How does model type influence consumer and online fashion retailing?

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Abstract

Purpose – Model's physical attractiveness plays an important role in online shopping. The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationships among model type, consumer’s perceived amount of information and consumer’s approach behaviour.

Design/methodology/approach – Construal level theory and anchoring effect are used to develop hypotheses. The authors conducted an online experiment in China, and 229 females participated in this experiment.

Findings – Compared with the professional model, the nonprofessional model triggers consumers’ more perceived amount of information and approach behaviour. The latter effect is significantly enhanced in the website retailing context. Moreover, perceived amount of information positively affects approach behaviour.

Practical implications – The findings can help fashion brands understand the roles of model type and the online retailing context in consumer behaviour. It offers guidance on how to improve its marketing strategy scientifically. It can also provide consumers with suggestions for making objective purchasing decisions.

Originality/value – This study is one of the first to examine the effects of two model types (professional model or nonprofessional model) on consumers’ perceived amount of information and approach behaviour within two online retailing contexts (website stores or webcast studio).

Keywords Fashion retailing, Fashion model, Approach behaviour, Perceived amount of information, Experiment, Online retailing

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Online shopping has developed rapidly in recent years. However, two significant problems remain. The first is a low conversion rate, one reason for which is that a product or advertisement is not attractive (Silva et al., 2021). The second is a high return rate, which occurs when the actual product is inconsistent with the advertised product (Lee and Chow, 2020; Tiggemann et al., 2019). For clothing retailing, the inconsistency between what are termed the buyer’s show and the seller’s show may be the main reason for consumer returns (Jang et al., 2018; Ye et al., 2018). To resolve these problems, some studies have pointed out that e-retailers can get closer between customers and products by improving the e-tail servicescape, so as to improve order fulfilment capability (Kautish et al., 2021; Kautish and Sharma, 2019). Business practice also proves this research conclusion, many brands have

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taken measures to optimize the product display effect, such as designing attractive display images and providing a virtual fitting function. Models, who typically possess superior physical attractiveness, play a vital role in exhibiting products, particularly in clothing retail. Models can elicit the most intuitive feelings from consumers and help them evaluate products and make decisions. There are two types of model: professional and nonprofessional, which we distinguish according to whether the model has received systematic training. Whether and to what degree there are differences between professional fashion models and nonprofessional models, who are ordinary people, in terms of their effects on consumer’s perceived amount of information and approach behaviour and whether this relationship is different in different online retailing contexts represent intriguing questions. These questions are the main issues discussed in this paper. For brands, particularly in the fashion industry, new product preannouncements and product displays represent a marketing strategy for transmitting product information to target consumers through a series of media channels (Ladhari et al., 2019). As product performers, models (and their physical attractiveness) play a significant role in this strategy.

Similarly, in the field of online retail, to alleviate the perceived risk of consumers (Kaur and Qureshi, 2015), enterprises and brands have begun to develop their website images not only by providing attractive visualization, but also by enhancing the consumer’s visual perception and psychological imagination through models to reduce psychological untouchability in the physical attractiveness. In addition, the use of models as a reference can decrease consumer evaluation difficulties and perceived risks and enable consumers to absorb more size and collocation information (Jai et al., 2014). This influence mechanism has been addressed by scholars and found to extend the effect that the model type contributes to the advertisement domain (Antico et al., 2012; Bian and Foxall, 2013; Smeesters, 2014).

