Suited for Retail: The Influence of Consumer Attire on Purchase Decisions

Although people make decisions every day about what they will wear and how they will present themselves to others, few retailers or shoppers would suspect that these clothing choices influence purchasing decisions during an afternoon trip to the mall. In the present research, we investigate whether basic attire choices influence personal economic decisions. We demonstrate that when people wear more formal attire, their likelihood of making purchases across diverse categories increases—a finding not intuited by either retailers or shoppers. We show that formal dress heightens purchasing behavior because it enhances a specific form of confidence—social confidence. In doing so, formal dress serves as a buffer against social anxiety in individuals’ decision-making. In addition to addressing alternative explanations, we also demonstrate a reversal: outside of mainstream outlets (i.e., in counterculture stores), casual dress actually increases purchase intentions. As casual dress grows in popularity across a range of social settings, our research offers important implications for how such a shift may influence consumer behavior.