck/high neck collar/no collar full skirt/straight skirt	patterned/solid color geometric/non-geometric obvious pattern/ subtle pattern busy pattern/ relaxed pattern vertical/horizontal floral/stripe
III. <u>DETAILS</u>	VII. <u>USAGE/OCCASION</u>
belted/no belt pockets/no pockets darts/no darts trimmed/no trim	dressy/casual daytime/evening versatile/ special occasion career wear/ leisure wear wardrobe basic/closet dress (very dressy)
IV. <u>COLOR</u>	VIII. <u>SEASONALITY</u>
vibrant colors/ subdued colors darker/lighter warm colors/cool colors	one season/multi-season cool weather/warm weather warm weather/transitional

TABLE 22A

OBSERVED FREQUENCIES OF CONSTRUCT CATEGORIES (CUSTOMERS ONLY) BY DEPT.^a

Stage 1: All Departments				
construct category ^b	actual frequencies			Totals
	D ₁ (Budget)	D ₂ (Misses)	D ₃ (Juniors)	
1. (image/wearer)	35	24	19	78
2. (silhouette)	142	153	155	450
3. (details)	17	27	22	66
4. (color)	11	14	18	43
5. (fabric)	29	25	42	96
6. (pattern)	21	23	28	72
7. (usage/occasion)	56	41	29	126
8. (seasonality)	12	11	11	34

Chi-Square = 24.4187 (14 df)*
 significant at $\alpha = .05$

^a6 trials only.

^bcategory 9 (others) omitted.

TABLE 228

RESULTS OF CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS : CONSTRUCT CATEGORIES BY DEPT.

Stage 2: Pairwise Comparison of Departments

(A) D_1 vs. D_2 Chi-Square = 7.8055 (7 df) : not significant

(B) D_1 vs. D_3 Chi-Square = 19.6388 (7 df)* (significant at $\alpha = .05$)

(C) D_2 vs. D_3 Chi-Square = 8.4100 (7 df) : not significant

Finally, looking at percentage differences between these two departments by construct category, it was determined that category 7 showed the highest difference. This category was then eliminated and a final chi-square computed for the remaining categories. This final test proved not significant (Table 22C).

The following conclusions may therefore be stated:

(a) The null hypothesis H_{031} (no difference in customer choice criteria by department) is rejected; (b) The differences which do exist are significant only between department 1 (Budget) and department 3 (Juniors); and (c) Those differences reside primarily in construct category 7 (usage or occasion).

Table 22C indicates that the Budget customers use category 7 16.0 percent of the time, while the Juniors use it only 8.3 percent of the time. In a more general consumer behavior context, the importance of situational variables was pointed out by Russell Belk (1975).

Summary

This chapter has examined each of the three groups of hypotheses: (a) Those relating to the customer segment itself; (b) those relating to the congruence between buyers and customers; and (c) those relating to customer choice criteria. Results of the statistical tests on the individual hypotheses were given together with a discussion of the outcomes.

TABLE 22C
CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS OF CONSTRUCT CATEGORIES BY DEPT.

Stage 3: Identifying the Source of Differences

construct category	Relative Frequency by Dept. (%)		
	D ₁ (Budget)	D ₃ (Juniors)	% Difference
1. (Image/Wearer)	10.0	5.4	4.6
2. (silhouette)	40.6	44.4	3.8
3. (details)	4.9	6.3	1.4
4. (color)	3.1	5.2	2.1
5. (fabric)	8.3	12.0	3.7
6. (pattern)	6.0	8.0	2.0
7. (usage/occasion)	16.0	8.3	7.7
8. (seasonality)	3.4	3.2	0.2

Chi-Square Test After Eliminating Category 7.

Chi-Square = 6.942 (6 df) : not significant.

Chapter V begins with a summary of the research findings, followed by a review of the prior chapters. The next section discusses the conclusions which may be drawn from the research; the final two sections are devoted to opportunities for further research and managerial implications of the research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This dissertation has explored the fundamental issue of the degree to which retail buyers of fashion merchandise are attuned to the wants of their target customers. In the course of this research, it was necessary to develop a method for identifying and quantifying those decision criteria used by the target customer groups and then to compare these with the decision criteria used by the buyers. Through use of the techniques of the repertory grid and multidimensional scaling, it was possible to accomplish the stated objectives and to create two empathy variables (Empscores). These Empscores, which measure the buyer's congruence, could then be compared with a series of independent variables.

