Consumers' Evaluations of and Purchasing Intentions towards Online Styling Services

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Abstract

This study examines consumers' (N=166,133 women, 31 men, 2 missing) evaluations of and purchasing intentions towards online styling services (OSS). The objectives of the study were to (1) examine consumers' motivations for online clothes shopping, (2) evaluate consumers' interest in and experience with OSS, (3) examine previous interest in and experience with OSS related to shopping motivations, and (4) examine purchase intentions of OSS consumers. An online survey was conducted to measure online (hedonic) shopping motives, participants' overall readiness and experiences on OSS, and several demographic items. Results showed that consumers with higher levels of hedonic shopping motives had a higher intention to pursue an OSS. Female participants had a higher level of interest towards OSS than male participants. There was no significant difference between plus-size and regular-size shoppers in their attitudes towards OSS and finding appealing qualities to the service. Implications of these findings for research on OSS were developed through studying the nature of OSS, gender differences in shopping motivations, and differences between plus size and regular size shoppers.

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1. Introduction

With the increasing number of online retail consumers, the demand for affordable, easy, and convenient shopping is the highest it has ever been since the start of e-commerce in 1991 (Miva, 2011). Companies and consumers have chosen to join the fast growing e-commerce option for easy and convenient shopping. According to *eMarketer* (2018) worldwide retail ecommerce sales reached $2.304 trillion in 2017.

Consumer demand for convenient shopping continues to increase. Because of the everyday life demands of family and work, people are looking for new ways to save time and money, especially in the area of shopping. A report by Hartman Strategy (2014) estimated that online grocery shopping helps consumers save around 39% of their time, 36% of money, and 27% of fuel. Retail giant Amazon reported that weekly sales for Amazon Fresh (its grocery delivery division) increased from $3 million to $7 million by the end of 2017 (Melton, 2018). Online shopping gives consumers a comfortable and convenient shopping environment that offers a short response time and minimizes customer effort (Jen-Hung, 2010).

With advances in technology, more customers are shopping online rather than in a physical store. The influence of e-commerce has created an extreme change in shopping behaviors (Ellis, 2018). The values of convenience, time saving, and product variety are among the major reasons why online shoppers keep coming back (Sebald, 2018). At the same-time, brick and mortar retailers are trying to fulfill the demands to create a personal and desirable shopping experience while dodging the competitive threats from e-commerce (Ellis, 2018).

Estimates suggest that the U.S will generate over 121 billion dollars by the year 2021 in apparel and accessories in retail e-commerce (Statista DMO, 2017). Retail e-commerce occurs both online and via mobile phones. Unless the traditional brick and mortar stores adopt a new perspective, they are likely to be swept away by the mobile shopping rush (Rigby, 2011). One feature of this move to e-commerce is the emergence of services that provide online personal clothes shopping and consultation called online styling services (OSS).

From climbing the corporate ladder to building self-confidence, people are seeking wardrobe assistance for a variety of reasons (Kimmiade, 2018). For many high-income consumers, an in-person consultation with a stylist to curate a wardrobe and create outfits is a shopping essential (Vaccaro, 2018). Some retailers offer free in-store and online personal stylists to help customers with their apparel needs (Vaccaro, 2018). The biggest reason for acquiring a personal stylist is to save time and money (Waltergreen, 2018). Consumers who use in-person styling services are said to have a better shopping experience by benefiting both functionally (quicker and easier selection) and symbolically (greater confidence) (Vaccaro, 2018). From the increase in online retail traffic and consumer requests for wardrobe assistants, the emerging markets of in-person and online stylists are coming together. Subscription services are finding their way into retail space. Over the past few years these services have been added to large retail companies like J.C. Penney's Big and Under Armour (Unglesbee, 2018). OSS is giving consumers the combination of in-house personal stylists with the convenience of online shopping (Leighton, 2018).

OSS is a new outlet designed to give people help from a personal stylist in the convenience of their home (Leighton, 2018). OSS is a clothing subscription box service that delivers 5 to 10 apparel, shoes, or accessory items picked by a personal stylist and shipped to the customer's front door. Serving over a million subscribers, this five-billion-dollar industry is introducing shoppers to a new way of acquiring clothes (Leighton, 2018; Ramkumar, 2017). Using data-driven technology, OSS stylists can create outfits from the specific clothing preferences, budget, and needs of each client (Vaccaro, 2018). This new phenomenon and personalized fashion experience could revolutionize e-commerce by transforming the way people dress and buy clothes (Vaccaro, 2018).

The purpose of this study was to examine consumers' evaluations of and purchase intentions towards OSS. The objectives of the study were to (1) examine consumers' motivations for online clothes shopping, (2) evaluate consumers interest in and experience with OSS, (3) examine previous interest in and experience with OSS related to shopping motivations, and (4) examine purchase intentions of OSS consumers. An online survey was conducted to measure hedonic shopping motives, participants' overall readiness and experiences on OSS, and several demographic items.

2. The Nature of Online Styling Services (OSS)

In the US, recent estimates indicate that there are 5.7 million subscription box consumers and more than 10 different online styling service companies (Kestenbaum, 2017). Through a combination of data science and human stylists, 2.7 million active customers have received clothing subscriptions from OSS Stitch Fix (Cheng, 2018). In

2017, Stitch Fix nearly reached $1 billion dollars in sales (Gensler, 2017). Because OSS is so new, there is minimal research on the topic of clothing subscription boxes.

