

High School and College Female Students' Fashion Information Sources Relative to their Personal Self-Concept

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I . Introduction

Consumers' information sources as a part of buying patterns are affected by a variety of factors, such as product cue, the level of economic progress, and social, demographic, geographic and cultural situations. They are also subject to consumers' personal situations, interests, preferences, values, self-concept and character.

These days, several young casual wear market include high school students as a part of their target group. Since many of high school girls are not satisfied with the items displayed in the stores for teenagers, they knock on the door of young adult casual store targeting above their age group. In fact, although the age of high school girls is quite close to college students, it is said that there are differences in needs for fashion, emotional status and self-concept between high school and college students in a lump. But there has been a little effort to define what are the specific differences in detail. The specific information on the differences in many aspects will be helpful to improve their satisfaction level with apparel products. But most of the previous studies related to clothing buying or behavioral pattern of college students were made in separate from the studies of high school student. Along with these informations gathered from the separate studies, there has been a need for close comparison of high school and college students' characteristics at the same time period.

Therefore the present study attempted to compare fashion information sources of high school and college female students in relation to their personal self-concept in order to better grasp the differences between the two level students, high school and college. The study also attempted to collect data which will provide fashion marketers with information necessary for effective marketing strategies to enhance the efficiency of advertising and students' satisfaction level with apparel products.

The specific research problems of the study were to determine, based on personal self-concept, ①fashion information sources of high school girls; ②fashion information sources of college female students; ③differences between high school and college

female students' fashion information sources.

Considering the degree of involvement, risk perception, use of information sources and selection criteria are different according to the type of clothing item, the present study is limited to the daily outer wear purchase situations only. Personal self-concept is defined here as sense of self-esteem, self-satisfaction as a person, and a self-evaluation about the characteristics of ones personality.

II . Review of Literature

1. Self-Concept

Self-concept is ones total system of thoughts and feelings about oneself as an object.¹⁾ Self-concept implies perceptions of ability, weakness, personality, value system, appearance, and attractiveness of oneself. From these perceptions, one forms an attitude or feeling toward oneself and this attitude or feeling affects his behavior.²⁾

According to many researchers and writers on the subjects of human behavior, an important key to understanding an individual's conduct is derived from a study of the concept he has of himself. William James³⁾ explains his Empirical Me under three sub-headings: (1) the constituents of self, (2) self feelings, and (3) the acts of self preservation and self seeking. George Herbert Mead⁴⁾ developed the idea that the self is an object of awareness instead of simply a system of processes. According to Won Shik Jung⁵⁾, self-concept is consist of four general categories(self-Identity, self-satisfaction, self-behavior, self-criticism) and five specific categories(physical self, moral-ethical self, personal self, family self, social self). In essence, Mead theorizes that one really responds and reacts toward himself in a similar way that other people respond and react toward him. Mead's conception, therefore, is one of a socially formed self. According to Rogers⁶⁾, a good indicator of a person's mental health is manifest by how he perceives himself. As he moves toward better mental health, his self concept becomes more positive, and vice versa. Truax⁷⁾ noted that a person's behavior is strongly affected by the self system and thus has a great influence, although indirect, on his interrelationships with others. Marston⁸⁾ drew the conclusion that an individual's behavior is definitely tied to his self image and the self perception of a person is a good determinant of his behavior.

Considering the above mentioned, Self-concept is ones total system of thoughts and feelings about oneself as an object, and is an important key to understanding an individual's behavior.

2. Self-concept and Clothing

Many researchers have reported there is a close relationship between self-concept and clothing. Horn and Gurel⁹⁾ and Hurlock¹⁰⁾ insisted that clothing is one of the very positive means to satisfy one's desire for self-improvement, and also is one of the sources to improve sense of self-esteem, self-confidence, and stability. Sontag and Schlater¹¹⁾ said that clothing is ①a component of self, ②an aspect of appearance by which self is formulated and confirmed, ③a symbol meaning individuality, feeling and attitude, ④an expression of self-value and self-esteem, ⑤an emotional component of self-evaluation, and ⑥related to the satisfaction level of one's physical condition.

According to several empirical studies¹²⁾¹³⁾¹⁴⁾ on the relationship of self-concept and clothing, there is a tendency that the persons having a high sense of self-concept or high level of self-satisfaction are highly satisfied with their clothing. Kim¹⁵⁾ reported the lower self-acceptance, the higher the dissatisfaction with clothing. The group with the higher sense of self-concept has a lower conformity of clothing behavior.¹⁶⁾ Moreover physical self-concept has a positive relationship with aesthetic behavior,¹⁷⁾ as does social self-concept with the level of following fashion.¹⁸⁾ There is a positive relationship between personal self-concept and the level of fashion acceptance and economical aspect of clothing, and the level of concern regarding the ease of clothing care.¹⁹⁾

As mentioned above, self-concept has a relationship with many aspects of clothing behavior. Based on this, it can be inferred that clothing buying pattern will be related to personal self-concept, which is considered as an important component of self-concept.

