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Consumer goals and goal hierarchies explored: Fashion favorites of young adult males

It has been theorized that consumers' possessions and consumption habits say a lot about who a person is and who he or she wishes to become; what the person is seeking to accomplish in life in the long-term, and day-to-day in the short term. Accordingly, Huffman, Ratneshwar, and Mick (2000) propose a theoretical framework for consumer goals and goal hierarchies to suggest that what people own or have (e.g., various products or consumption objects) are linked to what they wish to do (e.g., purposeful everyday activities and life projects) as well as who they are and wish to be (e.g., desired self-identities). Huffman et al. propose such a Being-Doing-Having framework but do not offer direct empirical evidence in support. The purpose of our research is to explore the consumption meanings of products in a particular domain with real people and discover if it is possible to map out consumer goal relationships in terms of the Being-Doing-Having framework, and thereby empirically test and validate the framework. Specifically, we investigate with depth interviews the favorite clothing items of a small sample of 21-year-old college males, with socioeconomic status held reasonably constant. Our research probes the factors that might influence individual's fashion decisions, such as moods, desired self-image, how they wish to project themselves to others, and situational needs as dictated by the activities in which the individual participates. We also explore how cultural, social, and family factors might influence the goals that drive favorite fashion choices. The research thus aims to analyze why a particular item of clothing is a favorite fashion item for the individual by mapping the implicit goals and goal connections at the different levels of the Being-Doing-Having hierarchy and also the factors that influence these goals.