For many individuals, clothes chosen and placed on the customer's doorstep could be a very beneficial service. According to Wang (2014), dressing appropriately can result in a large Return of Investment (ROI) professionally and in the workplace. Office Team (2007) reported that 93% out of more than 1,000 senior managers at companies with 20 or more employees responded that clothing choice affects an employee's chances of promotion. However, keeping track of fashion sense requires significant expenses, time, and effort, which lead some people to seek help from a professional stylist.

Kumar and Vaccaro (2017) found that OSS could revolutionize the way customers shop for clothing and choose outfits. As Ramkumar (2017) put it, "This new method of online shopping that removes consumers' responsibility to select merchandise and visit stores is substantially changing consumers' consumption habits and, further, their lifestyles" (p. 21). OSS can be a great alternative for shopping and purchasing items by permitting better use of time and resources.

Sebald and Jacob (2018) stated that customers are increasing their demand for individual, tailor-made preferences regarding shopping. Retailers are trying to meet this demand by offering online interactions, such as live chat rooms. As retailers move the focus towards the customer's individual needs, tailor-made solutions represent a pioneering approach in consumerism (Sebald & Jacob, 2018). With OSS, the stylists take on the role of curators by putting together personalized outfits tailor-made to each customer. OSS was first established in the United States and now expanded into other countries because of their unique niche (Sebald & Jacob, 2018).

When first established, most OSS were specifically created for men, to meet the strong desire to dress more fashionably without knowing how (Tao, 2017). According to Schlossberg (2016), most men would rather stay home and do their clothes shopping online. From the amenities offered by OSS, male consumers may never need to step foot in a store again in order to replenish their closet (Koivu, 2014).

Recent research suggests that the most likely targeted customers for OSS are now young women who like to take risks and try new things (Ramkumar, 2018). The women most satisfied with OSS are those who identify the service as a life investment (Petersen, 2015). Older female consumers, who once were excited and satisfied by in-store shopping, now find the task mundane and draining. Petersen (2015) asked women ages 35 and older how OSS has been beneficial to them. One woman stated that OSS is "finally giving me a sense of style at 35 years old. I needed someone to hold my hand and show me how" (p. 8).

Male and female consumers are not the only ones who are seeking OSS. Recently, many retailers have been launching updates on current boxes or creating entirely new offerings, specifically in the children's category (Unglesbee, 2018). From birth to pre-teens, companies such as Old Navy and Kidbox are targeting parents who want to avoid the hassle of kids in a retail store by offering clothing subscription boxes (Hill, 2018). As more retailers join the growing trend of OSS, companies are finding low product returns and high retention with customers (Berthene, 2018). From its launch in May 2017, the retailer BabyGap has reported an increase in numbers from new and returning customers produced by subscription boxes (Berthene, 2018).

The model of subscription orders was founded years ago by the newspaper industry, and newer services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime have rekindled the flame within customers (Jayakumar, 2014). OSS, along with other subscription box services, has created a way for retailers to reach the customer who has vanished from the shopping aisles (Jayakumar, 2014). Subscription services are making their way into major retailers like Ann Taylor, Fruit of the Loom, Gap, JCPenney, Old Navy and Under Armour (Wiener-Bronner, 2017). These big companies are trying out subscription services to help cut down on returns, while also figuring out what customers want. Their goal is to turn intermittent shoppers into regular customers (Wiener-Bronner, 2017).

As OSS demonstrates a new way of shopping, traditional retailers are chasing the trend (Anders, 2018). In 2016, Target sold out of their first Cat & Jack Baby Outfit Box in minutes and earned $2 billion dollars in sales in just over a year (Anders, 2018). From new companies like Stitch Fix to well established companies like Target, the consumer's request for tailor-made, hassle free, convenient shopping, remains the same (Rigby, 2011).

In summary, customers are increasing their demand for individual tailor-made preferences regarding shopping and seeking options that offer the most convenience. For the customers who have vanished from the shopping aisles, OSS is altering the way people will shop for clothing by minimizing personal risk and permitting better use of time and resources (Jayakumar, 2014).

3. Gender Differences in Shopping Motivations

A great deal of research suggests that women and men differ in their general motivations to engage in shopping behavior. Researchers find that women tend to shop more than men based on their personal preferences (Brennan, 2013). Jain (2014) describes hedonic motives as shopping for pleasure or amusement and utilitarian motives as shopping to acquire a necessary item (i.e., rational and goal driven shoppers). Female shoppers are more driven by hedonic motives, while male shoppers are utilitarian shoppers (Aswegen, 2015).

When it comes to shopping, men value a store that can provide a fast and uncomplicated purchase process (Banytė, 2015). Researching male fashion leaders and innovators, Engelbrecht (2015) found that fashion forward men held a unique set of values that motivate their purchasing decisions. Results also confirmed that male fashion leaders are best targeted if marketers and retailers focus the approach towards the utilitarian shopping motivations.

According to Meola (2016), 40% of American men aged 18 to 34 would prefer to do their entire shopping online, compared to 33% of women. Even for younger generations, male teens tend to produce more online retail traffic than female teens by an additional 10% (Meola, 2016). Online retail e-commerce provides customers with convenient and fast shopping. Because men are mostly utilitarian shoppers, e-commerce seems especially suited to meet their unique set of values and provides the best outlet for their purchasing decisions.

