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Consumer awareness about mask repurchase intention during coronavirus: The case of Chinese sample

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Abstract

The worldwide coronavirus pandemic has brought to light the importance of having a reliable supply of masks for each person. This study aims to understand the effect of personal awareness (including community, others', and safety awareness) on consumption conformity and the repurchase intention of masks. The research method used the SPSS 22.0 and AMOS 22.0 statistical systems to analyze descriptive statistics in terms of reliability, validity, structural equation modeling, and moderated regression analysis. A total of 272 Chinese participants were recruited via an online survey website (www.sojump.com) from May 1 to May 14, 2020. Findings indicated that mask users' awareness can be categorized into three distinct types: community, others', and safety awareness. The more community and safety awareness is perceived, the higher the level of consumption conformity. In contrast, others' has no statistical effect on consumption conformity or repurchase intention. The positive influence of consumption conformity on the repurchase intention of masks is also weaker than price perception. However, another moderating variable, mask quality, has no moderating effect. The results of this study can help mask manufacturers and distributors retain their customers, resulting in reasonable protective measures while maintaining market order. Theoretical and managerial implications for mask suppliers are also provided.

Key Words: COVID pandemic, mask consumption, personal awareness, consumption conformity, repurchase intention

Ⅰ. Introduction

The 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is believed to have originated in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China, with clinical manifestations similar to those of the severe acute respiratory syndrome outbreak in 2003. The intensification of the current disaster has profoundly influenced global economic and social development. The global COVID-19 pandemic has placed a large demand on personal protective equipment for every person. Masks, which are required for bacterial protection, are in short supply and have increased significantly in cost. The lack of a clear end to the pandemic requires that people need to create a long-term, cost-effective solution to

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the mask shortage (Chalikonda et al., 2020). A strongly significant effect of the COVID-19 pandemic has been observed within the fashion industry. To make masks available to everyone, many fashion factories worldwide have begun to focus on the mass production of masks.

Some empirical studies have shown that residents' disaster preparedness is essential to their coping with the effect of disasters. Existing academic research mostly measures residents' disaster preparedness from the perspective of ensuring the physical safety of residents (Xu et al., 2019). For example, residents are asked whether they have emergency supplies (such as flashlights, radios, and purified water), whether they have an escape plan, and whether they have purchased disaster-related insurance. According to relevant studies, with the outbreak of the epidemic, people continue to repurchase masks (Chalikonda et al., 2020), and their personal awareness and response to coronavirus pandemic have been of wide concern (Nicola et al., 2020). When consumers repurchase masks, they are mainly influenced by their personal awareness, how these influences are mediated by the consumption conformity, and what kind of moderating effect the quality and price of masks have. All these are very worthy of our attention and research. China is a mountainous country with frequent disasters. Despite this fact, few academic quantitative studies in China have proved the correlations among personal awareness, consumption conformity, and repurchase intention of masks. Thus, this study is urgent.

The objectives of this study are as follows: (1) to integrate the research streams on three personal awareness (namely, community, others', and safety awareness) in the COVID pandemic, then develop a comprehensive model with consumption conformity and mask repurchase; (2) to propose and test a model in which consumption conformity is perceived as mediating the relationship between personal awareness and the one outcome variable of repurchase intention; and (3) to provide the moderating effect of mask quality and price perception between consumption conformity and repurchase intention. Then, this paper presents a research framework, suggests implications, and discusses areas for further study when masks are likely to be appropriate for long-term use for everyday citizens.

Ⅱ. Theoretical background and hypotheses

1. Personal awareness

In the study of mask consumption during the epidemic period, personal awareness is indispensable and crucial. Burns and Engdahl (1998) argued that the shape and feel of awareness are heavily social, and this statement is no less true of our experience of community awareness than it is of our experience of individual awareness. Song (2012) measured the effect of personal awareness and used factors on attachment and innovation resistance to measure the effect of social awareness on conformity and social enhancement to establish a cause-and-effect relationship on the intention to purchase new mobile phones. Personal awareness can be divided into the following three categories: (1)Community awareness generally refers to people's dependence and trust on their own community ; (2)Others' awareness generally refers to people's care for others and their attention to the people around the society ; (3)Safety awareness generally refers to people's cognition of safety, whether they pay attention to safety hazards and safety problems or not.

