Conceptual study of literature, market, and consumer:
Combining swim and shapewear technology

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Introduction: Shapewear was first introduced in the form of a girdle in the 19th century as a way for women to manipulate and alter their figures (Nop, 2016; Fish, MacGillivray, Kyoung An & Beard, 2013). In the decades since, shapewear has evolved and transcended across a myriad of target market groups ranging from baby boomers to millennials. With the invention of Spanx and Skims, modern shapewear has evolved, enabling women to confidently shape and smooth while remaining invisible under their clothing. As the demand for the mentioned brands grows the shapewear industry has become more lucrative. The global shapewear industry was estimated to be $2.26 billion in 2018 with a predicted growth of 7.7% from 2019 to 2025 (Grand View Research, 2019). Swimwear is one of the most revealing garments women wear in public.

Purpose Statement: The purpose of this conceptual study was to conduct literary, market, and consumer research to propose creative and functional designs for the swimwear market that integrates benefits of shapewear technology.

Literature Review: Previous research has analyzed the growth in shapewear popularity for younger women, the improvement of perceived physical attractiveness (Fish, et al., 2013), the effects on posture due to shapewear (Lyu & LaBat, 2014) and the role of shapewear in female consumers’ online decision making (Shin, Zhang, Hwang, & Baytar, 2015). While there have been great advancements in research regarding the effects of shapewear, few have focused on accompanying shapewear into other garments, specifically swimwear. In order to analyze the needs of the consumer the Functional, Expressive and Aesthetic Model (FEA) was utilized. The FEA model developed by Lamb and Kallal (1992) provides a framework for conceptualizing a consumer’s needs for designing apparel. The model has been used effectively to explore apparel
design through a conceptual framework (Orzada & Kallal, 2016). The key is that it facilitates resolving design problems, whether predominantly function- or fashion-oriented so that a design meets the needs of the intended user/use within their cultural context (Orzada & Kallal, 2016).

Method: Market and consumer research provided a base for conceptualizing product development ideas and formal research direction(s). In order to evaluate current design problems, an online anonymous survey was created and administered via the researchers social media accounts. The survey collected information regarding demographics, preferred qualities in shape wear and swimwear, and user perceptions of swimwear garments. The survey assessed the functional, expressive, and aesthetic needs of women who own swimwear and desire the benefits of shapewear technology through multiple-choice, ranking, and short answer questions. Further questions were asked related to the user’s confidence and comfortability in swimwear.

Results & Discussion: The survey results yielded important insights. Out of the 115 responses, more than 50% of participant responses stated they do not feel confident in their current swimsuits, and roughly 60% of responders do not feel comfortable when wearing their current swimwear styles in public. Furthermore, approximately 90% of responders said they would buy a swimsuit with some sort of shapewear technology integrated into the design in order to help shape their ‘undesirable’ body areas.

The results support the development of swimwear with shapewear technology. Data collected by the consumer survey aligns with findings previously collected in research regarding body image and personal comfort wearing swimwear in public. Specifically, the growth in popularity of shapewear, and the positive body image views that shapewear may provide, such as body smoothing, influences purchasing decisions of women, overall (Shin, Zhang, Hwang, & Baytar, 2015; Fish, et al., 2013). Further, the use of the FEA Model was effective in identifying consumers’ needs related to swimwear. Specifically, participants of this study desired swimwear that is functionally comfortable, aesthetically attractive, and makes them feel emotionally empowered and confident. Figure 1 illustrates a conceptualized integration of shapewear technology into a swimwear high-waisted brief.
Conclusions and Future Directions: The findings provide support for the market opportunity of shapewear technology to be incorporated into swimwear. This advancement has the potential to increase the wearers’ confidence, security, and comfortability. Future planned directions for this concept involves the development of prototype(s) for consumer feedback and field testing. This continued research may lead to creative scholarship exhibition work and/or publication of research process and findings. Future researchers may explore the integration of shapewear technology in other ready-to-wear knit garments.

Note: This study and conceptualized design was conducted as a portion of a senior-level product development course.
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