Women tend to find enjoyment through shopping because of the social and physical interactions with people and products; online shopping leaves most female customers feeling isolated and less emotionally gratified (Sebald, 2018). However, women do note that the time saving aspect of e-commerce shopping is significant (Sebald, 2018).

When comparing men's and women's shopping behaviors, the main differences are in their decision-making styles (Jen-Hung, 2010). For women, shopping can play a psychological and emotionally encompassing role, whereas men focus on obtaining the item by the least amount of effort (Jen-Hung, 2010). When making a purchasing decision, men tend to focus on immediate needs, while women tend to look for products that promise long-term use (Sahakian, 2012). Women use other people's opinions to help make a final purchasing decision, but men create their own opinion by using people's decisions to help decide on purchasing a product (Sahakian, 2012).

Gender differences can also be noticed in the way men and women perceive online interactions. Women use the Internet as a communication tool, while men use it as a resource tool (Yang & Chun Wu, 2006). Wang (2017) says men's shopping behavior is achievement-oriented. When shopping online they become more actively involved in achieving the goal of "shopping to win." A study done on women's outlook towards online shopping found that they are skeptical and perceive more risk with retail e-commerce (Sharma, 2014). Male online shoppers will most likely engage with downloading and purchasing activities on the Internet (Sharma, 2014). Female online shoppers are more likely to search for a bargain and rely on customer recommendations (Wang, 2017).

In summary, men and women appear to process shopping from two different viewpoints, hedonic or utilitarian. Most men are seeking the "shopping to win" mentality to find the necessary items in the quickest amount of time (Wang, 2017). However, most women are looking for human interactions and internal satisfaction when seeking to purchase items (Jen-Hung, 2010). OSS is altering the way people interact with clothes shopping by incorporating human interactions and quick item retrieval to meet the needs from both shopping motivation viewpoints. By meeting the demands for individual, tailor-made preferences while keeping the process quick and simple, OSS wants to target both male and female customers (Sebald, 2018). Understanding both viewpoints of hedonic and utilitarian motives is an important step towards revolutionizing the way consumers shop for clothing.

4. Differences Between Plus Size and Regular Size Shoppers

Fashion retail companies are opening new doors for consumers by expanding apparel size ranges (Whelan, 2018). In women's apparel, the sizes are categorized as regular (0-12) and plus-size (14-30), and in men's apparel they are labeled regular (XS to XL) and big & tall (XXL to 8XL) (George-Parkin, 2018; Wilcox, 2012). Because of the wide range of sizes and categories, many retail brands are trying to create a large variety to reach different consumer body types (George-Parkin, 2018).

In the apparel business, plus-size fashion is a 46-billion-dollar industry and is one of the fastest-growing sectors (Weinswig, 2018; Pike, 2015). According to the apparel industry, plus-size clothing is designed for individuals whose body measurements are larger than average for their height (Romeo, 2016). 68% of adult women in the US wear apparel sized 14 or larger; however, most of the larger multi-brand retailers, such as Macy's, only supply 2.3% of plus-size assortments (George-Parkin, 2018). For male plus-size shoppers, stores like Urban Outfitters or Forever 21 only offer sizes up to a 38-

inch waist, and other retail stores like Gap and American Eagle only sell up to 48-inch waist pants online (Rebolini, 2018). In America, the average male waist size is 40 inches and average female size is 16 to 18, which means many Americans are plus-size consumers (George-Parkin, 2018; Roland, 2017).

Design educator Tim Gunn (2016), explains how the American fashion industry has many problems, one being the lack of plus-size presence. There are over 100 million plus-size consumers in America, but many fashion designers refuse to make clothes over size 12 (Gunn, 2016). Because of limited resources and little variety, male and female plus-size consumers are being neglected in the apparel industry.

Both male and female plus-size consumers experience out-casting from the apparel industry, but there is even more of an absence in male fashion (Mak, 2015). In 2015, Zach Miko, standing 6'6'' with a 40-inch waist, was one of the first ever plus-size male models signed to a major U.S. fashion agency (Feldman, 2015; Rebolini, 2018). Mak (2015) compared plus-size men's retail accessibility to plus-size women's. Out of 6,000 stores that cater to plus-size women, less than 1,000 provided shopping options for plus-size men. As Rebolini (2018) reported, retail company ASOS is one of the major pioneers paving a way into men's plus-size fashion. Only six months after the launch of the men's plus-size line, ASOS sold 60,000 units and surpassed what the executives predicted. Plus-size men are spending more money on clothes than ever before, resulting in a $1 billion industry. By displaying diversity through models and apparel sizes, brands are opening the consumer's eyes to new styles and fits (Rebolini, 2018).

From 25 of the largest clothing retailers by revenue, only four offer plus-size apparel (Lamarem, 2018). Reports show that regular-sized women spend less than plus-size: “21% of plus-size women spend at minimum $150 a month on clothes and accessories, whereas only 15% of women in standard sizes do the same” (Schlossberg, 2015, para.14). The limited amount of plus-size offerings in retail stores appears to be driving many plus-size consumers to online shopping (Lamarem, 2018). E-commerce sites offer plus-size shoppers more consistency and variety (Lamarem, 2018). Online retail has become a very important outlet for plus-size shoppers (Singh, 2017).