With the cooperation of a major department store, a large scale study was conducted during which the above methodology was empirically tested and shown to be feasible.

This chapter begins with a review of the previous chapters, followed by a summary of the research findings and tests of significance. The second section will be devoted to the conclusions which are drawn from the research, and

the final two sections will point out the managerial implications of the study together with recommendations for further research.

Background for the Study

Chapter I described the fashion industry context within which this study is positioned. The nature of the fashion cycle and consumer fashion behavior combine to create a volatile demand situation which is often difficult to predict. Within this environment, fashion merchandising becomes a highly pragmatic pursuit, more of an art than a science.

The particular perspective which was chosen for the study is that of the retail fashion buyer--that individual occupying the critical intersection between the consumer and the entire channel of distribution. It can therefore be argued that the quality of the decisions made by the buyer of fashion products can make or break the fortunes of the retail organization.

The initial focus of the dissertation may be described as an endeavor to bring together several separate research threads: (a) fashion theory, seen as a subset of diffusion of innovations theory, (b) fashion behavior, seen as a subset of consumer behavior, and (c) retail merchandising theory, as applied to the merchandising of fashion products.

More specifically, the research considers the question of the evaluation of retail buyer performance. As demonstrated by the research of Dalrymple (1964) and Johnston (1969), the problem of evaluating buyer performance has traditionally centered on the element of profitability. With the proliferation of store branches in recent years and the consequent separation of the selling from the buying function, it has become increasingly difficult to apply this profitability yardstick.

The proposal is therefore made that an alternate (or supplementary) criterion be created for buyer performance evaluation. This measure would be based on the trait of empathy--acknowledged to be a prime essential for the successful buyer.

Previous research on the subject of fashion behavior has established that the consumer decision process is an exceedingly complex one and that much of the consumer motivation process takes place at the unconscious level.

Other research indicates that non-fashion variables such as price often have a relatively minor effect on the purchase decision where fashion products are involved (Alexis, Haines, and Simon, 1968). It can therefore be argued that research on the fashion buying process should focus exclusively on the fashion-related aspects of the product and attempt to control for all non-fashion elements such as price, fit, manufacturer label, and so forth.

Although the view is contrary to popular belief, fashion theory affirms that fashion is an external (uncontrollable) variable--created neither by designers nor by the fashion industry. It has been further demonstrated that esthetics have little or nothing to do with fashion, shocking as this may seem to the lay observer.

The literature also shows that people's tastes (or preferences) are strongly influenced by fashion whether or not they are aware of it. It therefore follows that any efforts to measure consumer perceptions of fashion products which focus on preferences will have limited value, being subject to periodic changes in response to shifting fashions.

In other studies, subjects were permitted to specify their choice criteria in the selection of fashion apparel (e.g., White, 1976) in addition to stating their preferences. Most of this research, however, suffered from the limitation of using supplied, rather than elicited, criteria.

The relevant literature touching on the general topic of fashion merchandising may be grouped roughly into three categories, the first of which deals primarily with the consumer segment. This research category is exemplified by Wills and Midgley (1974), Gutman and Mills (1982), Alexis, Haines, and Simon (1968), Leaver (1974), and Tatzel (1982). These studies, although differing widely in their objectives, all share a common interest in identifying the motivations and buying behavior of fashion customers.

The second category focuses on the retail buyer and may be illustrated by the work of Dalrymple (1964), Joseph (1977), Johnston (1969), Martin (1973), Dickinson (1967) and Frank (1980). This research, for the most part, concerns itself with the areas of buyer performance evaluation, or with the identification of those buyer characteristics associated with successful buyer performance. The Frank study is distinctive in its focus on the decision criteria used by buyers in merchandise selection. While not all of the studies in this group deal with buyers of fashion merchandise, most of the results are equally applicable to fashion or non-fashion contexts.

The third category, which includes the work of White (1976) and McClure and Ryans (1968) integrates the two previous research directions. By thus combining the buyers and the customers into one unit of analysis, these studies finally approach the congruence issue which is crucial to the buyer/customer relationship. This integrative perspective opens up the possibility of a truly marketing-oriented approach to the problem, since it implicitly recognizes the consumer as the central point in the entire process. The consumer's motivation thereby becomes a baseline for the measurement of buyer/customer congruence.