At the beginning of 2020, COVID-19 emerged in China. As a result of the government’s prevention and control policy, some places in China were closed off for a short time, and the residents’ activities were limited to the family setting or other small areas for a short time. Therefore, under pressure to continue operating their enterprises, several Chinese fashion brands turned their attention to webcast retailing. Based on our observation, due to the setting and time limitations, certain brands employed ordinary individuals (i.e. nonprofessional models in this paper) to model their clothing products while performing live sales. According to previous studies on female model types and female physical attractiveness (Tiggemann et al., 2019), different model types result in different customer attitudes and behaviours. There are still two research gaps. First, there has been little research on model effects in the online retailing context, particularly the webcast retailing context. The impacts of model types on consumer attitudes and behaviours within the context of webcast retailing have not been explored. Second, previous works have compared different model types, such as idealized or nonidealized model (Antico et al., 2012), and normal-sized or small sized model (Bian and Foxall, 2013). However, there have been few studies that compare ordinary individuals or nonprofessional models with professional models. Moreover, few works have compared the effects of model type within different online retailing contexts, including webcast retailing and website retailing. In this connection and in view of Chinese fashion consumption attitudes, we wondered whether different models and online retailing contexts result in different consumer attitudes and behaviours. The present research can help retailers understand the role of model types in consumer decision making. In addition, it provides guidance for retailers on how to effectively present their products.

Specifically, the research aim of this paper is to evaluate the effect of model type on consumers’ perceived amount of information and consumer approach behaviour by an online experiment. Based on construal level theory and the anchoring effect, we will also consider the online retailing context as a moderator variable to explore whether this variable can play a moderating effect. As a continuation of theoretical research, this study also contributes to
the literature as follows. First, regarding whether the model is an ordinary person or a professional, we will identify two types of model (i.e. professional model and nonprofessional model) and investigate the effects of model type on perceived amount of information and approach behaviour. Second, we will also examine the two main online shopping contexts: the website stores and the webcast studio, and the different effects of model type on perceived amount of information and approach behaviour within these different retailing contexts will be evaluated.

Theories and hypotheses
Psychological distance and construal level
According to construal level theory, the representation of a cognitive object depends on the psychological distance from the object, which affects the cognition of things. In addition, there is a potential automatic connection between psychological distance and construal level (Amit et al., 2009), which affects people’s psychological construction of things, thus affecting their cognition, preferences and decision-making (Stephan et al., 2011). Specifically, individuals use low level construal for near objects, paying more attention to specific, surface, partial and background information while also displaying interest in the specific realization process of the ultimate state of things; in contrast, individuals employ high level construal for distant objects, taking note of abstract, essential, overall information without background information and attaching importance to the ultimate state of things (Liberman and Trope, 2008).

Many studies have also granted that probability has the same effect as psychological distance; that is, probability can also be regarded as a form of psychological distance. In the framework of the relationship between psychological construction and probability, researchers have also found that the individual’s psychological representation of events significantly affects the estimation of the probability that something will occur (Wakslak and Trope, 2009). Another study focused on the stimulus itself discovered that the predictability between stimuli previously contacted by individuals can also significantly lead to the bias of probability estimation (Lagnado and Shanks, 2002). There are also studies based on this viewpoint that examine the role of probability in psychological construction, finding that the probability of things and their psychological representation involves systematic association (Liberman et al., 2007), thus verifying the validity of probability as a form of psychological distance. Thus, from this perspective, we can better understand that probability, as a unique dimension, affects people’s preference formation and decision-making.

Thus, when people are preparing to purchase clothing, particularly online, what factors affect their cognition and information perception with respect to display clothing? From the perspective of the online store as a whole, several similar studies observe that friendliness (Price and Arnould, 1999), information quality, service and system quality (Papadomichelaki and Mentzas, 2012), website design (Hsu et al., 2012), usefulness (Ha and Lennon, 2010a), and hedonic and aesthetic factors (Ha and Im, 2012) result in higher quality information perception by consumers. In addition, a number of studies have considered model type (Antico et al., 2012), including body size (Smeesters, 2014) and ethnicity (Martin et al., 2004), but although these studies note the effects of such model factors the research has mainly focused on advertising, and there is a lack of research on models in fashion retailing and online retailing contexts.