Accordingly, most community awareness theory is dominated by the idea of contentious politics

and action with a political purpose (Laamanen et al., 2015). Driven by community awareness, the attention and purchase intention of peer pressure items, popular items, and conformity items will increase, that is, people will tend to practice consumption conformity (Santor et al., 2000). On others' awareness, Reddy (2003) indicated that awareness of others' attention, which provides emotional or objective information, links the self and others. Other's awareness enables consumers to follow others' consumption behaviors and suggestions, such as consumption conformity. The last type of awareness is safety awareness. Safety awareness is crucial in understanding the effect of safety on the public in an outdoor facility, and citizens' safety is a major responsibility (Ali et al., 2011). The higher the personal safety awareness, the stronger the consumption conformity of the safety equipment (Lewis Jr. et al., 2016).

In the present study, personal awareness is divided into three parts, namely, community, others', and safety awareness. The discussion gives rise to the following hypotheses:

H1a: Community awareness can improve consumers' consumption conformity.

+: Others' awareness can improve consumers' consumption conformity.

H1c: Safety awareness can improve consumers' consumption conformity.

2. Consumption conformity

During COVID-19, individuals usually need many masks to protect themselves. Residents need to store some masks when they see other people panic buying masks; the act of buying with others implies consumption conformity. Conformity refers to the process whereby individuals adjust their beliefs or behaviors to resemble those of real or imagined others (Dong & Zhong, 2017). The present study attaches consumer psychology to conformity and uses it as the concept of consumption conformity.

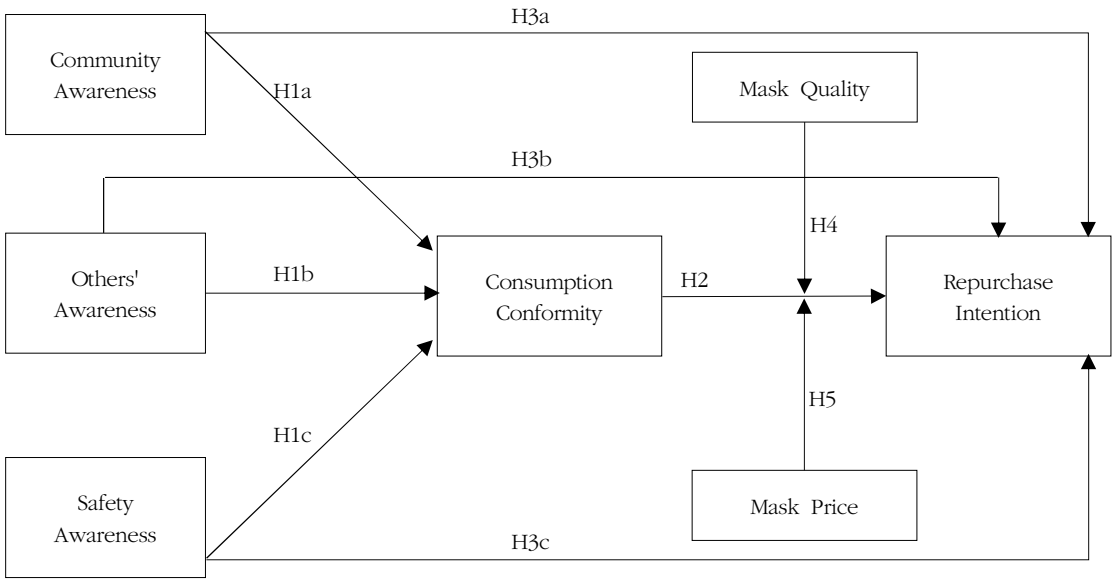
Empirical evidence shows a positive linkage between consumption conformity and repurchase intention (Santor et al., 2000). When people rush to buy masks that they trust, most people will buy them (Chalikonda et al., 2020), in other words, the consumption conformity effect. Thus, conformity in consumption will increase the repurchase rate due to habit or other personal reasons. When such conformity is elicited, people's product evaluations, purchasing intentions, or behaviors are expected to become consistent with the norm (Chou et al., 2013). Thus, the following hypothesis is postulated:

H2: Consumption conformity is positively associated with repurchase intention of masks.

