The Effect of Face Consciousness on Willingness To Pay for Clothing Premiums

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Abstract—In this study, the relationship between consumers' face consciousness and their willingness to pay a premium for clothing in social scenarios were explored, and the mechanism of premium payment driven by consumers' face consciousness was to be revealed, as well as the mediating effect of perceived value was analyzed. By conducting in-depth interviews and reviewing literature, the factors influencing consumers' willingness to pay a premium for clothing due to face consciousness were obtained. At the same time, three dimensions of emotional value, social value, and perceived quality were used as mediating variables to construct a theoretical model. The results of this study suggest that face consciousness has a significant positive effect on both the willingness to pay a premium for clothing and public self-consciousness; Public self-consciousness has also a significant positive effect on the willingness to pay a premium for clothing; In the perceived value, emotional value, social value and perceived quality all play a mediating role in the relationship between face consciousness and willingness to pay a premium for clothing.

Keywords—Face consciousness; Willingness to pay a premium; Public self-awareness; Perceived value

I. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of the clothing industry, the variety of clothing options available to consumers has grown increasingly diverse. Notably, the per capita disposable income of consumers continues to rise, causing their consumption habits and purchasing behaviors to evolve. As a result, they are now more inclined to pay a premium for clothing products that offer added value. This trend is especially relevant for individuals immersed in collectivist cultural values, as "face-saving" is highly valued [1]. Consequently, face-saving consciousness has become an influential factor affecting consumers' purchasing decisions, while also representing there is still much room for research regarding the unique face-saving attitudes of consumers and their willingness to pay a premium.

This study focuses on mid-range brand clothing consumers as research subjects. Firstly, through in-depth interviews and literature reviews, we have identified the factors that influence consumers' face consciousness and their willingness to pay a premium for clothing. Building upon this foundation, this study explored the effects of face consciousness and public self-consciousness on consumers' willingness to pay a premium for clothing, as well as the relationship between

these two concepts. The study also used the emotional value, social value, and perceived quality as mediating variables to investigate the impact of face consciousness on the willingness to pay a premium for clothing. The results of this research can provide guidance for sales strategies in the clothing industry.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Face consciousness

Mr. Hu was the first to provide a clear explanation of face. She believes that face reflects the reputation an individual has obtained through social interactions with others, which can be divided into two categories: "lien" and "mien-tzŭ" [2]. "Lien" refers to the confidence that society has in an individual's moral character, indicating that in order to gain respect and recognition from others, an individual needs to improve their moral qualities or spiritual appearance. "Mien-tzŭ" typically refers to an individual's use of certain behaviors or language to gain recognition and respect from others. Based on this concept, KING et al. divided face into "moral face" and "social or status face". Goffman set a situational definition for face, believing that the respect required for face is obtained in one social context, and divided it into "self-face" and "other-face," corresponding to behaviors that protect and defensive face [3]. Brown and Levinson even proposed that face is the most fundamental need in interpersonal communication [4].

In summary, this study believes that face refers to the publicity and social self-image cognition that individuals have in the process of interpersonal communication, based on attitudes and behaviors of others. It results from dynamic reactions within oneself and reflects social recognition, respect, and value identification.

B. Public self-consciousness

Self-awareness refers to an individual's comprehension of themselves and their relationships with others, which can be divided into two types: public self-awareness and private self-awareness. James used the terms "I" and "ME" to differentiate between public and private self-awareness [5]. Brown suggested that the "I" refers to the actively perceiving and thinking subject within oneself. Mead believed that public self-awareness refers to individuals viewing themselves as social objects when they become aware of the perspectives of

others, leading to the formation of self-concepts. Therefore, other people's reactions to an individual are a significant influence on their public self-awareness [6]. Fenigstein, Scheier and Buss found that public self-awareness is social and open, having a close relationship with others, representing an understanding of oneself as a social and public object, and its essence reflects the self as a social object [7].

To sum up, this study regards public self-awareness as an individual's self-image displayed in front of others or a social group, which then forms certain impressions and receives corresponding evaluations, reflecting the individual's relationship with others or society.