For the attainment of this research objective, it is essential that the following constraints be satisfied:

- (a) the respective samples of buyers and customers must be

matched so that any given buyer is being measured against his or her own target customers, (b) the research methodology should not be based on customer preferences, but rather on more stable measures which can provide lasting results, (c) the criteria must not be pre-specified by the researcher, but should rather be open-ended, allowing for any possibilities which are salient to the respondents, and (d) insofar as possible, the data collection procedure should permit access to customers' unconscious as well as conscious motivations.

It was demonstrated that none of the prior research discussed in Chapter II succeeded in meeting all these requirements.

Research Design and Results

Chapter III was devoted to a description of the research design which sought to accomplish the stated research objective: i.e., to create an appropriate measure of buyer/customer congruence and to conduct an empirical test of it. The chapter described the methodology which was utilized and presented a list of formal hypotheses which were then subjected to statistical testing.

These hypotheses are listed in three groups: (a) those relating to the customer segment alone, (b) those relating to buyer/customer congruence, and (c) those which are concerned with the customers' choice criteria. Table 23 lists the hypotheses and results of the testing.

TABLE 23
SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESES AND RESULTS

Group A - Hypotheses Relating to Customer Segment

<u>Hypothesis</u>	<u>Results/Significance</u>
H ₁ - On the association between Fashion Self-Confidence and Income	NS
H ₂ - On the association between Fashion Conformity and Income	NS
H ₃ - On the association between Fashion Involvement and Income	NS
H ₄ - On the association between Fashion Self Confidence and Marital Status	NS
H ₅ - On the association between Fashion Conformity and Marital Status	NS
H ₆ - On the association between Fashion Involvement and Marital Status	*
H ₇ - On the association between Fashion Self-Confidence and Age	NS
H ₈ - On the association between Fashion Conformity and Age	NS
H ₉ - On the association between Fashion Involvement and Age	*
H ₁₀ - On the association between Fashion Self-Confidence and Education	NS
H ₁₁ - On the association between Fashion Conformity and Education	NS
H ₁₂ - On the association between Fashion Involvement and Education	NS
H ₁₃ - On the association between Fashion Self Confidence and store dept. shopped	NS except for D ₂ vs. D ₃
H ₁₄ - On the association between Fashion Conformity and store dept. shopped	NS

TABLE 23 - Continued

<u>Hypothesis</u>	<u>Results/Significance</u>
H ₁₅ - On the association between Fashion Involvement and store dept. shopped	NS
H ₁₆ - On the association between Fashion Self-Confidence and store branch	NS
H ₁₇ - On the association between Fashion Conformity and store branch	NS
H ₁₈ - On the association between Fashion Involvement and store branch	NS
H ₁₉ - On the association between fashion adopter category and age	NS
H ₂₀ - On the association between fashion adopter category and marital status	NS
H ₂₁ - On the association between fashion adopter category and income	NS
H ₂₂ - On the association between fashion adopter category and education	NS
H ₂₃ - On the association between fashion adopter category and department shopped	NS
<u>Group B - Hypotheses Relating to Buyer/Customer Congruence</u>	
H ₂₄ - On the difference between congruence scores by dept. (Empscore A)	D ₁ vs. D ₃ - * D ₂ vs. D ₃ - * D ₁ vs. D ₂ - NS
H ₂₅ - On difference between congruence scores by dept. (Empscore B)	D ₂ vs. D ₃ - * others - NS
H ₂₆ - On the difference in congruence scores by performance rating (Empscore A)	NS

TABLE 23 - Continued

<u>Hypothesis</u>	<u>Results/Significance</u>
H ₂₇ - On the difference in congruence scores by performance rating (Empscore B)	D ₁ - * ; D ₂ , D ₃ - NS
H ₂₈ - On the relation between buyer's experience and congruence score (Empscore B)	D ₂ - * ; others NS
H ₂₉ - On the difference in congruence scores between buyers and assistants (Empscore A)	NS
H ₃₀ - On the difference in congruence scores between buyers and dept. managers (Empscore A)	*

Group C - Hypothesis Relating to Fashion Choice Criteria

H ₃₁ - On the differences in customer's choice criteria by dept.	D ₁ vs. D ₃ - * others - NS
---	--

*

- significant at $\alpha = .05$

Conclusions and Implications

Generalizability

Owing to the research design and the method of sample selection, it should be understood that no claim to broad generalizability can be made for the results of this study. Care should be exercised, therefore, in drawing inferences beyond the retail organization which provided the research site.

