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Inaction Inertia Impacting Purchase Intention for Fashion Products and Moderation of Involvement

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Abstract

Time-limited promotions have become a popular strategy across various product categories including fashion mobile platforms. While consumer feel content and satisfied when they get this , those who miss the opportunity may develop negative feelings and tend to give up on additional price discounts. This phenomenon, known as inaction inertia, has been a crucial subject of consumer behavior research. However, the underlying mechanism within the context of fashion consumption has yet to be discussed. This study investigated whether consumers show inaction inertia when purchasing fashion products and whether involvement moderates product purchases in inaction inertia situations. Hypotheses were tested through an online survey with 336 Korean participants based on fictitious purchase scenarios. In the results, the hypothesized negative influence of inaction inertia on purchase intention for fashion products was statistically confirmed. Furthermore, the hypothesized moderation effect of involvement in the mechanism was confirmed - only within the high (vs. low) age group. To explain, the negative effect of inaction inertia significantly decreases among older consumers of high (vs. low) involvement levels. We contributed to the related academic flow by performing an experimental study on inaction inertia, which had relatively little empirical research compared to the influence confirmed in practice so far. We also provided a novel idea by demonstrating that the moderating effect of product involvement differs depending on the age group.

Keywords: Inaction Inertia, Fashion Consumption, Involvement, Purchase Intention

1. Introduction

Product discounts can be found in various forms. Discount policies such as seasonal, event, brand, and item discounts are active. The proportion of discount sales, such as new product discounts and today-only special sales, has recently increased. Suppose these discount policies need to be utilized appropriately. In that case, it may hurt brand perception, image, and product purchases, so accurate prediction of discount policies is necessary [1]. In particular, it is important to consider how consumers feel when limited-time sales, such as

new product discounts and today-only sales, return to the original price or a smaller discount after a certain period. Consumers view it as a benefit when they purchase a product at a discounted price compared to purchasing it at a regular price. However, consumers who miss a discount opportunity experience regret; even if they experience regret, they give up the purchase if the subsequent opportunity is less attractive than the initial opportunity. Even though the follow-up opportunity is a real benefit, the follow-up opportunity is felt as a loss because the more significant benefit was experienced in the initial opportunity [2]. Tykocinski conceptualized the phenomenon of inaction in an initial opportunity, continuing to subsequent opportunities as the inaction inertia effect [3].

In previous research on inaction inertia, various studies were conducted on differences in product attributes, consumer tendencies, and consumer behavior. In addition, the variables affecting inaction inertia were studied based on the essential elements of the product, such as practicality, hedonic value, and attractiveness, and the research stimuli were also diverse. However, existing studies have a broad scope and a variety of irritants, so there are limitations in applying them to fashion products. Fashion products form a vast market, prices vary depending on each product and brand, and consumers' interests differ, so it is not appropriate to generalize existing theories of inaction inertia. Due to the nature of fashion products, there are many factors related to purchase, such as practical, symbolic, and emotional. Hence, the impact of the purchase price is multifaceted [4]. Accordingly, an academic need exists to reflect these characteristics in the study of inaction inertia.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Inaction Inertia in Time-Limited Promotions of Fashion Products

In an economic context, price is the money we must sacrifice to get what we want. In other words, price represents the money required to obtain a certain amount of a good or service [5]. Prices can determine which products and services should be produced by providing guidelines that indicate how resources should be used [6]. Price has a significant impact on buyer judgment and product perception. When consumers cannot evaluate product quality using intrinsic cues, they use price as the most representative quality indicator among extrinsic cues [7]. In other words, when there is a lack of information about a product because it is a new product or a product that consumers have not encountered before, it can be evaluated using extrinsic clues; then the price factor becomes influential. The product's price is the first price factor that affects consumers' purchasing behavior. The most essential factor is the quality evaluation of the product, and the decision to purchase is determined based on the consumer's tastes and preferences [6, 7].

Inaction inertia, as defined by Tykocinski, is the consumer's psychology of maintaining a state of inaction after missing an initial opportunity. Tykocinski's research identified this phenomenon, where a person who misses an initial opportunity to act does not retake any action when encountering a similar opportunity. This avoidance of action arises from the regret motive, a consumer's tendency to avoid future uncomfortable thought processes and regret by giving up the current opportunity to act. Tykocinski demonstrated inaction inertia through the difference in purchase intention after establishing an initial and a follow-up opportunity. When an initial opportunity is missed, and a follow-up opportunity is encountered, people's reactions can be seen, such as the more attractive the initial opportunity is, the more negatively they view the follow-up opportunity. This is because this situation activates counterfactual thinking, a key element in understanding inaction inertia [4]. Since the content of such thinking is sensitive to the contrast effect, the intensity of experienced regret increases accordingly [9]. Also, when there are two different alternatives with the same utility, people want to keep the same alternative once they have chosen one alternative. This is because once one alternative is chosen, the

other alternative that must be given up is perceived as a loss. Therefore, the fact that inaction in an initial opportunity continues to lead to inaction in subsequent opportunities can be seen as consumers perceiving subsequent opportunities as losses rather than opportunities [9].