As the plus-size market continues to grow, retailers are looking for ways to tap into the market. Recently (2018), Wal-Mart has acquired Eloquii to expand their plus-size fashion market (Hirsch, 2018). Founded in 2011, as part of The Limited, Eloquii clothes are designed for women sizes 14 to 28. Since the retailer’s re-launch in 2014 as an independent direct to consumer brand, their Net Promoter Score is near 80 and revenue tripling in growth (Dunn, 2018). Retail store Kohl's recently introduced a new private label plus-sized brand called EVRI, set to release into stores and online in spring 2019 (Elven, 2018). Target plans to double the number of stores that offer their plus-size brand Ava & Viv by the end of 2018 (Hirsch, 2018). In 2016, American’s spent 21.4 billion dollars on women's full-sized clothing. According to NPD Group, there will be an average of 4 percent growth each year through 2020 within the plus-size retail market (Hirsch, 2018).

Regardless if one is plus size or regular size, every consumer runs into problems when it comes to the fashion industry sizing. The fashion industry tends to favor the regular-sized consumers, creating the newest styles and offering the biggest variety, all while separating these customers from the plus-size (Bain, 2016). However, even regular-size customers run into the issue of vanity sizing (Aydinoğlu, 2012). Clothing manufacturers created vanity sizing to help sell more clothes. For many consumers, buying a smaller label size can boost self-esteem and make people feel better about their bodies. To please the desire and create more sales, manufacturers are changing labels to smaller sizes to trick the consumer into thinking they are thinner. These false labels are merely preying on low self-esteem consumers who are longing for smaller waistline, all for the sake of making money (McClanahan, 2015).

When comparing plus-size to regular-size shoppers, there may be different frustrations and challenges; but when looking beyond the surface both consumers desire the same results. According to a survey by Merryweather (2014), the most important thing to all consumers is the value of money; customers want to feel completely respected by the prices from a retailer (Merryweather, 2014). Value towards a particular product or service lies in the eye of the beholder (Almquist, 2016). Retail companies are constantly trying to improve their performance by delivering functional (saving time, reducing cost) and emotional (reducing anxiety, providing entertainment) value to their consumers (Almquist, 2016).

In summary, whether one is a size 2 or 22, the customer wants a shopping experience that is time saving, low price, and stress free. Financial Post describes OSS as helping customers look their best while lightening the pain and mental effort of shopping (Machine-stitched, 2016). One of OSS main missions is to offer styling services to all customers' sizes (Lapaeva, 2015). Through the offerings of OSS, consumers of plus-size and regular-size can now have the help and clothing options to reach their wardrobe goals (Lapaeva, 2015).

5. Statement of the Problem and Hypotheses

Consumers with hedonic motives view shopping as a pleasurable experience and tend to look for human interactions and internal satisfaction when seeking to purchase items (Jen-Hung, 2010). Driven by hedonic motives, consumers rely on other people's opinions to make a final purchasing decision (Aswegen, 2015; Sahakian, 2012). OSS provides hedonic shoppers with a new, exciting shopping outlet by incorporating human interactions and individual tailor-made styled clothing preferences (Sebald, 2018). Considering this research and the fact that OSS is a new and potentially exciting option for shoppers, the first hypothesis is that consumers with higher levels of hedonic shopping motives will have a higher intention towards using OSS compared to utilitarian shoppers.

Researchers find that women tend to shop more than men based on their social responsibilities (Brennan, 2013). For women, shopping can play a psychologically and emotionally encompassing role, whereas men focus on obtaining the item in the least amount of effort (Jen-Hung, 2010). Women tend to find enjoyment through shopping because of the social and physical interactions with people and products (Sebald, 2018). OSS addresses the need for female consumers by offering psychological and emotional interaction with a stylist. Women can now shop at home, while still meeting the need for social interaction. Based off the different shopping behaviors between men and women, the second hypothesis is that women will be more interested in OSS compared to men.

For plus-size women consumers, shopping for clothing can be a never-ending task. Because of the limited amount of resources and lack of variety offered within the apparel industry, plus-size consumers are being neglected (Gunn, 2016). According to research, department and retail stores are not meeting the needs of plus-size consumers, driving many plus-size shoppers to online retail (Lamarem, 2018). The third hypothesis is that plus-size shoppers will have a more positive attitude toward OSS and will find more appealing qualities to the service compared to regular-size shoppers.

6. Research methods

6.1 Participants

Participants were 166 (133 female, 31 male, 2 missing) college students, faculty members, and respondents from social media sites (Facebook and Instagram). Student participants received course extra credit as incentive. Participants' age range was 18 to 79 years (*M* = 26.63, *SD* = 11.25). The majority of participants were White (78%, 12% African American, 3% Asian, 5% Mixed, and 2% other). 61% of the sample were students and 39% of the sample were non-students; 36% of the sample were students with a part-time job, 25% of the sample were non-students with a full-time job. The final sample reflected those with complete data and who completed the survey in two and half minutes or longer.