In fact, many of the difficulties which were encountered in the course of evaluating and interpreting the findings may be directly linked to the homogeneous nature of the store's target market. This homogeneity, in turn, can be directly related to a store's success in defining and capturing its chosen market segment. The low variability in both the customer and merchandiser samples was in all likelihood the reason for a lack of statistical significance on several of the tests.

Implications: Customer Sample

On the association between customers' fashion attitudes and demographics ($H_1 - H_{12}$), significant relationships were found only for the fashion involvement factor in the case of marital status and age. Given the fact that previous research on this topic is both sparse and inconclusive, this outcome is not surprising. It is also worthy of note that income (at least within the range involved in this study) does not appear to be a significant factor in shaping fashion attitudes.

As for differences between departments and store branches ($H_{13} - H_{18}$), these all proved to be not significant (with one minor exception), tending to confirm management's perception of the homogeneity of the customer base.

The series of hypotheses which examined association between adopter category and the demographic variables ($H_{19} - H_{23}$) also proved to be not statistically significant. In this instance, the outcome may be similarly attributed to the relatively homogeneous customer sample which is an expected consequence of successful market segmentation.

Implications: Buyer/Customer Congruence

The two congruence measures (Empscores) were tested against four separate independent variables: department, position, performance rating, and experience. The results, while somewhat equivocal, do suggest a number of conclusions.

As for differences between departments, the Junior department scores were significantly better than those of the other two departments and this difference is attributable to the buyers rather than to the assistants. This relationship held true for both congruence measures--Empscore A and Empscore B. Interpretation of this result may properly involve the question of homophily versus empathy (see Table 13).

Performance ratings, in general, appear to be a poor predictor of buyer/customer congruence. In seeking an explanation for this fact, one may speculate that the raters

(in spite of instructions to the contrary) may have found it impossible to separate the purely merchandising criteria from other elements of the performance evaluation. It might be argued, therefore, that the store's performance rating system could be improved in this respect.

The difference in congruence among the three positions--buyers, assistants, and department managers--did yield a clear-cut result. Department managers appeared to have a significant edge over both the buyers and assistants, tending to confirm the belief that direct contact with customers is an important determinant of congruence.

The effect of experience on buyer/customer congruence can be inferred from the Misses department results where the more experienced group had a clear advantage over the less experienced. Although this result was not duplicated in the Junior and Budget departments, the reason may be traced to a preponderance of low-experience people in those departments. One is justified, therefore, in concluding that empathy does tend to improve with experience, but that this effect does not take place over short periods of time (a non-linear relationship).

Implications: Choice Criteria

An examination of customers' choice criteria indicates that silhouette is by far the most important choice criterion for almost all customers, appearing primarily in the following elements: sleeve length, dress length,

waistline, and neckline. Next in importance is the belted/not belted element, which may actually be the waistline issue in another guise. Fabric and pattern appear further down on the list for most customers, followed by image (youthful or matronly) and usage (dressy or casual).

One surprise which did emerge was the relative unimportance of color in the customer's mind. On the average, only one customer out of three mentioned a color-related criterion even once. One may infer that perhaps color may play a less important (or a different role) for customers than for buyers. Perhaps then the buyer ought to think of it more as an element of store decor (atmospherics) rather than as a primary customer choice factor. In any case, the issue of color deserves further investigation.

In general, the dominant customer choice criteria appear to be more pragmatic and less frivolous than one might have expected. Conceivably, this could be a result of the recession environment prevailing during the period in which the interviews were conducted.

As for differences in choice criteria among the three departments (H_{31}), results indicated significant difference only for the Budget department versus the Juniors. This difference was traced to the category of usage or occasion, where the budget customers (probably influenced by cost considerations) mentioned it twice as often as the juniors (who were apparently more prone to impulse buying).

Examining the issue of buyer/customer congruence measured by similarity of constructs, an informal analysis showed this to be quite good overall. A supplementary analysis was conducted on those cases where relatively low Empscore B values occurred in an effort to identify the buyers' weaknesses. This analysis involved looking at each department separately, isolating the lowest Empscores (here defined as Empscore B less than .50), and then comparing the construct categories used by the buyer group with those used by the customers.