The impact of this inaction inertia can be observed in time offer promotion strategies where the price is restored to its original price after a temporary price drop. Prior studies documented that product sales may decrease after a product discount promotion ends [10, 11]. After a consumer experiences a discounted product of a specific brand sold in the market, time passes, and they revisit the market when they need the product, but the discount has ended. At this time, products from other brands were listed to determine consumers' purchase intention when other alternatives emerged, and it was found that they were more likely to switch to other brands [12]. Additionally, it was found that people were more likely to switch to another brand if they missed a significant discount than if they missed a small discount on branded products. Past research noted that the impact of inaction inertia on decision-making, valuation, and regret should be considered as causes of inaction inertia [13].

Inaction inertia also influences purchasing decisions, depending on how much loss people perceive for missing the initial opportunity. Inaction inertia is often motivated by the fear of regret, which arises when comparing the missed opportunity with the current one. When the current opportunity seems to offer a relatively inferior outcome, an unpleasant thought process is initiated, leading to the rejection of the current opportunity to act. The effects of inaction inertia vary depending on the size of the benefits and losses people perceive [14]. In a study by Zhang et al., inaction inertia decreases purchase intention through regret [15]: The purchase intention of consumers with a high level of regret was lower than that of consumers with a low level of regret, and the product attributes had a moderating effect on purchase intention. In addition, when the initial opportunity is larger than the follow-up opportunity, consumers perceive the follow-up opportunity negatively, viewing the follow-up opportunity as a loss rather than a potential gain, even if it is still attractive. The stress that occurs when a purchase is given up appears as a feeling of regret [16]. On the basis of the past literature, the following hypothesis is established:

H₁. Inaction inertia will decrease purchase intention in the subsequent price-down situations.

2.2 Category Involvement

Involvement refers to consumers' interest and passion for various categories [17]. Fashion involvement refers to consumers' continued interest in fashion products [18]. It can also be seen as the overall level of interest in the object or the centrality of the object to the individual's ego structure. In other words, involvement is the degree of a person's interest in the object [19]. These emotions can be seen as consumers knowing more about a specific product or brand and paying attention to advertisements. In the case of high-involvement products, continuous participation in the brand can occur [20]. For example, continued interest in fashion indicates continued involvement and brand involvement may occur in the case of a consumer's preferred brand. Products with hedonic elements and products expressing self-concept evoke continuous involvement, while functional and utilitarian products, in contrast, may not be seen as continuous involvement [21].

Consumers with high fashion involvement tend to prefer high-priced products, and consumers have different levels of decision-making processes and information search depending on their level of involvement, which significantly impacts purchase intention. In addition, to determine the shopping tendency regarding clothing involvement, the difference in purchasing behavior by involvement group was analyzed, and a significant difference was found between the high involvement, medium involvement, and low involvement groups [22].

Consumer involvement in purchasing is an important explanatory variable because it determines attitudes and behavior toward consumption [23]. Given the pivotal role of consumer involvement in our research, we formulated the following hypothesis to demonstrate that fashion involvement can be influenced by the moderating effect of inaction inertia.

H₂. Consumer's product involvement will have a positive moderating effect on the impact of inaction inertia on purchase intention.

Specifically, it is predicted that when consumers' fashion involvement is high, the impact of inaction inertia on purchase intention will be stronger than when it is low.

Additionally, the moderating effect of involvement, a novel area of research, is expected to differ depending on consumer age. This anticipation has led to the formulation of the following hypothesis, adding a new dimension to our understanding of consumer behavior. Accordingly, the following is hypothesized:

H₃. The positive moderating effect of involvement will be greater in the older age group than in the lower age group.

3. Method

3.1 Study Design

This experiment was conducted on 336 people in their 20s and 30s living in Korea. We chose this age group as they are often the target audience for fashion products and thus are more likely to experience inaction inertia due to their frequent exposure to marketing stimuli. A self-administered questionnaire was used, in which participants were randomly assigned one of two scenarios and asked to fill it out directly. The experimental scenario in this study was created based on the research of Tykocinski who first demonstrated inaction inertia. By comparing the large and small discounts presented in previous studies, we experimented with 60% and 10% discount rates, respectively. For a more accurate effect of inaction inertia, a significant % discount rate of 60% was applied in this scenario. In addition, we rigorously attempted to prove the effect of inaction inertia by setting up a control situation that excluded the initial opportunity. In this study, the price range of existing women's coat products was investigated, and the average price of the product was determined. The stimulus used in the scenario was also set as a winter coat which is a type of outerwear and an essential clothing item [24].