For online clothing stores, which sell experiential and practical products, models are required to present products, and consumers have a high degree of dependence on online store models. According to a content analysis study of 111 online stores of clothing brands, nearly 60% of e-retailers use real models to display their products (Kim et al., 2006). Among these models, there are not only trained professional models but also ordinary members of the
Moreover, in addition to browsing through images of ordinary models displaying clothes in online stores, consumers also read the buyer’s show comments as a reference for decision-making when shopping regardless of the model type used in the store (Song et al., 2007). Based on this finding, Yang et al. (2014) studied the effect of the matching of psychological distance caused by different clothing display models and website recommendation information on consumer’s product evaluation. Their results indicated that compared with professional model display, peer display (i.e. buyer show) has a closer psychological distance with consumer projection, which can result in higher purchase behaviour. In this regard, we conjecture that compared with commonly used professional models nonprofessional models (who are ordinary individuals) whose body shape and appearance are closer to those of the consumer will make the consumer feel a closer psychological distance such that he or she can more accurately imagine the dressing effect of the target product and thus achieve better information perception (Yoo and Kim, 2012). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

\[ H1. \text{ Compared with a professional model, a nonprofessional model will increase the consumer’s perceived amount of information.} \]

**Anchoring effect and approach behaviour**

The anchoring effect theory holds that in uncertain situations people estimate the target by reference to the engage or recall anchor, making the estimated target close to the anchor (Mandera et al., 2017). In the consumption context, the consumer’s purchase intention is not only affected by individual characteristics, consumer emotions (Oliver, 1993), product clues (Boulstridge and Carrigan, 2000) and the consumption situation (Donovan et al., 1994) but also by the anchoring effect. Consumer price estimation and willingness to pay for products are easily anchored by historical prices and advertising prices (Simonson and Drolet, 2004). For example, COACH, an American luxury fashion brand, displays one or two expensive women’s bags in the display cabinets of each flagship store and marks their prices in a striking manner. These high-priced products may not sell out, but as a high anchor, they not only promote the sale of similar lower-priced products but also that of other products (Poundstone, 2010). This phenomenon represents a typical anchoring effect.

This type of anchoring effect is prime proposed as a heuristic, which plays a positive role in complex judgments and decision-making tasks (Shah and Oppenheimer, 2008), but it often has a negative effect on people’s decision-making and creates bias. For example, previous studies have shown that the anchoring effect can result in egocentric bias (Epley et al., 2004), time estimation bias (Thomas and Handley, 2008), negotiation bias (Galinsky et al., 2002), judicial decision-making bias (Englich et al., 2006), diagnostic bias of disease probability (Brewer et al., 2007) and the dilemma situation in the exchange of shared information (Cress and Kimmerle, 2007). Anchoring bias also affects various economic consumption behaviours and business decisions, such as the effect on consumers’ willingness to purchase and sell (Simonson and Drolet, 2004), consumption goals (Jiang et al., 2005), price judgments (Chandrashekaran and Grewal, 2006) and preferences (Nelson, 2005); even in certain redesign behaviours (Dixon and Colton, 2000) and recruitment interviews (Kataoka et al., 1997), anchoring bias can occur.

Similarly, this type of bias also appears in online clothing retailing. Song et al. (2007) proposed that the greatest weakness of online clothing sales is that consumers cannot try on a product before making a purchase decision. Their research results revealed that if the information provided by remote presentation is not sufficiently complete, the consumer’s imagination will not respond in a clear and genuine manner, and thus, the purchase intention will not be strong. According to the anchoring effect, the model display can be regarded as the anchor provided by the store. Consumers will estimate the target (i.e. their own dressing
effect) according to these anchors (i.e. the dressing effect of the models), and the estimation will approach the anchor. If there is a large gap between the anchor in the early stage and the actual shape of the consumer, this difference is bound to produce more anchoring bias, which will have a negative effect on consumer decision-making. In contrast, if consumers perceive a weak anchoring effect, the bias between the estimation and the target will be relatively small or nearly nonexistent, which will also result in more positive action by the consumer. This effect was subsequently verified by Yang et al. (2014).

Such positive action is termed approach behaviour, a term that refers to all positive actions in a specific environment, including the willingness to stay, explore and establish ties and behaviours (Bitner, 1992). In the online retail environment, according to the stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974), a stimulus is defined as the sum of all visual and audible cues, and the emotional and cognitive state of an organism represents the intermediate state in the relationship between the stimulus and consumer response. The response represents the final result, that is, the approach or avoidance behaviour of the consumer. In the traditional retail environment, approach behaviour includes, e.g. spending time and money in the store, revisiting and exploring. In the e-retail context, approach behaviour includes the willingness of the consumer to visit the online store again, the time and money spent in the online store, and the willingness to explore the online store’s offerings (Eroglu et al., 2001).