As an illustration, Table 24 shows this type of analysis for the Budget department. Here it can be seen that, for the buyers and assistants, Empscores of less than .50 occurred on four of the six trials. On trial one, it appears that the customers were looking primarily at silhouette and usage, while the buyers were concerned with usage first and pattern second. The assistants seemed to be concentrating on the silhouette only. On trials three and five, it turns out that the buyers are on a very different wavelength from the customers and this is reflected in the very low Empscore values here. The assistants, in both cases, seem to be much nearer the mark.

While this analysis is mainly of an exploratory nature, it does demonstrate a potential application of the technique for the improvement of buyer performance.

TABLE 24
COMPARISON OF CONSTRUCT CATEGORIES
CHOSEN BY CUSTOMERS AND BUYERS (DEPT. 1 ONLY)

Trial	Mean Empscore B ^a	Construct Categories ^b		
		Customers	Buyers	Assistants
1.	.445	2-7-9	7-6	2
3.	.328	2-1-7	7-5	2
5.	.314	2-1	7-6	2-7
6.	.446	2	2-9	2-6

notes:

^a

Only those trials where Empscores less than .5 resulted are shown.

Buyers and assistants scores pooled.

^b

Construct categories are shown in order of descending frequency.

Key to Construct Categories:

- 1. - Image/wearer
- 2. - Silhouette
- 3. - Details
- 4. - Color
- 5. - Fabric
- 6. - Pattern
- 7. - Usage/Occasion
- 8. - Seasonality
- 9. - Other

Methodological Implications: Evaluating the Procedures

A major objective of the research was the development of a methodology for measuring the essential empathic quality for a retail buyer: the ability to understand the target customer. This goal was successfully accomplished through the creation of the two Empscore measures which effectively operationalized the buyer/customer congruence variable.

In the course of the study, it was empirically demonstrated that these empathy variables could be accurately calculated for individual buyers as well as collectively for groups. The statistical techniques of the Repertory Grid and Multidimensional Scaling were utilized in combination to achieve the desired result.

Methodologically, it can be claimed, therefore, that the experiment was successful. In particular, the following achievements were demonstrated: (a) the creation of a quantitative tool which may be applied in a priori buyer testing as well as after-the-fact performance evaluation, (b) application of a technique which can tap the unconscious roots of the customer's decision process, and (c) in the data collection phase, demonstrating the successful elimination of a source of bias resulting from uses of supplied criteria.

It is apparent, therefore, that the quantitative tools developed in this study have considerable potential

use in the selection, training, and evaluation of fashion buyers as well as offering a new insight into the purchase behavior of fashion consumers.

Implications for Retailing Theory
(Market Orientation vs. Customer Orientation)

Retailing theory places the store buyer at a critical juncture in the channel of distribution--a point where ideally he or she should act as a purchasing agent for the consumer. In order to properly carry out this function, the buyer's orientation must be primarily toward the customer, but unfortunately there exists an opposing and powerful tendency for a buyer to think in terms that the vendor proposes. This tendency is accentuated by the subject store's organizational structure, where many buyers are doing the bulk of their business with only two or three resources.

It is a fact of life that few manufacturers in the fashion business are truly consumer oriented and that fewer of them make any use of marketing research to improve their understanding of consumer motivation (see, for example, Greenberg, 1973). As an illustration--apparel manufacturers most typically like to organize their seasonal lines around "themes" or "motifs"--a particular fabric, featured colors, or perhaps a nautical look. Under these conditions, the store buyer in the showroom finds it easy to fall into a pattern of thinking along these same lines, when actually her customers may not respond to these stimuli in the same way.

By providing a frame of reference which is firmly geared to the target customer rather than to the resource market, the methodology developed in this study can serve the buyer as a powerful means of maintaining consumer orientation.

Recommendations

Opportunities for Further Research

Pessemier (1978), in speaking of the needed directions for current retail research, emphasizes the need for additional research on buyer behavior and productivity. Although the present study does help to fill this gap, there remain many areas for further extension of the research. Some of the topic areas which might be mentioned include the following:

1. Extending the methodology to male subjects and to men's fashions. Differences in fashion attitudes by sex have been established in previous studies. At the same time, it is suggested that contemporary social trends may favor a reduction of sexual differentiation in this area. Further empirical research, particularly if it is longitudinal, could help to shed light on this question.

2. Comparative research, developing data from different sections of the country, as well as cross-cultural studies in other countries, would be of great value.

3. The techniques developed in this study should be tested in other types of stores (e.g., chain stores and

independent specialty stores) in order to investigate the effect of store type on the dependent variables. In the case of the chains, the remoteness of the buyer from the customers, the need for greater uniformity of styles, and the lack of responsiveness to local taste differences combine to create an interesting setting for extension of this study.