C. Perceived value

From the perspective of consumer psychology, Zeithaml defined perceived value as a comprehensive evaluation of products formed by consumers during the shopping process based on perceived gains and losses. Monroe believes that perceived value is the difference between the benefits brought by products and services perceived by consumers and the value paid, representing the disparity between gains and losses [8]. Woodruff discovered that consumers' perception of the value of products or services would be influenced by their own preferences and consumption nodes [9]. Sheth, Newman and Gross identified emotional, social, conditional, cognitive, and functional values as the five dimensions of perceived value based on different levels of consumer needs, believing that these independent dimensions jointly influence consumers' value judgments and more comprehensively measure perceived value [10].

In general, this study believes that perceived value refers to consumers' evaluation of the worth of products or services during the shopping process. Based on Sheth and Sweeney's perceived value dimensions and in-depth interviews, this study identifies emotional, social value, and perceived quality as the key measurement dimensions of perceived value.

D. Public self-consciousness

According to Blackstone, willingness to pay a premium is when consumers are willing to pay more for a brand's products than other brands with similar features and value. Francisco Aguilar, Richard and Vlosky argue that it reflects the price consumers are willing to pay a premium to obtain greater value for themselves [11]. Aker defined the willingness to pay a premium according to the brand. He suggests that it generally refers to consumers being more willing to pay extra for a specific brand, compared to other brands that has comparable quality and quantity in the same category, and that this willingness is not always related to the product's price [12].

Overall, this study believes that willingness to pay a premium refers to the amount that consumers are willing to overpay for a product compared to other similar or identical products, based on their perceived benefits. However, further research is needed to understand how different products and brands may influence this motivation.

III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEDUCTION

A. Face consciousness and willingness to pay premium

Face consciousness deeply influences consumer behavior, particularly when it comes to purchasing branded products, which are endowed with added value. Consumers who place high importance on face are more inclined to buy branded clothing in order to enhance or restore their reputation, gain respect and recognition from others, and avoid ordinary or cheap clothing that could damage their image [13]. This means that face consciousness reinforces consumers' awareness of brands, making them less sensitive to price and more likely to purchase expensive branded clothing, ultimately affecting their willingness to pay a premium. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: There is a positive correlation between consumers' face consciousness and their willingness to pay a premium for clothing. Specifically, consumers who place higher value on face are more likely to pay a premium, while those with a weaker sense of face are less inclined to do so.

B. Face consciousness and public self-awareness

From a psychological perspective, face is a positive image that individuals present to others in order to obtain recognition and approval. This image is based on internalized self-esteem or the public impression formed by how others evaluate them [14]. Public self-consciousness refers to the desire of individuals to be interdependent and consistent with the views of others in a social and public context. Since face not only refers to personal face, but also includes social and collective faces, the concern about gaining recognition from the social group can have an impact on the public image of individuals, thus influencing consumers' public self-consciousness. In other words, there is some overlap between face consciousness and public self-consciousness. Thus, the hypothesis of this study is as follows:

H2: Face consciousness and public self-consciousness are positively correlated. That is, consumers with stronger face consciousness tend to have stronger public self-consciousness, while those with weaker face consciousness tend to have weaker public self-consciousness.

C. Public self-awareness and willingness to pay premium

Public self-awareness is related to individuals' sensitivity to social interaction, which can influence their choices of social consumption products. Consumers may choose products based on their ability to create impressions. According to Xu's research, young consumers with strong public self-awareness tend to be more materialistic and have a higher willingness to purchase high-quality products at higher prices [15]. Clothing, as one of the most frequently purchased products, can effectively convey personal characteristics and showcase a positive image to others. Consumers with strong public self-awareness are particularly sensitive to the image they present in social environments, and they often use branded clothing to create and showcase this positive self-image. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: There is a positive correlation between public self-awareness and consumers' willingness to pay a premium for clothing, namely that consumers with stronger public self-

awareness are more likely to be willing to pay a premium, while those with weaker public self-awareness are less inclined to do so.