3. Repurchase intention

With the progress of the pandemic, people can no longer live without masks, which have become the necessity with the highest repurchase rate. Repurchase intention refers to the consumers' subjective probability of returning to the store and is the major determinant of the buying action (Wu et al., 2014). Ting (2014) indicated that repurchase intention is similar with purchase intention, except with the element of experience. In the present study, repurchase intention is defined as the likelihood that the customer will repurchase masks in the future.

Nicola et al. (2020) pointed out that personal awareness during COVID-19 has a considerable effect on the shopping behavior of products. For example, the influence of individual community awareness on social activities is positive (Burns & Engdahl, 1998), and the purchase intention of masks is no exception. Others' awareness (others' attention) can improve the positive outcome



〈Fig. 1〉 Research model

variable (Reddy, 2003). Personal safety awareness plays a positive role in the purchase of safety equipment (Ali et al., 2011). The positive relationship between personal awareness and repurchase intention can be derived by examining the mediating role of consumption conformity. This discussion gives rise to the following hypotheses:

H3a: Community awareness can improve consumers' repurchase intention of masks.

H3b: Others' awareness can improve consumers' repurchase intention of masks.

H3c: Safety awareness can improve consumers' repurchase intention of masks.

4. Mask quality and mask price

Disease does not only affect the body and mind. Disabling conditions due to mask quality and key economic factors such as mask price are also affected. Sometimes researchers regarded perceived product as an antecedent to a person's outcome of willingness to buy and also re-viewed product quality as influenced by perceived price (Sinha & Batra, 1999). Thus, perceived price has a dual effect. First, price is a financial sacrifice and contributes negatively to value. However, perceived price also influences perceptions of quality and has a positive influence on value (Sweeney et. al., 1999). Although this latter relationship has been widely discussed in the literature, the relationship may not be pearlized across all product types. Rao and Kent's (1989) meta-analysis concluded that the phenomenon had only been supported for moderately priced, frequently purchased goods as opposed to higher-priced, infrequently purchased goods. The present study mainly focuses on masks, which not only have a low price but are also a daily necessity due to COVID-19. With respect to disaster research, many studies have proved that perceived price and perceived quality of necessities tend to be negatively associated with behavioral intention. Thus, we test these relationships through the following hypotheses:

H4: Perceived mask quality negatively moderates the relationship between consumption conformity and repurchase intention of masks.

H5: Perceived mask price negatively moderates the relationship between consumption conformity and repurchase intention of masks.

Ⅲ. Research model and methodology

1. Research model

〈Fig. 1〉 shows our hypothesized model, the left portion of which incorporates the direct influence of personal awareness (that is, community, others', and safety awareness) on consumption conformity and repurchase intention. 〈Fig. 1〉 also shows the moderating influence of perceived mask quality and mask price on the positive relationship between consumption conformity and repurchase intention.

2. Data collection

A self-administered online questionnaire (www.sojump.com) was developed to examine the hypotheses. First, we screened out the respondents with the question, "Have you ever purchased masks for yourself during the COVID-19 pandemic?" The answers were "Yes (1)" or "No (2)." For the respondents who answered yes, another open question was used to further inquire about the main variables. A total of 272 usable responses were used in the data analysis after eliminating incomplete responses. As COVID-19 began to spread from China, which is the country with the highest mask production and consumption, the recent study was limited to Chinese respondents. The language of the questionnaire is in English and Chinese. The respondents were asked to identify the masks they were using. Thus, they answered all the questions from May 1 to 14 in 2020.

3. Measurement instrument

All the variables in 〈Table 2〉 were measured using several items adopted from the existing literature. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) was used to measure these items. The measurement scales with personal awareness, namely, community awareness (Song, 2012), others' awareness (Reddy, 2003), and safety awareness (Ali et al., 2011), were adopted from related research.

Given that the rest of the constructs in this study have been well established in the existing literature, we adapted previously validated measures as appropriate, including consumption conformity (Santor et al., 2000), repurchase intention of masks (Ting, 2014), and perceived mask quality (Sweeney et. al., 1999). Mask price was defined as consumers' perception of the masks' price compared with other products with similar specifications (such as N95 or N94), and the measures were four items derived from Sinha and Batra (1999), which compared the price of the good to other masks with equivalent features.

