

Chapter 19

That's So Last Season!

An Exploratory Study on Information Technology as Fashion

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores Information Technology (IT) adoption behavior in firms as fashion first and a means of leveraging competitive advantage second. In this paper, IT is treated as a product and compared to fashion apparel through a distinct set of characteristics that define the behavior and nature of the apparel market. The underlying questions that are posed by this paper is twofold: (1) Is IT in fashion? (2) If it is, then how does it affect the adoption of IT from a behavioral perspective and what are the results? Through an exploratory study of the topic, this paper seeks to provide further insight to firms on how to go about adopting new innovative technologies. Moreover, by enticing firms to pay special attention to detecting and predicting such fashions and the value they add, this paper sets the ground for future research in the field of emerging technologies and IT adoption.

INTRODUCTION

Information Technology (IT) has proven to make the lives of both individuals and organizations significantly easier as they are adopted over time, and more efficient holistically. Nonetheless, improved functionality is among a myriad of reasons why people chose to adopt new and innovative technologies. What has been observed is that the adoption of such technologies takes place despite the minimal differences that exist in the solutions offered by these technologies (Katz and Sugiyama, 2005). It comes as no surprise that we question ourselves about how people base their decisions on adopting a certain technology. This then begs the question of what makes people accept such technologies even though they may not add much functional value and conversely, why people reject such technologies despite their functional excellence (Ali and Deligiannaki, 2011;

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Rai and Sharma, 2015). It is also understood that the more dispersed technologies become and the more they evolve ubiquitously, performance is no longer the single factor used to assess the magnitude of a technology's success. As suggested by Wang (2010), "social approval" helps us express ourselves better and at the same time, allows us to comprehend other people's behavior and perceive them on a much more effective scale.

Adoption of IT as a fashion implies that the popularity of a certain IT product or service has proliferated to the extent that it is something that companies want to "wear" in order to impress. An example of this would be the utilization of individual personal computers over time to cache or mine through rich media sources to extrapolate content that is helpful in creating and delivering new IT products such as e-learning tools. The fashionization of IT has created many gaps that need to be filled. With that in mind, this paper explores the fashion adoption process in the context of IT and bridges the gap in terms of available literatures on the contributing factors that stimulate the IT fashion adoption decision and the diffusion level of IT at the point of adoption.

This exploratory paper touches upon two key points with regards to the adoption of IT as fashion. Firstly, it strengthens the belief that adopters treat IT innovations as fashions, and that the majority follow what is popular. The position taken here is formulated by the collection of scattered ideas from previous literature, research, and published articles. Secondly, after exploring the "IT as a fashion" idea, the paper emphasizes on the innovation diffusion model (Roger, 1962) to explore the effect of time of adoption on decision-making factors and expected results. Since adoption decisions depend on the factor of social acceptance besides technical performance for fashions, time of adoption becomes a sensitive factor for organizations wanting to gain a competitive edge.

The objective of the first component of the paper is reached by adopting a metaphoric approach to comparing IT to apparel. Throughout this section, the characteristics of both the IT and apparel markets are examined and similarly, popular innovations from both markets are compared in the context of the topic at hand. The reason behind the apparel market serving as a reference point for comparison is because apparel is the leading fashion market; therefore, one becomes a strong comparative benchmark for the other. The second component of the paper, on the other hand, depicts illustrative scales that visually conceptualize the extent to which the factors influence the decision to adopt innovative technologies and consequentially, the results of the decision on the organization at large and where it stands in the market. On that note, these scales have also been linked to the position of adopters according to where they fall on the innovation diffusion curve.

As a result, it is highly beneficial for firms to understand that the time a certain technology is adopted, as conceptualized by the diffusion curve, interplays with and affects the value that the technology yields for the firm. Primarily, the adoption decision teeters between two desirable outcomes depending on where firms are categorized on the diffusion curve – better performance and greater social status and acceptance. This then, yields a respective competitive advantage in their arena. In addition, by being able to foresee the behavior of innovations, companies can strategize on a much more effective scale and similarly, put together strategic plans that will, ultimately, allow them to identify and foresee potential future fashions and the value they may bring to them.

This paper has been structured in the following manner. First it defines fashion and identifies the characteristics that have been used to compare IT and apparel. Then it presents the nature of both markets and compares the two in that context. Next it examines the behavior of both markets and forms the basis for the subsequent chapter, which looks at the effects of IT fashion adoption time on decision-making and subsequently, the resulting outcomes. Lastly, the paper concludes with a section that sets the ground for future research and identifies the implications for business.

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