D. Mediating effect of perceived value

Consumption can be used by individuals to demonstrate their social identity and status, showcasing their self-image and relevance to certain groups. Therefore, consumers who have a strong sense of face will prioritize the value, prestige, and popularity of products when making purchasing decisions to fulfill their social needs [13]. Consumers who value the face of their social group will place greater emphasis on a product's added value and are more willing to pay a premium for products that can enhance their self-image and social status. Fenigstein's research found a significant positive correlation between consumers' face consciousness of face and their risk aversion and materialism in consumption. That is, consumers with a strong face consciousness have higher perceived value requirements for brand products and are more inclined to purchase them [7]. Based on this, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H4: Perceived value plays an intermediary role between face consciousness and willingness to pay premium for clothing.

H4a: Emotional value plays an intermediary role between face consciousness and willingness to pay premium for clothing.

H4b: Social value plays an intermediary role between face consciousness and willingness to pay premium for clothing.

H4c: Perceived quality plays an intermediary role between face consciousness and willingness to pay a premium for clothing.

E. Research model

The research hypothesis determined the research framework, which is illustrated in Figure 1.
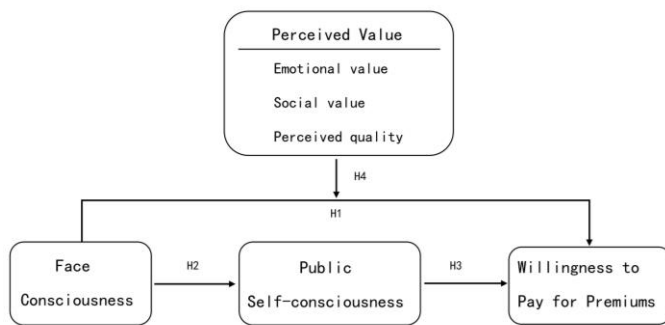

Fig. 1. Theoretical model diagram

IV. RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to comprehensively understand the factors influencing consumers' willingness to pay a premium, this study conducted in-depth interviews with consumers of different ages and professions. Based on the interview results, the study analyzed and organized each record and their relationships. Additionally, with the support of literature review and existing research, the study extracted dimensions of perceived value for hypothesis testing.

A. Variable design

Based on the theoretical model illustrated in Figure 1, this study focused on six variables: face consciousness, public self-consciousness, emotional value, social value, perceived quality, and willingness to pay a premium. All variables were measured using scales that were referenced from mature scales. Some of these scales were designed by foreign scholars. To ensure accuracy, the scales underwent back-translation methods and appropriate adjustments and modifications were made to fit the measurement situation of this study. All items were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 7, where 1 represents complete disagreement and 7 represents complete agreement.

The measurement of face consciousness was referenced from Chan et al.'s study, and this study used six items from it. The measurement of public self-consciousness drew from the scale developed by Fenigstein et al. in 1975, comprising a total of seven items. For perceived value, the scales developed by Rao, Luo, and Li et al. were referenced, and suitable items were selected and modified based on the research content, resulting in a final design of 17 items, including five for emotional value, seven for social value, and five for perceived quality. The scale for willingness to pay a premium referred to the scales developed by Shi, Juliet et al., and Netemeyer et al., as well as the suitable items were also selected and modified, resulting in a total of four items.

B. Pretest

In this study, some measurement scales were designed based on existing research findings without being validated, which could potentially reduce the reliability of these scales. Therefore, a pre-test was conducted after developing the questionnaire to ensure the rationality and reliability of the scale design. Participants sequentially rated their face consciousness, public self-consciousness, perceived value (including emotional value, social value, and perceived quality), and willingness to pay a premium. A total of 85 questionnaires were distributed, with 77 valid questionnaires returned, resulting in an effective response rate of 91%.

We conducted reliability and validity analyses using SPSS 23.0. Our findings indicate that all six variables - face consciousness, willingness to pay a premium, public self-consciousness, emotional value, social value, and perceived quality - have high internal consistency, as reflected in their alpha (α) reliability coefficients. Specifically, both face consciousness and willingness to pay a premium had α values above 0.8, while all other variables had α values greater than 0.9. These results suggest that the 34 items included in these variables are highly reliable. Moreover, our Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.887 - exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.8, and the Bartlett test was highly significant at $p<0.001$, indicating that the research information could be effectively extracted.