3.2. Measurements

In this study, inaction inertia refers to the effect of not purchasing even when faced with a subsequent purchase opportunity after missing the initial purchase opportunity. Based on previous research, a survey question was designed based on three factors: degree of loss, feelings of regret, and product value, to set inaction inertia as an independent variable. After presenting the basic experimental scenario to the experimental participants, the extent to which they assumed they were in this situation was measured by three questions on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7 = very much). Meanwhile, fashion involvement refers to consumers' continued interest in fashion products. To measure this, we used a structured survey that was designed to match the specific situation of this study, based on the fashion involvement questions used in previous studies. After presenting the basic experimental scenario to the experimental participants, the extent

to which they assumed they were in this situation was measured with four questions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = very much).

3.3. Analysis

To test the hypotheses of this study, frequency analysis, reliability analysis, factor analysis, mean value analysis, and regression analysis were conducted using SPSS 25.0. Frequency analysis was used to identify the general characteristics of the sample, and an internal consistency test (Cronbach's α) and factor analysis were conducted to verify the reliability and validity of each measurement variable. A regression analysis was conducted to determine the influence of fashion involvement and the moderating role of inaction inertia.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Preliminary Analysis

Frequency analysis was conducted by classifying demographic characteristics into gender, age, marital status, occupation, education, and average monthly income. In terms of gender, there were 163 (48.5%) men and 173 (51.5%) women, with a higher proportion of women, and the age ratio was evenly distributed at 166 (49.4%) in their 20s and 170 (50.6%) in their 30s. Regarding marital status, the proportion of single people was higher, with 237 (70.5%) single and 99 (29.5%) married. The occupations were 83 students (24.7%), 120 office workers (35.7%), and 28 service workers. (8.3%), Fifty-one professionals (15.2%), 40 unemployed (11.9%), and 14 other people (4.2%). Educational background: 3 people (0.9%) less than high school graduate, 38 people (11.3%) high school graduate, 77 people (22.9%) enrolled in college, 185 people (55.1%) college graduate, 14 people (4.2%) enrolled in graduate school, 19 people (5.7%) graduated from graduate school or higher. In addition, the average monthly income was less than 1 million won for 13 people (3.9%), more than 1 million won to less than 3 million won for 126 people (37.5%), more than 3 million won to less than 5 million won for 115 people (34.2%). More than 5 million won to 9 million won. Sixty-seven people (19.9%) had less than KRW 9 million, and 15 (4.5%) had more than 9 million won.

4.2 Validity and Reliability

This study conducted exploratory factor analysis to verify data validity. The method applied to exploratory factor analysis was principal component analysis, and the analysis was performed using the Varimax method during orthogonal rotation based on factor loadings and variables with an Eigenvalue of 1 or more and factor loadings of 0.4 or more were extracted to confirm the factor structure. To verify the reliability of each variable's factors, a value of 0.7 or higher was considered an appropriate level of reliability through Cronbach's α, a widely accepted method of measuring internal consistency, instilling confidence in the reliability verification process. In addition, manipulation check is performed. As shown in Table 1, it was confirmed that the perceived level of inaction inertia is significantly differs between the two scenarios.

Table 1. Manipulation check between inaction inertia and control conditions

	M	S.D.	t	p
Inaction Inertia Condition	4.70	1.40	5.90	.00***
Control Condition	3.51	1.19		

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

4.3 Hypotheses Testing

4.3.1 Regression Analysis with the Total Participants (H1, H2)

The results of multiple regression analysis to determine the impact of inaction inertia on purchase intention and the moderating effect of involvement are shown in Table 2. Durbin-Watson's result is close to 2, which shows that the independence condition is satisfied. In step 1, it was confirmed that inaction inertia had a significant negative effect on purchase intention (β=-.32, t=-6.06, p<.001). This supports hypothesis 1. In the step thee, involvement has a statistically significant (p<0.05) effect on the dependent variable, purchase intention. In step 3, the interaction term of inaction inertia and involvement was not statistically significant. The results failed to provide support for hypothesis 2.