Ⅳ. Data analysis and results

1. Demographic data

Descriptive statistics were conducted to examine the respondents' demographic characteristics, including gender, age, education, and monthly income. In terms of gender, 27.2% of the respondents were male and 72.8% were

〈Table 1〉 Demographics characteristics(n =272)

Category		Frequency(s)	Percentage(%)
Gender	Male	74	27.2
	Female	198	72.8
Age	10s	26	9.6
	20s	174	64
	30s	35	12.9
	40s	37	13.6
Education	High School	36	13.2
	Undergraduate	187	68.8
	Graduate	49	18
Income	Under 1,000,000 WON	65	23.9
	1,000,000~2,000,000 WON	108	39.7
	2,000,000~3,000,000 WON	51	18.8
	Above 3,000,000 WON	48	17.6

female. The largest proportion was 20~29 years old (64%), followed by below 20 years old (9.6%), 30~39 years old (12.9%), and above 40 years old (13.6%). Given that a random questionnaire survey was used, a problem of gender and age imbalance arose. A follow-up study will use a more standardized distribution. The respondents have high educational backgrounds, listed as follows: undergraduate (68.8%), high school (13.2%), and graduate (18%). Most of them are in their 20s; thus, their educational background is generally college graduates. As for monthly income, 23.9%, 39.7%, 18.8%, and 17.6% of the respondents reported a monthly personal income of below 1,000,000 won; 1,000,000~2,000,000 won, 2,000,000~3,000,000 won, and more than 3,000,000 won, respectively. The reason is that most participants are generally young, and the monthly income of the respondents is not high. Demographic information of the sample was reported as descriptive analysis, as shown in (Table 1).

2. Reliability and validity

Confirmatory factor analysis with maximum likelihood algorithm was conducted using AMOS 22.0 to test the models' fit to the data. 〈Table 2〉 shows the results of absolute fit indices (χ^2/df = 2.203; RMSEA = 0.067; RMR = 0.044) and the incremental fit indices (GFI = 0.838; CFI = 0.930; IFI = 0.931; TLI = 0.920) demonstrated a good model fit (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). Internal consistency was assessed by composite reliability (CR). All the CR values exceeded the threshold value of 0.8, indicating good reliability. Convergent validity was accessed by factor loadings and average of variance extracted (AVE) (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Cronbach's alpha values of the constructs ranged from 0.861 to 0.959, which are all greater than 0.70. The standard estimate ranged from 0.665 to 0.968, which exceeds 0.7, showing high convergent validity. The AVE re-presents the mean variance extracted for the item loading on a construct. The AVE for each construct exceeds 0.6, suggesting adequate convergence.

In discriminant validity, according to the suggestion of Fornell and Larcker (1981), the AVE of the construct should be greater than the squared correlations between any two constructs. The outcomes indicate that the AVE values of all constructs 〈Table 3〉 exceed the squared correlations between any two constructs,

〈Table 2〉 Validation of measurement items

Construct	Scales	Standard Estimates	t-value	Cronbach's α	AVE	CR
Community Awareness	When buying products, I will observe most groups buying or using goods.	0.665	—	0.863	0.613	0.908
	When buying products, I will consult with most groups.	0.701	10.151***			
	The products I buy are generally accepted by most groups.	0.867	12.006***			
	The products I buy will make a good impression on most groups.	0.876	12.073***			
Others' Awareness	I care about what others think of the products I buy.	0.875	—	0.891	0.674	0.894
	I care about the projection of others to my product.	0.896	18.949***			
	I care about others' evaluation of my products.	0.731	14.047***			
	I care whether others like my products.	0.770	15.191***			
Safety Awareness	I have a strong sense of safety.	0.880	—	0.861	0.618	0.913
	I consciously stay away from the epidemic area.	0.819	16.176***			
	No matter where I am, I can find a safe exit.	0.699	12.919***			
	I know the call numbers of the police, ambulance, fire engine, etc.	0.734	13.821***			
Consumption Conformity	I usually purchase what I told.	0.964	—	0.959	0.860	0.958
	I usually obey my parents.	0.960	39.864***			
	I often purchase products that are agreed.	0.968	41.947***			
	I often refer to products purchased by people around me.	0.807	20.721***			
Mask Quality	The mask would be reliable.	0.690	—	0.902	0.652	0.924
	The mask would be dependable.	0.754	11.686***			
	The mask would be durable.	0.697	10.844***			
	The workmanship on the mask would be good.	0.935	14.163***			
	The mask would be isolating viruses.	0.926	14.056***			
Mask Price	I tend to buy the lowest priced mask that will fit my needs.	0.806	—	0.870	0.638	0.902
	When buying a mask, I look for the cheapest one available.	0.840	15.230***			
	When it comes to buying, I rely heavily on price.	0.824	14.897***			
	Price is the most important factor when I am choosing a mask.	0.719	12.544***			
Repurchase Intention	I will buy the same mask again.	0.773	—	0.900	0.696	0.926
	I will suggest the people to use this mask.	0.881	15.631***			
	I will buy this mask of the same brand again.	0.898	15.951***			
	I will buy this mask even if the price is a little higher.	0.778	13.506***			