C. Sample and data collection

We utilized online questionnaires to gather data from participants in our study. A total of 446 questionnaires were collected, but we excluded invalid responses from participants who provided identical answers or extreme ratings (either 1 or 7) too frequently. After these exclusions, we obtained 406

valid questionnaires, resulting in an effective response rate of 91.03%.

V. DATA AND RESULTS

We employed SPSS 23.0 and AMOS 24.0 to examine the hypothetical model.

A. Measurement items and reliability evaluation

The inter-item correlations within each measurement scale were high, with correlation coefficients between items exceeding 0.6 and most exceeding 0.7. In addition, the overall α reliability coefficient for all measurement scales was 0.957, indicating strong internal consistency reliability across all scales. Meanwhile, each individual variable measurement scale exceeded the recommended boundary value of 0.8, demonstrating good internal consistency reliability for each scale in this study.

B. Evaluation and correction of measurement model

Hair et al. suggest that CMIN/DF values between 1 and 5 are acceptable for evaluating goodness-of-fit, with values less than 3 considered excellent. Similarly, GFI, AGFI, CFI, and TLI (NNFI) values greater than 0.8 are generally acceptable, with values greater than 0.9 considered excellent [16]. Moreover, an RMSEA value between 0 and 0.1 is acceptable, while a value less than 0.08 is considered excellent. For our study, we utilized AMOS 20.3 for structural equation modeling analysis. However, two of our fit indices did not meet the desired standard and fell short of excellence, indicating that the model fit was not ideal.

To improve the model, we used M.I. (Modification Indices) values to calculate error values for each item, resulting in the retention of 28 measurement items after program revision. After modification, all fit indices reached good or excellent levels, as presented in Table I.

C. Validity assessment

and perform Bartlett sphericity tests. Next, we employed AMOS 24.0 to evaluate both convergence and discriminant validity.

The results indicated that all constructs had KMO values greater than 0.8, with an overall KMO value for the questionnaire of 0.940 - exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.9. Moreover, the significance level of the Bartlett sphericity test was below 0.05 for all constructs. The factor loading coefficients for all items ranged from 0.7-0.95, with p-values less than 0.001. Additionally, the CR values for all variables exceeded 0.8 - surpassing the recommended boundary of 0.7 - while all AVE values were greater than 0.6, which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.5. These findings suggest that our measurement scales have good convergent validity. Furthermore, all person correlation coefficients were less than 0.85, and the square root of AVE was greater than the person correlation coefficients of other constructs, indicating good discriminant validity across our measurement scales. Overall, these results indicate that our questionnaire has good validity.

D. Verification and analysis of main effect

To assess the significance of path coefficients and establish relationships between latent variables, we used a T-test. Specifically, a T-value greater than 1.98 indicates significant results for the T-test. Our findings support H1, as evidenced by a standardized path coefficient (std.) of 0.245 and a T-value of 3.884 (p<0.001) between face consciousness and willingness to pay a premium for clothing. Similarly, our results support H2, with a standardized path coefficient of 0.587 and a T-value of 9.880 (p<0.001) for face consciousness and public self-consciousness. Lastly, we found support for H3, as indicated by the standardized path coefficient of 0.219 and T-value of 3.741 (p<0.001) for public self-consciousness and willingness to pay a premium for clothing. Please refer to Table II for further details.

TABLE I. Fitting index of measurement model before and after correction

Fitting index	CMIN	DF	CMIN/DF	GFI	AGFI	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Initial measurement model	2110.127	518	4.079	0.753	0.716	0.878	0.868	0.087
Fitting criteria			Acceptable	Not up to standard	Not up to standard	Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable
Modified measurement model	1102.783	341	3.234	0.832	0.801	0.923	0.914	0.074
Fitting criteria			Acceptable	Acceptable	Acceptable	Excellent	Excellent	Excellent

TABLE II. Path inspection analysis results

Assumption Path	Unstd.	std.	S.E.	T value	P	Conclusion
H1: Face consciousness→Willingness to pay premium	0.297	0.245	0.076	3.884	***	Assumption holds
H2: Face consciousness→Public self-consciousness	0.560	0.587	0.057	9.880	***	Assumption holds
H3: Public self-consciousness→Willingness to pay premium	0.278	0.219	0.074	3.741	***	Assumption holds

