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Consumers' Perception of Quality for Ladies' Swimwear Based on Price and Brand

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Cover Page Footnote

Jennifer Avila is a 2022 honors program graduate in Apparel Merchandising and Product Development. Dr. Laurie M. Apple, the faculty mentor, is an Associate Professor in Apparel Merchandising and Product Development in the School of Human Environmental Sciences. Dr. Lance M. Cheramie is an instructor in Apparel Merchandising and Product Development in the School of Human Environmental Sciences. Dr. Leigh Southward is an Associate Professor in Apparel Merchandising and Product Development in the School of Human Environmental Sciences.

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Meet the Student-Author



Jennifer Avila



Jennifer Avila and Sydney Taylor at the Bumpers College Awards and Honors Banquet, receiving medals for graduating with honors.

I am a May 2022 graduate with a degree in Apparel Merchandising and Product Development with a Minor in Marketing. Before attending the University of Arkansas, I went to Rogers High School, located in Rogers, Arkansas. At the University of Arkansas, I was a student mentor for the 360 Program, which is geared towards first-year students who are first-generation college students and/or Federal Pell Grant recipients, in the fall semester of 2019. I have been a part of the Academic Enrichment Program all four years of my college experience; this is a student success program designed to enhance the college experience of first-generation and other underrepresented students. I have received multiple scholarships like the Razorback Bridge scholarship, Arkansas Academic Challenge, Irma Fitch Giffels scholarship, and the John W. White scholarship. Outside of classwork, I also worked at a local women's boutique, Riffraff, for the past three years, as well as a dance studio in Lowell, Arkansas, called Favorite's Dance Academy. I would like to thank my advisor and honors mentor, Dr. Apple, for being there for me and assisting me as I completed my honors thesis. I would also like to show my gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Cheramie and Dr. Southward, for being a part of my committee. I am so grateful for the mentorship and the guidance they have all provided me these past four years.

Research at a Glance

- Swimsuits are one of the most popular items sold during the spring and summer seasons.
- Name brand influence was seen to have an impact on how people perceive quality.
- Price did not play a factor when determining quality.

Consumers' Perception of Quality for Ladies' Swimwear Based on Price and Brand

Jennifer Avila, Laurie M. Apple,† Lance M. Cheramie,§ and Leigh Southward‡*

Abstract

Consumers shop at multiple retailers for different needs, and it is understood that many choose a retailer for an experience, and others choose a retailer for better savings. In a time where E-commerce is at an all-time high, brick-and-mortar retailers need to consider how they compare against online retailers in the apparel sector. In this study, swimsuits from three retailers were compared to determine if quality perceptions differ by brand (store), price, or both. As these retailers adjust to store and production shortages, it is important to understand how the quality of clothing will keep sales consistent. Consumers are likely to keep shopping at locations where they trust the quality of clothing instead of having to deal with returns and customer service desks. The purpose of this research is to look at how consumers view the quality of women's swimwear. Participants of this study examined a swimsuit from three different retailers and rated the perceived quality of each. Retailers can use this information to better understand what consumers perceive as quality swimsuits by brand, price, or both.

* Jennifer Avila is a May 2022 honors program graduate with a major in Apparel Merchandising.

† Laurie Apple, the faculty mentor, is an Associate Professor of Apparel Merchandising and Product Development in the School of Human Environmental Sciences.

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Introduction

Big-name retailers are not only perceived differently by consumers for their products but also for their brand identity and image. The identity of the store impacts the buying habits of consumers. De Klerk and Lubbe (2006) reported that an aesthetic experience can include an appreciation for the formal, expressive, and symbolic qualities of a product as well as the appearance or environment of the product. A general merchandise retailer is known for providing an addictive shopping experience, and Hanbury (2019) comments on the running joke that consumers go to this retailer for one item but buy more than the single intended purchase. Price is also a factor that consumers look at when making a purchasing decision. Lee and Chen-Yu (2018) found that when consumers see a higher price, they will perceive the quality to be high. A large discount retailer is known for having lower prices and price matching. These actions lead their consumers to perceive products as having lesser quality or value. Since E-commerce is at an all-time high, brick-and-mortar retailers often compare themselves to fast-fashion online stores. A fast-fashion online retailer has risen in popularity over the last few years, and its main draw is trendy clothes at very low prices. Another incentive that retailers offer is credit cards that encourage consumers to buy more with credit card rewards. Consumers who shop at the large discount retailer, the general merchandise retailer, and the fast-fashion online retailer are exposed to different shopping experiences.

Several factors should be considered regarding consumers' perceptions as to whether the brand name, the price, or both affect the buying habits of consumers. During the spring and summer, ladies' swimwear is one of the highest-selling apparel items. Little research is available investigating the roles of brand and price in consumers' perception of quality, so it is necessary to investigate how these aspects affect perceived quality. This study aims to explore consumers' perceptions of brand and price as they relate to quality when purchasing swimsuits from retailers. A price discount is a common marketing strategy to attract consumers by providing an extra value or purchasing incentive, which encourages consumers to purchase the product immediately (Yin and Huang, 2014). Therefore, research evaluating the role of pricing with or without consideration of brand in driving consumer choice is essential.

Materials and Methods

A quantitative research plan was used to examine consumers' perceptions of quality swimwear and whether price and/or brand affect their purchasing decisions. The study focused on these research questions:

- Does knowing the price and brand of swimwear have higher perceived quality?

- Do fabric perceptions differ between knowing and not knowing price and brand?
- Do construction perceptions differ between knowing and not knowing price and brand?
- Do overall perceptions of swimwear differ between knowing and not knowing the price and brand?
- Was there a higher perceived quality between the 3 swimsuits, knowing price and brand?
- Was there a higher perceived quality between the 3 swimsuits not knowing the price and brand?