Another important type of fashion retailer which presents an attractive setting for this type of research is the direct response or mail order operation. The removal of the customer from the point of purchase in this case obviously increases the need for a better understanding of the decision processes involved in this rapidly growing segment of the retail fashion business.

4. Fashion research on products other than apparel has been extremely sparse up to this time. A study focusing on other types of products which have a high fashion content (such as furniture, jewelry, or possibly automobiles) could be useful.

5. The question raised in connection with the Junior department buyers was whether or not their higher Empscores were the result of greater empathy or of the fact that they were closer in age to their customers. This empathy versus homophily issue suggests a possibly fruitful area for further research.

6. Finally, it is suggested that research to investigate the relationship between body type (such as out-sized customers) and fashion choice criteria might yield useful insights into the buying behavior of another important segment of the market.

Managerial Applications

Self-selection in the Department Store

One of the more important trends which marks the department store merchandising environment today is the sharply decreased emphasis on personal selling--except perhaps at very high price levels. A direct consequence of this trend is a diminished control over the customer's in-store decision process; moving along the continuum from salon selling to complete self-service, the salesperson becomes less and less of a factor until he or she completely disappears.

In the case of fashion apparel, however, the need for some minimum level of salesperson intervention (at least in the department store setting) can never be totally eliminated. While this problem may not be completely capable of resolution, it is certain at least that a better understanding of the customer's fashion choice criteria would be a step in the right direction.

The questions which assume greater importance in this context are those concerned with the customer's in-store behavior: e.g., how does a customer look at fashion products?

When a woman looks at an array of dresses on a rack, what does she see? These questions, which would seem simplistic in the context of the traditional salesperson/customer encounter, can be important when posed in the self-selection environment.

Put another way, in a store where sales assistance may be minimal--where the rapport and feedback formerly provided by a salesperson is now lacking--how can the merchandiser reach the customer and influence or facilitate the decision process? The methodology developed in this research offers a promising avenue for finding answers to this type of question.

Specifically, retail management can apply the information gained from the Repertory Grid type of analysis in the following areas:

Sales Force Training

By exposing salespeople to the Rep Grid experiment and comparing their responses to those of their customers, they may be trained to distinguish between what a customer says and what she means, thus becoming more sensitive to the customer's reactions.

In-Store Display

By applying the knowledge gained from a Rep Grid analysis of a given department's customers, the department's stock can be arranged to maximize customer exposure to those features which are most likely to be of interest to the market segment involved.

As an illustration, it was stated earlier in this chapter that color appeared to be a relatively minor criterion for the customers of some departments. What a manager might recognize in such cases is that, although the merchandise may be arranged by color on the selling floor in order to attract attention initially to the department (in a sense, treating it as an element of store decor), it should be realized that the customer's ultimate decision may not weigh this factor highly.

Promotional Appeals

One of the ills to which advertising copywriters frequently fall prey is that of being too subjective in their creation of promotional appeals. The question which must be asked is--"Is the store emphasizing the same merchandise features in their promotional appeals that the target customers are interested in?"

Here again, the Rep Grid technique can yield valuable insights as to which selling features should be emphasized and the most appropriate copy to present these to the target audience.

Buyer Selection, Training, and Promotion

Considerable emphasis was given earlier in this dissertation to the use of the Empscore measure for purposes of buyer performance evaluation. To summarize the potential of this variable, it may be useful to examine its managerial application in three personnel areas:

Buyer Selection

Empscores can be calculated for individual candidates for buying positions--ideally after they have acquired some familiarity with the customer as department managers or assistants. If several individuals are being considered for a given job, the Empscore can be one additional item to be weighed into the decision.

Buyer Training

As has been stated, empathy is a learned quality. In order to improve a given buyer's congruence with his or her target customers, an analysis of construct categories may be carried out. As demonstrated earlier in this chapter, the areas in which the buyer is deficient are identified and an effort can be made to improve these weaknesses. One possible result might be that the buyers would decide to increase the time spent visiting branch stores in order to improve their understanding of the customers' wants.

Performance Evaluation

As one additional item in the performance evaluation process, the Empscore could add a highly quantitative criterion to those factors which might be more subjective. In particular, when the profitability measure is not feasible to apply, the Empscore could supplement other available criteria.