In this regard, we combine the anchoring bias phenomenon and the psychological distance rule in the anchoring effect and consider that when the bias between the anchoring image and the actual effect on consumers is small, the consumers will feel less anchoring bias, which will result in more approach behaviour. In the context of online clothing retailing, when consumers browse a clothing display model with the face and body of an ordinary person, they will obtain a closer estimate of the real situation when they estimate their dressing effect, which will result in more approach behaviour. According to the social cognitive theory, the consumer’s perception level of information quality will affect his or her subsequent attitude and behaviour. In this context, consumers determine their subsequent behaviour (i.e. approach or avoid) according to the information perceived when they touch the anchor, and the perceived information will exert a mediation effect. Thus, the following hypotheses are posited:

\[ H2. \] Compared with a professional model, a nonprofessional model will trigger more approach behaviour in the consumer.

\[ H3. \] The perceived amount of information mediates the effect of model type on approach behaviour.

**Time distance of different online retailing contexts**

In the purchase context, consumers will browse according to their goals. Compared with the browsing context, consumers pay more attention to products in the retailing context, and their involvement is also high (Ha and Lennon, 2010b). Consumers with high involvement will be motivated to make more careful decisions (Zaichkowsky, 1986), their attention and elaboration ability will be enhanced (Ha and Lennon, 2010b), and their interest in products will be temporarily strengthened (Ha and Lennon, 2010a). In addition, the attention paid to product-related information involves the level of interest (Hansen et al., 2014). However, for different online retailing contexts, particularly for the relatively new context of webcast retailing, consumers may have different concerns and attitudes towards products.

In construal level theory, the dimension of time distance under the category of psychological distance can well explain this difference. The time dimension of psychological distance refers to the individual’s perception of the distance between things (Liberman and Trope, 1998). When the individual perceives that things will occur in the near future, the
perceived distance is relatively close; otherwise it is far (Bar-Anan et al., 2007). With respect to a specific consumer behaviour, the time distance consumers perceive is the time from now to product purchase. For products that have been available for a long time in an online store, consumers can browse and perform shopping behaviour at any time without time pressure. The time interval during this period will affect the consumer’s psychological distance perception of product time distance: the longer that the time interval is, the farther the psychological distance perception; otherwise, the closer it is. Based on this phenomenon, the consumer’s time distance perception of the product will be relatively closer to those products that are available in a webcast for a short time. In such a time pressure situation, in contrast to a professional model, a nonprofessional model (i.e. an ordinary person) may transmit more information to consumers, and the resulting consumer approach behaviour may also be more pronounced. Therefore, we hypothesize the followings and summarize the theoretical model in Figure 1.

**H4a.** In the webcast retailing context, compared with that of a professional model, the effect of a nonprofessional model on the perceived amount of information will be significantly enhanced.

**H4b.** In the webcast retailing context, compared with that of a professional model, the effect of a nonprofessional model on approach behaviour will be significantly enhanced.

**Method**
This paper uses an online experiment to investigate the effects of model type. Before proceeding with the formal study, we first conducted two pre-tests to select the models and clothing products used in the experiment.

**Pre-test**
The pre-test had two parts. The purpose of pre-test 1 was to select the experiment samples from model and clothing product databases refer to similar studies (Bian and Foxall, 2013; Tiggemann et al., 2019). Regarding the model alternatives, to avoid the influence of race and gender, we only focused on Chinese female models. All of the seven professional models we tested were from the same university, had similar appearances (height: 177 ± 1.5 cm; weight: 52 ± 2 kg; bust: 84 ± 4 cm; waist: 61 ± 1 cm; hip: 90 ± 2 cm) and more than four years of experience in clothing product display. All seven ordinary individuals (i.e. the nonprofessional models) that were tested were from the same city and had ordinary facial features and body shaped (height: 167 ± 2 cm; weight: 52 ± 3 kg; bust: 80 ± 4 cm; waist: 70 ± 4 cm; hip: 90 ± 4 cm). Their appearance characteristics represented an average level. These models had no experience in clothing product display. In addition, the 14 females were

![Figure 1. Theoretical model](image-url)
similar in age (22.5 ± 1), hair colour (black), and hair volume and length (medium). Photographs of each candidate were taken in which the candidates exhibited a neutral expression. The photographs were cropped as necessary to avoid the influence of clothing, background and other factors.