6.2. Measures and Procedure

Participants completed a 54-item survey, involving multiple parts. The first section included 11 items on demographic information and the participant's clothing sizes including gender, age, race, occupation, shirt size, pant size, and body size. The second section included 16 items on an online adaption of the Hedonic Shopping Motivations scale (HSM, Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Participants rated items using a 7-

point likert scale (0 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). The HSM consist of six subscales with three items each, with possible scores ranging from 0–2. By using the HSM scale and adapting it towards online shopping, I was able to evaluate participants with more accuracy. The scale was scored such that lower scores reflected more utilitarian motives and higher scores reflected hedonic motives. The shopping subscales include adventure (e.g., "To me, online shopping is an adventure"), gratification (e.g., "I go online shopping when I want to treat myself to something special"), role (e.g., "I like online shopping for others because when they feel good I feel good"), value (e.g., "I enjoy hunting for bargains when I shop online"), social (e.g., "Online shopping with others is a bonding experience") and idea (e.g., "I go online shopping to keep up with new fashions"). See Appendix A for all items. The Cronbach alpha total scale score was in the acceptable range, $a = .92$.

The third section of the survey measured participants' opinions toward OSS. Participants rated items using a 7-point scale (0 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Items included feelings towards OSS and current wardrobe (enjoyment, excitement, and frustration), reasons for trying OSS (need, desire, interaction, and convenience), and reasons for not trying OSS (price and time). See Appendix A for these items.

The final section of the survey assessed participants who had past experiences with OSS. Participants rated items using a 7-point scale (0 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). Items included the feelings towards OSS (satisfaction, overwhelmed, and excitement), reasons for returning to OSS (simple process, valued service, and helped wardrobe needs), and reasons for not returning to OSS (wrong sizes, price, and time). See Appendix A for these items.

This survey was created through Qualtrics and distributed from a sourced link. The university IRB also approved the study (See Appendix B). In order to test the hypotheses, we conducted a series of correlational analyses and independent sample *t*-tests.

7. Results

7.1 Tests of Hypotheses

The first hypothesis is that consumers with higher levels of hedonic shopping motives will have a higher intention to pursue an OSS. The results provided strong support for this hypothesis. The results indicate that there are several significant positive relationships between online hedonic shopping motivations and OSS intention (see Table 1).

Table 1. Online Hedonic Shopping Motivation (HSM) and OSS Intention Correlations

OSS Intention Items	HSM Total Score	Sig.
I would use an online styling service.	.409***	.000
I would pay the one-time $20 dollar subscription fee.	.348***	.000
The styling fee or subscription fee makes me less likely to use the service.	-.101	.194
I would become a frequent customer of online styling services.	.375***	.000
Having a new outfit shipped to my doorstep would make my life easier.	.204**	.008

Online styling services would take the excitement away from my shopping experience.	.022	.782
I find it very frustrating to put together outfits.	-.149	.056
I enjoy putting together outfits myself.	.460***	.000
I have always wanted to have a personal stylist.	.319***	.000
I would pursue a subscription to this service because of the personal stylist interactions.	.289***	.000
I do not think online styling services would be worth my time.	-.250**	.001
I would enjoy the fast process of purchase offered from online styling services.	. 346***	.000
I would try online styling service to receive clothing in an uncomplicated matter.	.330***	.000

Note N = 166
** p < .01
*** p < .001

The second hypothesis is that women will be more interested in OSS compared to men. The results offer strong support for this hypothesis. As expected, results indicated that, on several items, female participants had a higher level of interest towards OSS than male participants (see Table 2).

Table 2. Gender Differences in OSS Intention

Items	**Women (n = 133)**	**Men (n = 31)**	***t*-Value**
	M (SD)	***M (SD)***	
I would use an online styling service.	4.32 (1.474)	3.06 (1.843)	4.051***

I would pay the one-time $20 dollar subscription fee.	4.03 (1.542)	3.13 (1.996)	2.762**
The styling fee or subscription fee makes me less likely to use the service.	4.66 (1.487)	4.52 (1.630)	.482
I would become a frequent customer of online styling services.	3.73 (1.388)	2.71 (1.442)	3.657***
Having a new outfit shipped to my doorstep would make my life easier.	4.80 (1.375)	4.29 (1.697)	1.764
Online styling services would take the excitement away from my shopping experience.	4.04 (1.520)	4.10 (1.469)	-.196
I find it very frustrating to put together outfits.	3.47 (1.695)	3.10 (1.513)	1.114
I enjoy putting together outfits myself.	5.24 (1.508)	4.68 (1.600)	1.851
I have always wanted to have a personal stylist.	4.37 (1.545)	2.25 (1.539)	6.540***
I would pursue a subscription to this service because of the personal stylist interactions.	3.93 (1.321)	2.58 (1.311)	5.137***
I do not think online styling services			

would be worth my time.	4.05 (1.350)	5.10 (1.640)	-3.717***
I would enjoy the fast process of purchase offered from online styling services.	4.58 (1.067)	3.65 (1.684)	3.883***
I would try online styling service to receive clothing in an uncomplicated matter.	4.47 (1.247)	3.55 (1.670)	3.447***

Note
** p < .01
*** p < .001

The third hypothesis is that plus-size shoppers will have a positive attitude towards OSS and will find more appealing qualities to the service compared to regular-size shoppers. Comparing plus and regular size shoppers, the results showed no significant differences between the two groups. Thus, there was no support for this hypothesis (see Table 3).