Entry Into New Market Areas

As was implied earlier in this chapter, the generalizability of this study may be limited. Certainly, no conclusions can be drawn from the research about male customers, or about non-apparel fashion merchandise. Likewise, one would hesitate to extend the findings to other target markets or to other geographic areas. It is this latter limitation, however, which does offer an interesting opportunity. The following example may serve to illustrate this potential application.

For the purpose of discussion, let us imagine a major chain expanding into a completely new market area. In this case, what options are available to a fashion buyer in the selection of merchandise for this "unknown" customer? The buyer might: (a) shop the existing competition to get a feel for what is currently selling in this market--at the risk of winding up with a "me-too" look in the new store, or (b) assume that the new customer will react much the same as the existing customer and proceed to duplicate the assortments in the home store with some minor modifications, or (c) a buyer might resort to the costly trial and error method--experimenting with various fashion approaches until discovering those that work.

As an alternative, however, the store might--some months prior to the new area opening date--conduct a series of interviews among the target customers in the new area to

accurately measure their fashion selection criteria as was done in this study. Comparing these results with the previously established data base from the home store area, the similarities and differences would then be readily apparent. The buyer is thus armed with one additional--and important--tool to inform his or her decision-making and to minimize buying errors.

APPENDIX A

COPY OF QUESTIONNAIRE

FASHION SURVEY

In order to help this store's buyers and managers do a better job of bringing you the type of clothes you want, we would appreciate your opinions on the following fashion-related topics. Please indicate the extent to which you "agree" or "disagree" with the following statements by putting an "X" in the space that best indicates how strongly you agree or disagree. Remember--there are no right or wrong answers; it's your opinion that counts.

	<u>COMPLETELY</u> <u>AGREE</u>		<u>COMPLETELY</u> <u>DISAGREE</u>	
-Compared to most people, I spend a lot of time making selections when shopping for clothes.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-I believe it is worth spending time on styling my hair.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-It's more important for my furniture to be fashionable than durable.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-I prefer to dress like my friends.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-If I find another person at a party wearing the same outfit as mine, I would feel very uncomfortable.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-I think it is important to have clothes which are the latest style.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-I feel that fashion is largely artificially devised by the industry to get people to discard their clothes before they are worn out.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-I like to dress differently from other people to show my individuality.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-Seeing others (especially people I admire) wearing the same styles as me gives me a feeling of satisfaction.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-I dress to please myself; I couldn't care less what others wear.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-I buy new fashions when they catch my eye regardless of whether I need them or not.	_____	_____	_____	_____
-For me, the functional aspect of clothes (how long they wear, how warm they are, etc.) is the most important part.	_____	_____	_____	_____

-I wouldn't want to be the first to
be seen in a new style, but neither
would I want to be the last.

-I prefer wearing clothes that do
not call attention to myself.

-Friends of mine often ask my advice
on fashions.

FASHION INTEREST

Please classify yourself in terms of your readiness to try new styles.
(check one of the following categories)

<u>"First Purchaser"</u>	<u>"Early Purchaser"</u>	<u>"Early Majority"</u>	<u>"Late Majority"</u>	<u>"Late Purchaser"</u>	<u>"Last"</u>
------------------------------	------------------------------	-----------------------------	----------------------------	-----------------------------	---------------

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------

ABOUT YOURSELF

1. My age _____ years.
2. Marital Status: _____ single _____ married
3. Employment: Are you presently employed outside of the household?
 _____ yes _____ no

4. Please indicate your approximate family income for 1980 by
checking one of the following categories.

_____ 5,000 or under	_____ 20,001 to 30,000
_____ 5,001 to 10,000	_____ 30,001 to 40,000
_____ 10,001 to 15,000	_____ 40,001 to 50,000
_____ 15,001 to 20,000	_____ over 50,000

5. Please check the line which indicates the highest grade you have
attended or degree received.

_____ grade school completed	_____ some college
_____ some high school	_____ college graduate
_____ high school completed	_____ post college graduate