Regarding the clothing product alternatives, to avoid seasonal and positioning effects, we only focused on autumn casual wear. 20 sample upper outer and 20 sample lower garments with the same fabric thickness and length were obtained from real online stores. Two pictures of each garment were created, one from the front and the other from the back. We used Photoshop to maintain a uniform background colour (white), picture size (29.7 × 21 cm), resolution (150 dpi) and proportion of clothing visible in the picture (65–70%) to eliminate interference as much as possible.

Thirty senior undergraduates (15 females) from a university in China were invited to take pre-test 1. In the test, each participant was presented 14 photographs of the models and 40 photographs of the clothing samples in a group in a random sequence. After viewing the photos, the participants were asked to rate the perceived attractiveness of the models and clothes in each photo using a seven-point scale (1: very unattractive to 7: very attractive). After the scoring, we thanked the 30 participants and presented them a 5-yuan remuneration. Subsequently, one professional model (M = 5.11; height: 178 cm; weight: 53 kg; bust: 81 cm; waist: 60 cm; hip: 88 cm) and one nonprofessional model (M = 4.09; height: 166 cm; weight: 52.5 kg; bust: 75 cm; waist: 67 cm; hip: 94 cm) with median attractiveness scores were selected as the models to use in the formal experiment by calculating their perceived attraction scores. In addition, one upper outer garment sample (i.e. a green striped shirt, M = 4.31) and one lower garment sample (i.e. a pair of pants, M = 4.23) were selected to use in the study experiment.

For pre-test 2, we used the two selected females as our models and photographed them wearing all 40 sample shirts and pants in a studio. The background of the photographs was neutral grey, and the two models used a standing posture. The hairstyle, makeup, shoes, expression, posture, and studio lighting were the same for both models. More specifically, the models did not use an exaggerated posture. After the photography, we used the procedures described for pre-test 1 in a similar process in pre-test 2. Twenty senior undergraduates (14 females) were invited to score the perceived attractiveness of the new photographs. Finally, one front view, one side view and one back view of each model with median scores were selected as the photographs we would use in the subsequent formal experiment.

Design and procedure
In the formal experiment, we used a 2 (model type: professional vs. nonprofessional) × 2 (retailing context: website store vs webcast studio) between-subject design, and the participants were randomly arranged into four groups. Prior to the experiment, we created promotional materials in the manner of a real online store product presentation. The name of our virtual brand was “loop,” which we pretended was mainly focused on female clothing and targeted consumers aged 20–30 years.

Procedure. The participants were told that “loop” wanted to understand the market reaction to its products. Each participant first received three pages of material via mobile phone providing brand information and product presentations (i.e. one page of brand information, one page of shirt products, one page of pants products). The product introduction page included product displays using models and key product information (e.g. price, fabric, size).

To manipulate the retail context, we drew on a method presented in the literature (Ha and Lemon, 2010b). In the brand introduction on the first page, a coupon was included. The participants in the website store (or webcast studio) retailing context read the following statement at the beginning of the questionnaire: “This coupon is a 100-yuan shopping
voucher provided by the brand. Please carefully examine the products presented in the following introduction, and then answer the corresponding questions. After all the questions have been answered, you can proceed to the brand’s website store (or webcast studio) to use this voucher to purchase the described products”. After completing the questionnaire, the authors thanked the participants and explained the purpose of the experiment.