Table 3. Plus-size vs. Regular-size

Items	**Regular (n = 155)**	**Plus (n = 11)**	***t*-Value**
	M (SD)	***M (SD)***	
I would use an online styling service.	4.07 (1.629)	4.27 (1.489)	-.398
I would pay the one-time $20 dollar subscription fee.	3.84 (1.685)	4.36 (1.502)	-.994
The styling fee or subscription fee makes me less likely to use the service.	4.68 (1.533)	4.36 (1.286)	.657

I would become a frequent customer of online styling services.	3.50 (1.438)	4.00 (1.549)	-1.108
Having a new outfit shipped to my doorstep would make my life easier.	4.70 (1.465)	4.64 (1.286)	.143
Online styling services would take the excitement away from my shopping experience.	4.06 (1.524)	3.82 (1.250)	.524
I find it very frustrating to put together outfits.	3.42 (1.664)	3.36 (1.567)	.133
I enjoy putting together outfits myself.	5.10 (1.546)	5.45 (1.214)	-.749
I have always wanted to have a personal stylist.	3.96 (1.749)	4.09 (1.578)	-.239
I would pursue a subscription to this service because of the personal stylist interactions.	3.64 (1.408)	4.09 (1.640)	-1.009
I do not think online styling services would be worth my time.	4.25 (1.444)	4.18 (1.779)	.156
I would enjoy the fast process of purchase offered from online styling	4.38 (1.284)	4.73 (.647)	-.879

services.			
I would try online styling service to receive clothing in an uncomplicated matter.	4.29 (1.386)	4.27 (1.348)	.045

Note
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

8. Discussion

This study's primary difficulties were found in the lack of existing data and research. OSS is a new phenomenon with very little published research. From the beginning of the study, finding published works and accurate data on this topic was difficult. The available data were largely on the topics of basic shopping motivations and growth of e-commerce. Furthermore, because of the lack of existing data on the topic of OSS and other subscription services, the scope of the information was limited.

Results showed strong support for two of the three hypotheses. The supported hypotheses were that consumers with higher levels of hedonic shopping motives had a higher intention to pursue an OSS and female participants had a higher level of interest towards OSS than male participants. The unsupported hypothesis results were that plus-size shoppers would have a positive attitude towards OSS and find more appealing qualities to the service compared to regular-size shoppers.

Consumers who have higher levels of hedonic motives tend to find enjoyment in discovering new ways of shopping. Based on the results, I was not surprised to find female shoppers were more willing to pursue OSS than male shoppers. I predicted plus-size consumers would have a higher interest in OSS than regular-size shoppers, because my research indicated a higher level of clothing essentials for plus-size shoppers. From the results, comparing plus-size and regular-size shoppers, I believe all consumers, no matter the size, could find OSS to be interesting or appealing.

8.1 Limitations of the Study

One limitation of my study is the survey sample size. Limited by time and resources, this study surveyed people from the researcher's personal contacts, college professors, and students. The sample size of the survey was confined by a small demographic exposure. If the sample size had older participants or a wider variety of clothing sizes, the results may have produced a more general outcome. By surveying a wider range of older aged participants, the study could have formed a better understanding in technology and shopping generational gaps. If the sample size had more petite-size shoppers, the study could have gone further into comparing the benefits and challenges of consumer sizing. The study also surveyed participants with previous experience with OSS, but because of the small sample size, the items were unable to be analyzed. By having a larger and wider demographic pool, the survey might have led to different results.

8.2 Implications for Future Research

To achieve a deeper understanding of the methodology and longer-term results of OSS in the apparel industry, additional research is needed. Future research should explore and compare the offerings of OSS for pre-professional (student) and professional (full-time job) consumers. Research could also target male and female consumers who are either preparing to enter into the career world or already an established professional. Such individuals might have required business attire or have to follow human resource guideline for dress. Another emphasis for future research would be comparing part-time and full-time workers, and evaluating if different work hours would affect people's involvement with and interest in OSS. I suspect people who spend more hours working would be more interested in OSS for time and money related reasons compared to part-time workers. Studying deeper into how OSS could be a positive or negative resource for the consumers of the career world could be a useful tool for marketing this service.

Future research should conduct a study on people willing to try OSS for the first time in a controlled setting. It would be very informative to interview participants before and after using an OSS on their expectations about and experience with that service. By evaluating each participant and following each step of their experience with OSS, I believe a deeper knowledge of the positive and negative features of OSS could be ascertained.

Additional research should also take a deeper look into how the method used in OSS can be applied to a retailer in store and online. I believe the future of retail will be tailor-made to each consumer's budget, body, and need. In Japan, fast-fashion retailers are currently creating chatbots that give clothing recommendations based on human input and purchasing history (Bhattarai, 2018). Even in the U.S., companies like Amazon are creating new ways to provide easier clothing services. In summer 2018, Amazon launched their new Prime Wardrobe, offering customers a free, "try before you buy" shopping option (Stone, 2018). To remain competitive, retailers will need to provide consumers with all the right tools to find the required garments and accessories. Studying the method used by OSS to achieve future success in the apparel industry would be beneficial in my career as a fashion merchandiser.