Notes: χ^2/df=2.203; RMSEA=0.067; RMR=0.044; GFI=0.838; CFI=0.930; IFI=0.931; TLI=0.920; p^{***}〈0.001

supporting the discriminant validity. Therefore, the measurement model in the current study shows acceptable model fit, good reliability, and sufficient convergent and discriminant validity.

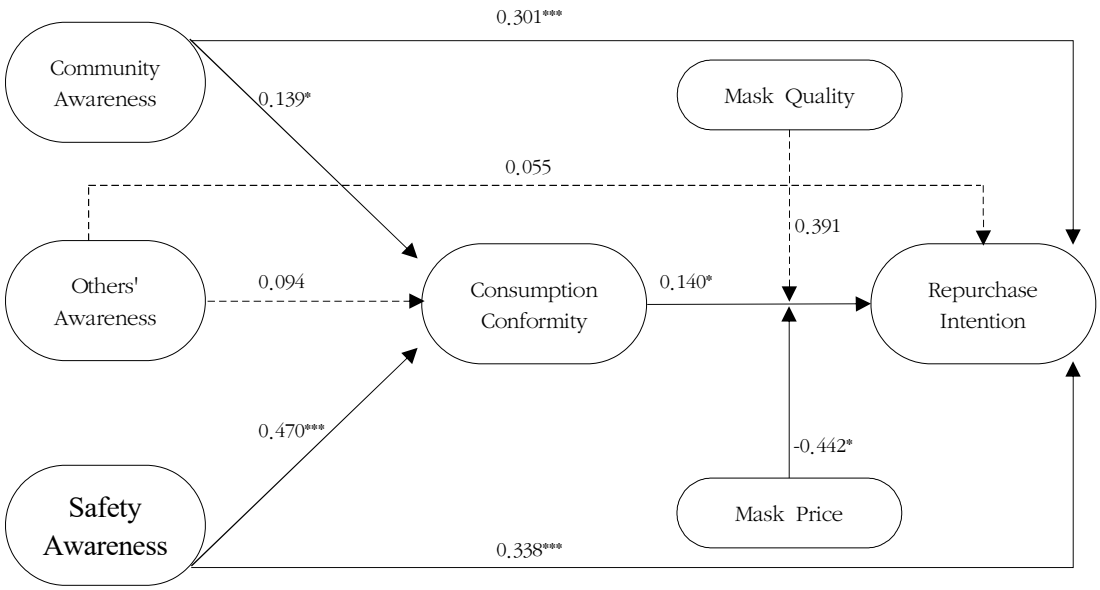
3. Testing of hypotheses

As shown in the results of the structural e quation model in 〈Fig. 2〉, the indicators of fit in our model are acceptable (χ^2/df=

〈Table 3〉 Test of discriminant validity

	Community Awareness	Others' Awareness	Safety Awareness	Consumption Conformity	Mask Quality	Mask Price	Repurchase Intention
Community Awareness	0.613[a]						
Others' Awareness	0.321[b]	0.674[a]					
Safety Awareness	0.470[b]	0.130[b]	0.618[a]				
Consumption Conformity	0.352[b]	0.182[b]	0.522[b]	0.860[a]			
Mask Quality	0.330[b]	0.144[b]	0.437[b]	0.412[b]	0.652[a]		
Mask Price	0.481[b]	0.245[b]	0.585[b]	0.468[b]	0.646[b]	0.638[a]	
Repurchase Intention	0.481[b]	0.194[b]	0.517[b]	0.405[b]	0.241[b]	0.488[b]	0.696[a]