Participants. A total of 240 females were invited to participate in the experiment in Shanghai, China. Participants who indicated that they could not view the full materials package because of a network bug (n = 3) or who did not complete the questionnaire (n = 8) were omitted from the analyses. The final sample included 229 valid participants aged 21–30 years, (M = 24.6, Median = 25, SD = 2.02), most with a higher education background (43 undergraduates, 18.8%; 184 graduates, 80.3%; other, 0.9%).

Measures

Manipulation. First, the questionnaire was used to conduct a manipulation check with respect to the introduction of each product. That is, five- or seven-point Likert scales were used to elicit the participants' perception of the model type (1: typical ordinary person to 5: typical professional model) and the perceived attractiveness of the model (1: very unattractive to 7: very attractive). The purpose of measuring the perceived attractiveness of the models was to determine whether different model types would result in different perceived attractiveness and subsequently affect approach behaviour.

Dependent variables. The measurement of perceived amount of information referred to the scale by Kim and Lennon (2010) and used five questions (α = 0.793). The measurement of approach behaviour was based on a study by Eroglu et al. (2003) and included four questions (α = 0.731). Additionally, all dependent measures were assessed on a seven-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree to 7: strongly agree).

Other measures. For the independent variable, we assigned a value of 1 for the professional model and 0 for the nonprofessional model. Similarly, the website retailing context as a moderator variable was assigned a value of 1, and the webcast retailing context was assigned a value of 0. In addition, we used two demographic information variables as control variables: age and education.

In addition, it should be noted that the authors have used the Chinese translation versions of the above scales for this study in China. What’s more important is that the translated language refers to the Chinese peer-reviewed papers, and three graduate students checked the language of the scale. Table 1 summarizes how all variables were measured.

Results

Manipulation check

To test the effectiveness of our model type manipulation, we used a two-item scale of perception of the model type (α = 0.931) and two-item scale of perceived attractiveness of the model (α = 0.756) to conduct manipulation checks. The results of one-way ANOVA of model type reveal that the group that viewed the professional model (M = 2.81, SD = 0.78) reported a higher score for perception of model type than the group that viewed the nonprofessional model (M = 1.69, SD = 0.64), F(1,227) = 140.01, p = 0.000 < 0.001. In addition, the group that viewed the professional model (M = 3.51, SD = 1.00) rated that model more attractive compared with the group that viewed the nonprofessional model (M = 3.16, SD = 1.17), F(1,227) = 5.979, p = 0.015 < 0.05. Therefore, our manipulation of model type was effective.

Hypotheses testing

H1 and H2 propose direct effects of model type on perceived amount of information and approach behaviour. Therefore, we used one-way ANOVA to test the hypotheses. The results
reveal that the nonprofessional model ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 0.79$) triggered more consumer perceived amount of information than the professional model ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 0.71$), $F(1,227) = 4.616$, $p = 0.033 < 0.05$, supporting $H1$. In addition, the nonprofessional model ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.66$) triggered more consumer approach behaviour than the professional model ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.76$), $F(1,227) = 9.201$, $p = 0.003 < 0.01$, supporting $H2$.

We used PROCESS Model 8 (5,000 bootstrapped samples) to test the moderated indirect effects of model type on approach behaviour with the perceived amount of information as the mediator and the retailing context as the moderator. The testing results of $H3$, $H4a$ and $H4b$ are shown in Table 1. Among it, the index of moderated mediation was not significant ($b = 0.090$, $ns$), which indicates that perceived amount of information does not mediate the relationship between model type and approach behaviour. Thus, $H3$ was not supported.

As shown in Table 2 and Figure 1, the retailing context has no moderating effect on the relationship between model type and perceived amount of information ($b = -0.090$, ns). Therefore, $H4a$ was not supported. However, the retailing context moderates the relationship between model type and approach behaviour ($b = 0.444$, $p = 0.004 < 0.01$), which means that the effect of the nonprofessional model on approach behaviour was stronger than the effect of the professional model in the website retailing context. This outcome contradicts $H4b$ (see Figure 2).