We conducted several tests to assess the validity of our questionnaire. First, we used SPSS 23.0 to obtain KMO values

E. *Verification and analysis of mediating effect*

The mediating effect was assessed with a 95% confidence level. A mediating effect is present if the confidence interval's upper and lower limits do not include 0 or if $p < 0.05$. For emotional value, social value, and perceived quality, the final effect values on face consciousness and willingness to pay a premium for clothing were 0.083, 0.089, and 0.087 respectively. The confidence intervals for all three dimensions did not include 0, and the p-value was less than 0.05. This indicates that there was a mediating effect supporting H4a, H4b, and H4c. Thus, the three dimensions of perceived value mediate face consciousness and willingness to pay for clothing premiums, establishing H4. Table III displays the

observable, clothing store assistants can make suitable recommendations by inferring consumers' public self-consciousness based on their self-image management.

Through in-depth interviews, this study discovered that consumers primarily value the social value, emotional value, and perceived quality of clothing. These three dimensions play a mediating role in the relationship between face consciousness and willingness to pay a premium for clothing. As a result, clothing companies can increase consumers' willingness to pay a premium by enhancing their emotional value, social value, and perceived quality. Furthermore, both perceived value and premium range have an impact on consumers' repurchase rates. Quality is the biggest factor

TABLE III.   STANDARDIZED BOOTSTRAP MEDIATING EFFECT TEST

Route	Effect Value	SE	Bias-corrected 95%CI				Percenntile 95%CI		
			Lower	*Upper*	*Lower*	*Upper*	*Lower*	*Lower*	*Upper*
Initial measurement model	2110.127	518	0.017	0.170	0.017	0.170	0.017	0.017	0.170
stdInd emotional value	0.083	0.038	0.040	0.158	0.040	0.158	0.040	0.040	0.158
stdInd social value	0.089	0.030	0.016	0.177	0.016	0.177	0.016	0.016	0.177

a.   Sample of a Table footnote. (stdind emotional value represents "face consciousness → emotional value → willingness to pay a premium," stdind social value represents "face consciousness → social value → willingness to pay a premium," and stdind perceived quality represents "face consciousness → perceived quality → willingness to pay a premium.")

results.

VI.   RESEARCH CONCLUSION AND PROSPECT

A. *Research conclusion*

This study focused on clothing consumers and utilized in-depth interviews to identify emotional value, social value, and perceived quality as the mediating factors. The study constructed a theoretical model to explore the potential mechanisms by which face consciousness influences willingness to pay a premium for clothing. The study's conclusions are as follows:

Face consciousness and public self-consciousness both have a significant positive impact on willingness to pay a premium for clothing. Face consciousness also has a positive impact on public self-consciousness. Emotional value, social value, and perceived quality in perceived value all play a mediating role in the relationship between face consciousness and willingness to pay a premium. Social value has the most significant mediating effect, followed by perceived quality and then emotional value.

B. *Management Inspiration*

This study has focused on clothing consumers and constructed a research framework to investigate the impact of face consciousness on the willingness to pay a premium for clothing. The findings indicate that consumers' face consciousness has a significant positive impact on their willingness to pay a premium for clothing. As a result, clothing companies can improve consumers' face consciousness to increase their willingness to pay a premium for clothing and expand their consumer base. In addition, there is a high correlation between public self-consciousness and face consciousness. While face consciousness may be less

affecting consumers' repurchase decisions. By offering small premiums, clothing companies can enable consumers to satisfy their face needs and perceive high value after making a premium purchase. This enhances the likelihood that consumers will become loyal customers over time.

C. *Research Deficiencies and Prospects*

This study investigated the impact of face consciousness on willingness to pay a premium for middle-range brand clothing. However, the relationship between consumer face consciousness and willingness to pay a premium for other grades of brands and non-branded clothing remains unknown. The performance of corresponding consumer groups may vary depending on the different grades of clothing and whether it's branded or not. Additionally, there may be other dimensions of perceived value that play a mediating role in the relationship between face consciousness and willingness to pay a premium for clothing. Furthermore, this study did not explore the direct impact of perceived value on willingness to pay a premium, which can be studied in-depth in future research.

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