Notes: [a]AVE of each variable, [b]Square of correlation coefficient between latent variables



χ^2/df=2.758; RMSEA=0.081; RMR=0.054; GFI=0.862; CFI=0.932; IFI=0.932; TLI=0.921; p^{***}〈0.001

〈Fig. 2〉 Results of structural equation model

2.758; RMSEA=0.081; RMR=0.054; GFI= 0.862; CFI=0.932; IFI=0.932; TLI=0.921). 〈Table 4〉 presents the results of the hypot hesis. H1a, H1b, and H1c predict that perso nal awareness positively influences consump tion conformity with mask products. Commu nity awareness (β=0.139, p〈0.05) and safe ty awareness (β=0.470, p〈0.001) have a si gnificant positive effect on consumption conf ormity, whereas others' awareness has no si gnificant effect. Thus, consumers perceive h igher community and safety awareness, whic h have more consumption conformity with m ask products for personal safety. The result s also show that the effect of safety awaren ess is greater than that of community aware

〈Table 4〉 Results of hypothesis testing

Hypotheses Path		Standardized Coefficient	*SE*	*t*-value	Contrast
H1a	Community awareness → Consumption Conformity	0.139*	0.108	2.376	Accepted
H1b	Others' awareness → Consumption Conformity	0.094	0.062	1.637	Rejected
H1c	Safety awareness → Consumption Conformity	0.470***	0.094	7.750	Accepted
H2	Consumption Conformity → Repurchase Intention	0.140*	0.041	2.085	Accepted
H3a	Community awareness → Repurchase Intention	0.301***	0.073	4.581	Accepted
H3b	Others' awareness → Repurchase Intention	0.055	0.039	0.929	Rejected
H3c	Safety awareness → Repurchase Intention	0.338***	0.068	4.689	Accepted

Notes: $p^{***}<0.001$, $p^{*}<0.05$

〈Table 5〉 Moderating effect results

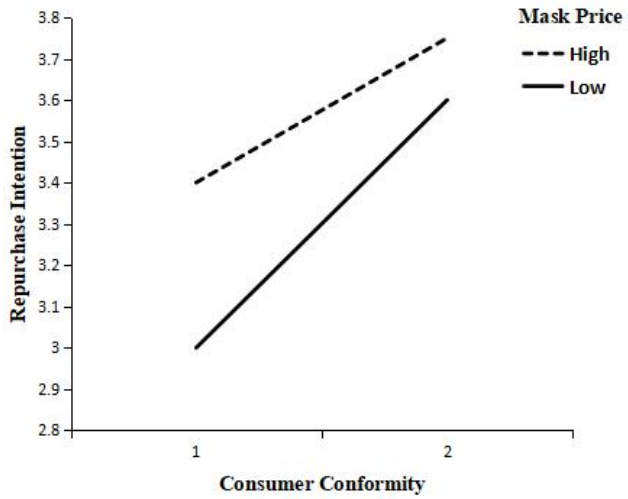
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	*t*-value	*p*-value
		B	*SE*	β		
1	(Constant)	2.387	0.157		15.253	0.000
	Consumption conformity	0.310	0.043	0.404***	7.262	0.000
2	(Constant)	1.600	0.232		6.898	0.000
	Consumption conformity	0.202	0.046	0.263***	4.364	0.000
	Mask quality	−0.026	0.069	−0.026	−0.383	0.702
	Mask price	−0.346	0.071	−0.336***	−4.846	0.000
3	(Constant)	1.549	0.502		3.086	0.002
	Consumption conformity	0.230	0.161	0.299*	1.424	0.050
	Mask quality	−0.210	0.189	−0.206	−1.110	0.268
	Mask price	−0.545	0.175	−0.529**	−3.107	0.002
	Consumption conformity × Mask quality	0.058	0.056	−0.391	−1.039	0.300
	Consumption conformity × Mask price	−0.066	0.053	−0.442*	−1.235	0.018

Notes: $p^{***}<0.001$, $p^{**}<0.01$, $p^{*}<0.05$

ness because the main use or purchase of m asks is for safety, and safety awareness is t he most important. By contrast, others' awar eness does not work at all in disasters, and no one cares about others during such chaoti c moments. Thus, H1a and H1c are supporte d.