### Conclusions and discussion

To examine the effects of model type on consumer attitude, we considered two types of model: professional and nonprofessional (i.e. an ordinary person). We measured two dependent variables: the consumer’s perceived amount of information and the consumer’s approach behaviour, whereby the former was also analysed as a mediator variable. Both the website retailing and webcast retailing contexts were considered as moderating variables to be added to the theoretical model. Using these variables in a theoretical model, we were able to test several hypotheses while employing data ($N = 229$) collected in an online experiment.

Our results indicate that compared with the professional model, the nonprofessional model triggered more consumer perceived amount of information and more consumer approach behaviour. Perceived amount of information also had a significant positive effect on

### Table 1. Variables and their measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Measures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependent variables</strong></td>
<td><strong>Approach behaviour</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived amount of</td>
<td>The introduction contains a lot of information about the brand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>information</td>
<td>I can learn a lot about the products from this introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The introduction contains useful information about the product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have enough information to decide after reading this introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I can fully trust the information provided in the introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to spend a lot of time in this website/webcast store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to enjoy looking around, when I come to this website/webcast store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will try this brand if I want to buy clothes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Will look around in this website/webcast store later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variable</strong></td>
<td>Model type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional model is 1; otherwise it is 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderator variable</strong></td>
<td>Retailing context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Website store is 1, otherwise it is 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables</strong></td>
<td>Age, education</td>
</tr>
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</table>
approach behaviour. These main effects of model type were not only consistent with previous studies (Antioco et al., 2012; Bian and Foxall, 2013; Smeesters, 2014) but also expand the category of model type.

We also demonstrated that in the website retailing context the effect of a nonprofessional model on approach behaviour will be significantly enhanced compared with that of a professional model. Although this hypothesis test result was contrary to our expectation, it may represent an interesting and meaningful initial finding for subsequent theoretical exploration. As mentioned in the preceding hypothetical argument, for different online retailing contexts, the time distance faced by consumers in the webcast and website store may be different, and the construction level of the products sold may also be different. In addition, even if the customer browses the same anchor (i.e. clothing displayed by a model),
the anchoring effect may be different. As a result, the subsequent customer behaviour is different, and as in this article, the customers will display different contact behaviours. Of course, we consider the reason why this effect is stronger in the website retailing context is that consumers may regard webcast retailing as a type of publicity similar to a product launch, and attractive publicity pictures seem to entice them to participate. In the website retailing context, consumers are more focused on the shopping purpose (Barros et al., 2019). Therefore, they may pay more attention to a product display that is close to their expected effect, which in this paper was the nonprofessional model display.

However, H3, which concerned the mediating effect of perceptual information on model type and approach behaviour, was not supported by our results. The reason that the mediating effect was not significant may have been the degree of pleasure and arousal. A previous study proposed that in the online retailing context pleasure and arousal are two types of emotion considered to represent the response produced by an environmental stimulus. Different model types will affect people’s pleasure and arousal and then affect behaviour (Eroglu et al., 2001). Kim and Lennon (2010) also note that when people experience a certain emotional state their evaluation tends to be consistent with that emotional state. Therefore, we believe that the participants in our experiment were not the same in terms of the pleasure and arousal caused by the model type, which may have had an effect. Although previous authors have considered this factor, we did not include it in this study for brevity and hope to investigate it in future research.

H4a was also not supported by our results. That is, there was no significant difference in the effect of model type on the consumer’s perceived amount of information in the different retailing contexts. The reason for this result may be that although the consumers were in different online retailing contexts the product information they browsed did not differ substantially between the contexts (Kautish and Sharma, 2018). Thus, their perceived amount of information did not significantly increase or decrease according to context.

Theoretical and managerial implications

The theoretical implications of this research are as follows. First, this paper expands our understanding of construal level theory and the anchoring effect in the field of fashion marketing and demonstrates the feasibility of using these two classical theories to explain consumer phenomena in this area. In explaining the effects of model type and retailing context on perceived information and approach behaviour, this paper draws on the theories of construal level and anchoring effect. In line with these theories, it was found that with respect to nonprofessional models (i.e. ordinary individuals), consumers feel a near psychological distance (Lee et al., 2018). They paid more attention to nonprofessional models close to their own types, and therefore, the main effect of model type was apparent. This broadens the application scope of the construal level theory and the anchoring effect.