According to NPD Group, 43% of American women are considered petite and struggle to find clothes that prefer their body size (Ribitzky, 2018). Future research should look into the petite-size shoppers and compare those of plus and regular size. Research could also examine how petite consumers are perceived in the fashion industry and study their major clothing needs with respect to OSS. Evaluating the petite side of the clothing sector and how OSS could positively or negatively benefit these consumers would be a valuable direction for further research.

Finally, future research should look further into the OSS industry and how they meet customer requests. Evaluating how OSS deals with consumers who have a negative experience using OSS could provide a better understanding for the overall process and future success of this service. Studying further the negative results of OSS can offer resources of improvement for future customers.

In conclusion, the results indicated the most successful target market for OSS are women with high levels of hedonic shopping motives. The consumers that are less likely to pursue OSS are men and utilitarian motive shoppers. The results evaluating plus-size and regular-size shoppers indicate both are equally inclined to try OSS. For future success, OSS companies should continue to find ways to target women who love to shop and find the task exciting. OSS needs to improve on marketing their service to men who enjoy effortless and fast shopper options. Lastly, OSS should create services that target consumer's specific needs according to clothing sizes. This new way of shopping may not be an effective resource for every consumer; nonetheless, OSS is paving the way into the future of consumerism.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Survey Questions

This survey is about online styling services. An online styling service is a clothing subscription box that is put together by a personal fashion stylist created by your own clothing preferences, budget, and needs. Companies like Stitch Fix, Trunk Club, Dia&Co, Bombfell, and Le Tote, offer online customers 5 to 10 apparel, shoes, or accessory items picked by a personal stylist and shipped to your front door.

Section 1 – Demographic Information

1. What is your gender?
   __ Male __ Female __ Other

2. What is your age?
   ____

3. How would you classify your race/ethnicity?
   __ African American (Black) __ Caucasian (White) ___ American Indian
   ___ Asian American/ Pacific Islander ___ Hispanic ___ Mixed ___ Other

4. Occupation (please check the option that is closest to your current status)
   ___ Student with part-time job ___ Student with full-time job
   ___ Student with no job ___ Full-time job (non student)
   ___ Part-time job (non student)

5. I am confident with my current wardrobe choices?
   ___ Strongly Disagree
   ___ Moderately Disagree
   ___ Disagree
   ___ Neutral
   ___ Agree
   ___ Moderately Agree
   ___ Strongly Agree

6. I do more online shopping then brick-and-mortar (visiting the store in person) shopping.
   ___ Strongly Disagree
   ___ Moderately Disagree
   ___ Disagree
   ___ Neutral
   ___ Agree
   ___ Moderately Agree
   ___ Strongly Agree

7. I enjoy the physical interactions of brick-and-mortar shopping.
   ___ Strongly Disagree
   ___ Moderately Disagree
   ___ Disagree
   ___ Neutral
   ___ Agree
   ___ Moderately Agree
   ___ Strongly Agree

8. Are you familiar with the concept of Online Styling Service?
   Yes No

Section 2 – Size Chart

9. What size do you typically wear in shirts (tops)?
   ____

10. What size do you typically wear in pants (skirts)?
   ____

11. What would you consider your body size to be?
   ____ Regular (ranging between XS – XL)
   ____ Plus (Women's XL – 6X)
   ____ Big & Tall (Men's XXL – 8XL)
   ____ Other

Section 3 – Please think about your online shopping experience, and indicate your level of agreement with the following statements, using this response scale:

0 = Strongly Disagree
1 = Moderately Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Neutral
4 = Agree
5 = Moderately Agree
6 = Strongly Agree

12. To me, online shopping is an adventure.
13. I find online shopping stimulating.
14. Online shopping makes me feel like I am in my own universe.
15. When I'm in a down mood, I go online shopping to make me feel better.
16. To me, online shopping is a way to relieve stress.
17. I go online shopping when I want to treat myself to something special.
18. I like online shopping for others because when they feel good I feel good.
19. I enjoy online shopping for my friends and family.

20. I enjoy online shopping around to find the perfect gift for someone.
21. For the most part, I go online shopping when there are sales.
22. I enjoy looking for discounts when I shop online.
23. I enjoy hunting for bargains when I shop online.
24. Online shopping with others is a bonding experience.
25. I go online shopping to keep up with the trends.
26. I go online shopping to keep up with the new fashions.
27. I go online shopping to see what new products are available.

Section 4 – For the following items about Online Styling Services, please indicate your level of agreement with each statement, using the following response scale.

0 = Strongly Disagree
1 = Moderately Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Neutral
4 = Agree
5 = Moderately Agree
6 = Strongly Agree

28. I would use an online styling service.
29. I would pay the one-time $20 dollar subscription fee.
30. The styling fee or subscription fee makes me less likely to use the service.
31. I would become a frequent customer of online styling services.
32. Having a new outfit shipped to my doorstep would make my life easier.
33. Online styling services would take the excitement away from my shopping experience.
34. I find it very frustrating to put together outfits.
35. I enjoy putting together outfits myself.
36. I would enjoy the fast process of purchase offered from online styling services.
37. I would pursue a subscription to this service because of the personal stylist interactions.
38. I would try this styling service to receive clothing in an uncomplicated matter.
39. I would not try online styling services because I like the interactions that are involved with shopping in stores.
40. I would be willing to try this service because I have a hard time finding clothes that fit my body.
41. I have always wanted to have a personal stylist.
42. I do not think online styling services would be worth my time.