Another important result is that community awareness (β=0.301, $p<0.001$) and safety awareness (β=0.338, $p<0.001$) have a significant positive effect on repurchase intention of masks, whereas others' awareness has no significant effect on consumer behavior. Consumption conformity (β=0.140, $p<0.05$) also has a positive significant effect on repurchase intention of masks. Thus, H2, H3a, and H3c are supported. The results of mediating show that community and safety awareness affect repurchase intention of masks through consumption conformity. Consumption conformity plays a partial mediation effect between the relationship of personal awareness and repurchase intention.

H4 and H5 predict that perceived mask quality and mask price negatively moderate the positive effect of consumption conformity and repurchase behavior. As predicted by H4, the result of this calculation process shows that the moderating effect of perceived mask quality is insignificant. Regarding H5, the result of this calculation process shows that the moderating effect of perceived mask



〈Fig. 3〉 Moderating the effect of perceived mask price on the relationship between consumption conformity and repurchase intention

price is significant (β=−0.442, t=−1.235, p〈0.05). The analysis indicates that 16% of the variation in repurchase intention can be explained by consumption conformity and the interaction effect between consumption conformity and perceived mask price (F=14.761, p〈0.001). In other words, the coefficient of the perceived mask price representing the interaction between consumption conformity and repurchase intention is negative and significant (Table 5). Thus, customers' perceived mask price reduces the positive effect of consumption conformity on the repurchase intention of masks during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, H5 is supported, but not H4.

To facilitate interpretation, the relationships were again plotted with perceived mask price and consumption conformity, taking values of low and high, respectively (Fig. 3). The figure shows that consumption conformity has a stronger positive relationship with repurchase intention, which has a low mask price (solid line) perceived by customers. When consumers perceive high mask price (dashed line), they will not take the initiative to repurchase even if they have good conformity.

V. Conclusion and implications

The results of this study elucidate some important issues on the effect of personal awareness (that is, community, others', and safety awareness) on consumption conformity and repurchase intention, which is moderated by perceived mask quality and mask price during the COVID-19 pandemic that have not been addressed by previous studies. This study proposes a model that strives to understand personal awareness success among community, others', and safety. Consistent with our hypotheses, we present the following findings.

First, this study uncovers the influence of personal awareness on consumption conformity. Community and safety awareness can increase consumption conformity, which is consistent with the extant research findings (Lewis Jr. et al., 2016). In addition, respondents care more about safety awareness, which plays a more important role in consumption conformity than in

community awareness. The potential implication is that people pay more attention to safety, especially during this pandemic period. Our study emphasizes the importance of safety awareness of customers, facing the worldwide disaster. We show that previously, people were mostly concerned about their own safety, extending the findings of Ali et al. (2011). Our findings can help marketers and the government clarify how to conduct safety education to improve safety awareness.

Second, consumption conformity of customers can increase the repurchase intention of masks, which is consistent with a previous study (Chou et al., 2013). The results suggest that administrations should consider focusing more of their energy on providing consumption conformity. Managerially, our findings on the positive effect of the consumption conformity of masks suggest that administration or fashion marketers should be sure to provide mask-related information updates, such as a message that shows that people all over the world are wearing masks.

Third, perceived mask quality and price are factors that affect the behavioral intent of users unless addressed appropriately. Mask price has a negative significant moderating effect on the positive relationship between consumption conformity and repurchase intention, which is consistent with the research of Sinha and Batra (1999). High-price perceptions weaken the relationship between consumption conformity and repurchase intention, whereas mask quality has no effect. Thus, customers' decisions are generally based on perceived price rather than mask quality. Therefore, marketers must highlight the rationality of price to mitigate mask price perceptions. Policymakers may also offer incentives to tax filers about mask purchasing, such as tax rebates upon changes in tax policies.

Finally, some methodological limitations and future research opportunities should be addressed. This study examines only Chinese respondents. However, the pandemic has spread to countries worldwide. Future investigations on whether the variables and research model of this study are applicable to participants in other countries would be useful.

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