Second, our study also contributes to the literature on online retailing and fashion marketing. Although there have been numerous studies on the effect of visual information and e-retail information quality on consumers (Hsu et al., 2012), there has been little research on the effect of model type on fashion consumer behaviour. This paper contributes substantially to this literature and further expands the understanding of the effect of visual information and static images on consumers, particularly with respect to the visual information anchor (Lee and Huang, 2021; Xue et al., 2020). In this work, we used approach behaviour to represent consumer behaviour rather than willingness to buy. That is because approach behaviour can better reflect the real behaviours of consumers in the online retailing context.

Third, our study extends the model type literature by identifying two types of model: nonprofessional model and professional model. To the best of our knowledge, we are one of the first to investigate the effects of nonprofessional and professional model on consumer
attitudes and behaviours. Additionally, we explore their different influences within different online retailing contexts, including webcast retailing or website retailing. Thus, this study also enriches the literature related to the webcast. It sheds new light on online shopping or retailing.

The managerial implications and suggestions of this study are twofold. First, the online retailing context plays an important role in consumers’ decision-making. We refer to the concept of time distance to explain the anchoring effect on consumers in different contexts, which provides a theoretical basis for a brand marketing differentiation strategy. In different retailing and decision-making contexts, the time pressure consumers face is different, as is the time distance (Bar-Anan et al., 2007). For relatively distant future product launches or brand publicity displays, consumers are not required to make decisions immediately. Therefore, they can “sketch” the product display they see in a picture of high construal level using their memory of the abstract and essential features of the product. In contrast, in the near future webcast retailing context, consumers must make immediate decisions without the leisure to develop logical inferences or think carefully. Thus, they rely more on emerging information (such as the anchor of the model display before them) in making a judgement. Therefore, they are easily affected by the anchor information and subject to the basic anchor effect. In this regard, it is important for brand marketers to adopt different marketing strategies according to the response of consumers in different contexts (Loureiro et al., 2018).

Second, the product display directly affects the consumer’s evaluation of products and brands. The results of this study reveal that model type has a significant effect on the perceived information and approach behaviour of consumers. Compared with a professional model, a nonprofessional model will trigger more approach behaviour in the consumer. In the website retailing context, the influences of nonprofessional model on approach behaviour are stronger. Thus, the retailers should use a nonprofessional model to display products, especially in the context of website retailing. In addition to considering consumers’ responses in different contexts, the brand retailers should also comprehensively determine the display form according to product characteristics. For near future products, as in webcast retailing, brand marketers should provide consumers with a variety of reference information to trigger more consumer perception of the product information and increase approach behaviour. Correspondingly, such marketers should then promote more word-of-mouth recommendation and repurchasing behaviour to finally achieve a better brand reputation (Sundstrom et al., 2019).

Limitations and future research
Although our research has several limitations, these limitations represent opportunities for future research. First, we conducted an online experiment. The models and clothing we employed in our experiment were intended to be as neutral as possible, and the introductory materials we prepared (such as the product presentation by models and the provision of product information) simulated the online presentation of real products as much as possible. However, differences remain between this presentation and the consumer’s experience of real online browsing and shopping. Future studies can conduct a field experiment in real stores and invite real consumers to participate in this experiment. Furthermore, future research can use objective data to measure the real behaviour of consumers, which can improve the effectiveness of findings. Second, we used static pictures of models to display products. Future studies can use dynamic pictures or videos of models to display products and compare the difference between static pictures and dynamic pictures or videos (Watson et al., 2020). Third, this paper used basic demographic information as control variables. Although this approach improves the value of the paper, from a comprehensive viewpoint, there remain
more control variables to investigate, such as brand attributes, product types, other characteristics of the model (such as figure, race, facial expressions), and personality traits. Future work could consider controlling for these variables. It would be very interesting and meaningful to examine how these factors influence the effects of different models.

References


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