Table 2. Results of regression analysis with the total participants (DV: purchase intention)

Step	IV	β	S.E.	t	DW	R2	△R2	F
1	Inaction Inertia (A)	-.32***	.05	-6.06		.24	.24	9.36**
2	Inaction Inertia (A)	-.31***	.05	-5.99		.27	.03	32.36***
	Involvement (B)	.15	.08	1.81	1.91			
3	Inaction Inertia (A)	-.33***	.05	-6.08				
	Involvement (B)	.10	.09	1.18		.28	.01	33.60***
	(A) × (B)	.06	.06	1.11				

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

4.3.2. Regression Analysis by Age Groups (H3)

Additionally, the sample was median-split into high- and low- age groups to verify the moderating effect of involvement by respondent age group. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis was performed for each group and the results appear in Table 3. In step three, the interaction term of inaction inertia and involvement shows a significant and positive impact on purchase intention, showing that involvement has a valid positive moderation effect in the high-age group. Meanwhile, as shown in Table 4, the moderating effect of involvement on the effect of inaction inertia on purchase intention in the low-age group is not statistically significant. In step 3, as the interaction term shows no significant impact on purchase intention. In total, the positive moderation effect of involvement is found to be valid only in the high-aged group. This supports hypothesis 3.

Table 3. Results of regression analysis with the high-age group (DV: purchase intention)

Steps	IV	β	S.E.	t	DW	R2	△R2	F
1	Inaction Inertia (A)	-.33***	.06	-5.08		.24	.24	25.86**
2	Inaction Inertia (A)	-.32***	.06	-5.15		.26	.02	14.46**
	Involvement (B)	.16	.10	1.60	2.00			
3	Inaction Inertia (A)	-.34***	.06	-5.55				
	Involvement (B)	.00	.12	.05		.31	.05	11.98**
	(A) × (B)	.17*	.07	2.33				

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Table 4. Results of regression analysis with the low-age group (DV: purchase intention)

Steps	IV	β	S.E	t	DW	R2	△R2	F
1	Inaction Inertia (A)	-.39***	.05	-7.34		.40	.40	53.90**
2	Inaction Inertia (A)	-.37***	.05	-7.17		.43	.03	29.64**
	Involvement (B)	.15	.08	1.91	1.87			
3	Inaction Inertia (A)	-.37***	.05	-7.00		.43	.00	19.57**
	Involvement (B)	.15	.08	1.92				
	(A) × (B)	-.02	.06	-.31				

*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

5. Conclusion

Inaction inertia, the phenomenon of not purchasing when faced with a subsequent purchase opportunity of a small discount after missing the initial purchase opportunity for a significant discount, is a novel area of study when applied to fashion products. While various studies have been conducted on inaction inertia, the existing ones have a broad scope and a variety of stimulants, leading to limitations in applying them to fashion products. The potential harm to brand perception, image, and product purchases due to inappropriate discount policies is a topic that warrants further research. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing the impact of inaction inertia related to fashion products on consumer purchasing behavior and the moderating effect of involvement, with the hope of uncovering new insights and implications for the industry. In the results, the negative influence of inaction inertia on purchase intention was statistically verified. The regression analysis results also showed that the level of inaction inertia perceived by respondents significantly affected purchase intention. Furthermore, the additional analysis results of the average purchase intention by price range confirmed a significant negative effect of inaction inertia on purchase intention. This research provides valuable insights for marketers, empowering them to devise effective strategies to counter inaction inertia. Second, it was confirmed to what extent consumer involvement has a moderating effect on the influence of inaction inertia on purchase intention. In the statistical analysis targeting all respondents, involvement's moderating effect was insignificant. However, as a result of regression analysis conducted after segmenting respondents by age, consumer involvement significantly moderated the relationship between inaction inertia and purchase intention in the older age group. It was confirmed to have. On the other hand, the involvement of younger age groups was not statistically significant.

The implications of the study are summarized as follows. First, it is significant that the concept of 'inaction inertia' was separately verified by applying it to the price standard. Inaction inertia refers to the tendency of consumers to stick with their current choices, even when better options are available. In existing studies, price manipulation was conducted only on purchase intention according to the discount rate, but the proposed price was not focused on. Since fashion products are distributed in various price ranges from low to high depending on brand and distribution, this study identified the negative aspect of inaction inertia by varying prices. Second, existing studies focused on consumer and product characteristic factors and had a wide scope, so there were limitations in applying them to the fashion industry. This study is significant because it analyzed and verified consumer behavior appropriate for the fashion industry by subdividing it into fashion products. Third, it is meaningful to verify whether consumer involvement affects inaction inertia. We contributed to the related academic flow by performing an experimental study on inaction inertia, which had relatively little empirical

research compared to the influence confirmed in practice so far. We also provided a novel idea by demonstrating that the moderating effect of product involvement differs depending on the age group.

The limitations of the study and future tasks of this study are as follows. First, in addition to negative factors such as regret, loss, and value, it will be necessary to discover factors related to motivation that cause inaction inertia. Second, since fashion products are composed of various products such as watches, shoes, and clothing, research on segmenting related products will be necessary. Third, research based on various discount situations will be needed to identify the discount policy required in the fashion industry. Fourth, it will be possible to suggest an appropriate discount policy through research on how long the negative perception of inaction inertia lasts.

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