43. Have you ever used an Online Styling Service?
Yes No

Section 5 – The final section refers to your previous experience with Online Styling Services. If you have used an OSS in the past, please click "Yes" on the following question and complete this section. If you have not used an OSS in the past, please click "No" on the following question (you are finished with the survey). Indicate your level of agreement with each statement, using the following response scale.

0 = Strongly Disagree
1 = Moderately Disagree

2 = Disagree
3 = Neutral
4 = Agree
5 = Moderately Agree
6 = Strongly Agree

44. I will use this service again.
45. I was very satisfied with the overall styling service.
46. I kept all my items selected by my stylist.
47. I would recommend this service to a friend.
48. The styling fee was worth the money.
49. The stylist really listened to my style preferences.
50. The stylist created outfits based off my style.
51. The online layout for the styling service was easy to navigate.
52. I am a frequent customer of online styling services.
53. The items selected by my styles were all the right size and fit me well.
54. The online styling consultation was overwhelming to me.
55. The online styling service helped my wardrobe.

56. What was your main reason for choosing this service?

______

Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

IRBN007 – EXEMPTION DETERMINATION NOTICE

Friday, September 21, 2018

Principal Investigator	**Jana Pehrson** (Student)
Faculty Advisor	Jasmin Kwon Vu
Co-Investigators	Tom Brinthaupt
Investigator Email(s)	*jem9h@mtmail.mtsu.edu; jasmin.kwin@mtsu.edu; tom.brinthaupt@mtsu.edu*
Department	Human Sciences - Textiles Merchandising and Design
Protocol Title	***Consumers' evaluations of and purchasing intentions towards onine styling services***
Protocol ID	**19-1026**

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the **EXEMPT** review mechanism under 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) within the research category *(2) Educational Tests* A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	**EXEMPT from furhter IRB review*****	Date	**9/21/18**
Date of Expiration	NOT APPLICABLE		
Sample Size	300 (THREE HUNDRED)		
Participant Pool	**Healthy Adults (18 years or older)**		
Exceptions	Online data collection and online infomed consent are permitted.		
Mandatory Restrictions	1. Participants must be 18 years or older 2. Informed consent must be obtained from the participants 3. Identifying information must not be collected		
Restrictions	**All requirements for exemption apply (REFER BELOW).**		
Comments	NONE		

***This exemption determination only allows above defined protocol from further IRB review such as continuing review. However, the following post-approval requirements still apply:

- Addition/removal of subject population should not be implemented without IRB approval
- Change in investigators must be notified and approved
- Modifications to procedures must be clearly articulated in an addendum request and the proposed changes must not be incorporated without an approval
- Be advised that the proposed change must comply within the requirements for exemption
- Changes to the research location must be approved – appropriate permission letter(s) from external institutions must accompany the addendum request form
- Changes to funding source must be notified via email (irb_submissions@mtsu.edu)
- The exemption does not expire as long as the protocol is in good standing

- Project completion must be reported via email (irb_submissions@mtsu.edu)
- Research-related injuries to the participants and other events must be reported within 48 hours of such events to compliance@mtsu.edu

Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to make the following types of changes to this protocol without the need to report to the Office of Compliance, as long as the proposed changes do not result in the cancellation of the protocols eligibility for exemption:

- Editorial and minor administrative revisions to the consent form or other study documents
- Increasing/decreasing the participant size

Only THREE procedural amendment requests will be entertained per year. This amendment restriction does not apply to minor changes such as language usage and addition/removal of research personnel.

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all applicable post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website. Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, current & past investigator information, training certificates, survey instruments and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the sacure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:
Click here for a detailed list of the post-approval responsibilities.
More information on exmpt procedures can be found here.

Appendix C: IRB Participant Recruitment Flyer

Research Participants Needed

Study Title: **Consumers' Evaluations of and Purchasing Intentions towards Online Styling Services.**

Protocol ID 19-1026 Approval 09.17.2018 Expiration Not Applicable

Study Description & Purpose

My name is Jana Pehrson, I am currently working on an honors thesis at MTSU. My honors thesis is about online styling services (OSS). These online services are designed to assist people with their wardrobe needs by the help of a personal fashion stylist. The purpose is to examine customers' motivations for online clothes shopping, evaluate interest in and experience with OSS, examine previous interest in and experience with OSS related to shopping motivations, and examine purchase intentions of OSS customers.

Target Population

This study is for anyone who does clothes shopping online or in stores that is 18 years or older.

Risk & Benefits

The risks of the questionnaire should present no more than minimal risks to the participants. There are no specific personal benefits for participants, other than providing you the opportunity to help with this research project by answering questions about your personal online shopping behavior and your opinion on online styling services.

Additional Information

The participant will be asked questions about their demographics, clothing sizes, online shopping experiences, and opinions on online styling services.Your participation will require approximately 10 minutes or less.

Contact Information

Jana Pehrson, Student,Textiles,Merchandising,and Design, (865)209-7056, and jem9h@mtmail.mtsu.edu
Faculty Advisor contact if PI is a student (Jasmin Kwon Vu, Dr., Textiles,Merchandising,and Design, (615)904-8340,jasmin.kwon@mtsu.edu)

Institutional Review Board, Middle Tennessee State University
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Tel 615 494 8918 | Email: irb_information@mtsu.edu | www.mtsu.edu/irb