Data were collected through digital surveys. Participants were presented with three swimsuits from the three retailers: a general merchandise retailer, a large discount retailer, and a fast-fashion online retailer. Participants in group 1 looked at swimsuits with brand labels shown and price tags attached, group 2 surveyed swimsuits without brand labels shown but did have price tags attached, and group 3 surveyed swimsuits that did not have either brand or price. The participants completed the survey on the provided tablet and answered questions for each swimsuit. The survey was divided into the following categories: fabric, construction, aesthetics, and overall appearance. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from (5) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree was used to measure the first three categories. With each swimsuit, participants were asked to investigate aspects of quality by answering different questions based on the categories above (i.e., the fabric has good resilience, etc.). The participants were then asked to rate their overall perception of quality on a scale of 1 to 7 with 7 being high quality and 1 being low quality for each swimsuit. Once the three swimsuits had been rated individually, the participants were then asked to rank the three swimsuits from 1 to 3, with 3 being the highest quality to 1 being the lowest quality (Table 1).

After getting approval from the Institutional Review Board of the University (IRB) for the use of human subjects, the data were collected in the fall of 2021 and spring of 2022. Three swimsuits were selected from three different retail stores. All three swimsuits were chosen to have similar characteristics for brand identification to be hidden. It was important to choose swimsuits that varied in price but looked similar. The population for this research was students enrolled in an apparel program at a mid-Southeast university. A non-probability convenience sample was used to gather data. The total number of participants surveyed was 119; 21 were freshmen, 32 were sophomores, 36 were juniors, and 30 were seniors. The participants were placed into three groups (knowing brand and price, knowing brand only, and not knowing brand or price). A questionnaire was used by the participants to assess the swimsuits, and it focused on traits of the garment (seams, durability, etc.) and if the swimwear met the wants and needs of the participant. Each group of participants then analyzed all three

of the swimsuits from the three competing stores. Participants recorded their findings through the Qualtrics survey on a tablet. A description of the procedures, purpose, and participant rights was on the first page of the survey, and if the participants agreed to take the survey, they continued with the study. The sample characteristics, fit model tests, and graphs are discussed with correlations and effects between the variables by testing the proposed hypothesis. The standard level of significance that was used for the Fit Model statistical test was $P > 0.05$, and the results from all 3 groups are shown in Table 1.

Results and Discussion

The participants who rated swimsuits without brand or price known (Group 3) rated swimsuit 3 (fast-fashion online retailer) higher on the 7-point Likert scale in comparison to swimsuits 1 (general merchandise retailer) and 2 (large discount retailer) based on overall perception. Participants who surveyed the swimsuits with brand labels shown and price tags attached (Group 1) also rated swimsuit 3 higher on the Likert scale. Regarding, fabric

characteristics, there was a significance found ($P < 0.05$) in the stretch between the swimsuit's fabrics.

Those who surveyed swimsuits without brand labels shown but did have price tags attached (Group 2) saw a difference ($P < 0.05$) between swimsuits when rating them by their overall perceptions. Swimsuit 2 had a higher average of responses rating it between a 5 and a 6 on the Likert scale. The participants who surveyed swimsuits without brand labels shown but did have price tags attached (Group 2) viewed the swimsuit from the large discount retailer as having a higher perceived quality. This same group who surveyed the swimsuits without brand labels but did have price tags attached (Group 2) also saw significant differences in resiliency ($P < 0.05$) between the three swimsuit fabrics. Swimsuit 1 had a higher average of being rated low on the Likert scale in comparison to swimsuits 2 and 3. Swimsuit 1 came from the general merchandise retailer. Another difference was noticed among those in group 2. There was a significant difference between the stretchiness of the three swimsuits ($P < 0.001$). On average, swimsuit 1 was rated lower on the Likert scale in comparison to swimsuits 2 and 3.

Table 1. JMP FIT-Model test results for fabric, construction, aesthetics, and overall perception by category and group.

Category	Characteristic	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Fabric				
	Defects	0.6083	0.1357	0.2585
	Resiliency	0.3528	0.0308*	0.642
	Softness	0.9941	0.7631	0.0828
	Stretch	0.1301	0.0006*	0.3866
	Smooth	0.6965	0.7294	0.5712
	Fiber Knowledge	0.5773	0.0701	0.5141
Construction				
	Hems	0.5723	0.8072	0.6192
	Seams	0.5542	0.6474	0.1764
	Stitches	0.2008	0.8317	0.1768
	Color	0.3116	0.092	0.2246
Aesthetics				
	Fashionable	0.1488	0.4248	0.232
	Interesting	0.1594	0.9016	0.5796
	Unique	0.1708	0.3416	0.4408
Overall				
	$P \geq 0.05$	0.1758	0.0110*	0.0822

*Significant result $P < 0.05$.

Conclusions

One thing retailers can do to guarantee customer satisfaction is to guarantee quality apparel. In this study, participants were given swimsuits from lower-priced discount stores with three different store formats. Based on the results, consumers vary in their quality perceptions when brand and/or price is known. It would be significant to compare higher-priced swimsuits to the lower-priced swimsuits from various store formats in order to further expand this study. This could include a wider price gap to determine if price does drive quality. In addition, more participants are needed to fully understand the inference back to the larger population. Through this study, when consumers know the brand, they are more likely to perceive the quality of the garment's fabric as higher than when observing a garment without a brand. The overall perceptions of the swimsuits showed a significant difference when consumers knew the brand versus when they did not. Additional research is needed to determine if brand loyalty was occurring for those that knew the brand while assessing the swimsuits.

Acknowledgments

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