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

APPENDIX B

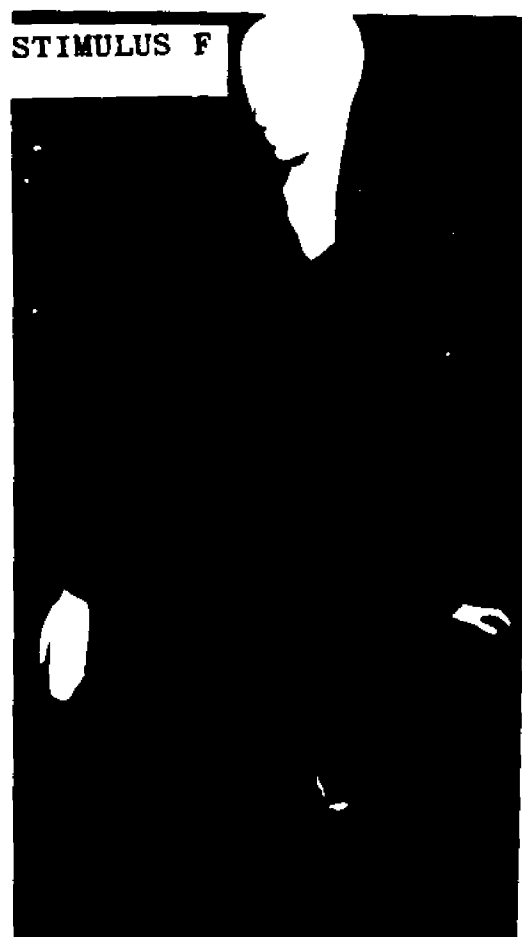
ILLUSTRATIONS OF DRESSES USED AS STIMULI



STIMULUS E



STIMULUS F



STIMULUS G



STIMULUS H



APPENDIX C

INSTRUCTIONS TO SUBJECTS FOR REP GRID PROCEDURE

INSTRUCTIONS TO SUBJECTS FOR REP GRID PROCEDURE

"This is a study of the way people look at clothes when making selections and is designed to help this store's buyers do a better job of bringing you the kind of clothes you want. There are no right or wrong answers; each person's responses will be different from everyone else's.

The dresses we're using are not from this store and they are not current models. When you view them, please try to consider only the fashion aspects of the dress: disregard size, fit, and price. Most important, do not be concerned with whether you personally like the dress or would buy it. You are welcome to touch or examine the garments as closely as you like, but not to try them on."

(Eight dresses are hanging in front of subject. Interviewer picks out three according to predetermined random pattern.)

"Please look at these three dresses and think of a way in which any two of them are similar to each other and different from the third. In other words, in what important way are two of them alike and different from the third?"

Interviewer records the answer as emergent pole, then points to the third dress and asks - "How is this dress different?" Answer is noted as the contrast pole. Subject is then asked to go through all eight of the dresses and rate them on the 5-point scale. This procedure is repeated for ten trials or until subject runs out of ideas. Note: each successive round must contain different constructs. The same idea may not be repeated.

APPENDIX D

DATA WORK SHEET FOR REP GRID PROCEDURE

DATE:

START TIME:

REF. #:

SCALE

FINISH TIME:

EMERGENT
POLE

1= very much
2= slightly

3= neutral
(or does not apply)

4= slightly
5= very much

CONTRAST
POLE

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	
1. - BDH									
2. - CFG									
3. - DEF									
4. - ABH									
5. - ACG									
6. - DEH									
7. - BCE									
8. - ABF									
9. - EGH									
10. - BFH									

APPENDIX E

FACTOR ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDINAL DATA: DEVELOPMENT OF 3 FACTORS

FACTOR ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDINAL DATA: DEVELOPMENT OF THREE FACTORS

The initial stage in the factor analysis procedure was a principal components analysis of the 16 items comprising the attitudinal scale. The eigenvalues and cumulative portion of variability explained are shown in the following table:

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Eigenvalue</u>	<u>Cumulative Portion Exp.</u>
1.	2.5827	.161
2.	2.3219	.307
3.	1.4209	.395
4.	1.3749	.481
5.	1.0962	.550
6.	.9871	.611
7.	.9424	.670
8.	.8552	.724
9.	.7860	.773
10.	.7368	.819
11.	.6617	.860
12.	.6145	.899
13.	.5472	.933
14.	.5085	.965
15.	.4409	.992
16.	.1233	1.000

The above data suggest a split at either four factors or seven factors. Seven would have met the criterion of eigenvalues equal to approximately 1, with 67% of the variability explained. The next distinctly different group was four, with eigenvalue of 1.37 and 48% explained. On the basis of the factor loadings, however, the fourth factor turned out to be difficult to interpret. Since the fourth factor was not distinctive, a judgmental decision was made to settle on the three factor pattern, explaining 40% of the variability.

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