3. Self-concept and Consumer Behavior

The influence of self-concept on consumer behavior is well shown in the fact that symbolic meanings of merchandise have greater influence on consumer behavior than functions of merchandise have²⁰⁾. Merchandise and brands also have individuality; like human beings, brand individuality delivers information about the person who has or uses the brand. Therefore, consumers prefer the brand or merchandise by which he can express his self-concept most efficiently. This behavior of consumers could be explained by the motivations of self-esteem and self-consistency.²¹⁾ That is, in the view point of self-esteem, consumers are motivated to purchase merchandise which is helpful in reaching his ideal self-concept or in maintaining his real self-concept. This enables a consumer to keep this consistency between his behavior and self-image, and functions to avoid disharmony caused by the difference between his actual behavior and the confidence of his self-image. Therefore, consumers process information and

purchase merchandise in the manner of matching their self-concept. At the same time, they try to keep and improve their self-concept through the merchandise they purchase. That is why self-concept plays a role in processing information and all other purchase decision making processes. The ads having consistency with one's self-image might be remembered easily by consumers, and motivate a preferable attitude toward the ads and purchase intention of consumers.

Kang and Lee²²⁾ reported that male consumers' physical, personal, and social self-concept had positive relations to the purchase motive of 'clothing design'. They said also that consumers having higher score in self-concept showed more positive attitude in the evaluation of clothing after purchase.

III. Methodology

1. Instrument

Self-administered questionnaire was used to collect the data. It consisted of three parts: personal self-concept, fashion information source, and demographics.

Won-Shik Jung's standardized self-concept test was used for the measurement of personal self-concept. Questions regarding store selection and information sources were developed on the basis of the questionnaire used in previous studies,²³⁾²⁴⁾²⁵⁾²⁶⁾²⁷⁾ and modified appropriately for clarity and length based on the results of a pre-test.

Five point Likert scales were used for most measures with 1=never or strongly disagree, or very unimportant, and 5=always, strongly agree, or very important.

2. Sample and Data Collection

The sample consisted of 433 high school girls and 423 college female students.

The self-administered questionnaire was distributed to college female students at four universities located in Sudaemungu, Nowongu, and Dongdaemungu, Seoul, and high school girls at three girl's high schools located in Dobonggu and Gangnamgu, Seoul. The survey was conducted after or right before classes and all questionnaires were distributed and collected by the instructor of the class. 68.8% of the respondents considered income level of their households to be average, low 16.6%, and high 14.6%.

3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by the SAS package. Descriptive statistics and t-test were

employed for the statistical analysis of the data gathered.

Personal self-concept was represented by the score measured by Jung's. A high score reflects one's stable and desirable or positive personal characteristics, and a low score means the opposite. In order to investigate if there is any difference in students' fashion information sources according to their personal self-concept scores, the respondents were classified into two groups, low and high. Those falling below the mean score were categorized as low; those falling above the mean score were categorized as high.

IV. Results

1. Fashion information sources of high school girls according to their personal Self-concept

"Very often" was given value 5, "often" 4, "moderately" 3, "rarely" 2, and "never" 1.

As shown in <table 1>, among the 15 kinds of fashion information source investigated, there was no source having mean score above 4. Friends showed the highest score (3.90). Those having mean score above 3 were friends, knowledge acquired by self-experience of buying or use of the products, observation of other's attire, window and store displays, family members, fashion magazines, and actors and actresses on TV, meaning that these are used often by high school girls as fashion information sources. On the other hand, the mean score of catalogs and direct mails, fashion ads on TV, salespersons in stores, and internet sites fall between 2 and 3 indicating a low frequency of use. Those falling between 1 and 2 are newspapers and fashion shows, meaning that these two are rarely used as fashion information sources by high school girls.

When the results are broken down according to respondents' sense of personal self-concept, knowledge acquired by self-experience and family members were used more often by the high personal self-concept group than the low group. On the other hand, no significant difference was found in the rest of sources according to personal self-concept. (refer to table 2) Regarding this result, it is considered that detailed informations on the characteristics of the high personal self-concept group can be utilized to improve the effectiveness of advertising activities especially for the group using self-experience and family members frequently as a fashion information source.

2. Fashion information sources of college female students according to personal self-concept

Among the 15 kinds of fashion information source investigated, those having mean score above 4 are fashion magazines, and knowledge acquired by self-experience of buying or use of the products (refer to table 1). This means fashion magazines and self-experiences are the fashion information source used most often by college female students. The fact that self-experience plays an important role in fashion information implies an increasing need for the management of customers after purchase to enhance the customers' satisfaction level with the products and services.

Those falling between 3 and 4 are friends, actors and actresses on TV, fashion ads on TV, printed catalogs and direct mails, store and window displays, and observation of other's attire, meaning that these are also used often as information sources. On the other hand, the mean score of family members, salespersons in stores, and fashion shows fall between 2 and 3. Those falling between 1 and 2 are newspapers and internet sites, meaning that these two are rarely used as fashion information sources by college female students.

No significant difference was found in fashion magazine, friends, family members, and sales persons according to personal self-concept. However, the rest of the sources, newspaper, actors and actresses on TV, fashion ads on TV, printed catalogs and direct mails, internet sites, and knowledge acquired by self-experience were used more often by high personal self-concept group than low group. (see table 2). Therefore, in general, it could be said that high personal self-concept group than low group search fashion information more.

3. General trend and the Differences between high school and college students' fashion information sources

Among the 15 kinds of fashion information source investigated, the source having mean score above or near 4 in both high school and college was knowledge acquired by self-experience of buying or use of the products (refer to table 1). This means self-experiences is the fashion information source used most often by high school and college female students. Since self-experience plays an important role in fashion information, there is an increasing need for the management of customers after purchase.

Friends showed the highest score among the fashion information sources of high school girls. While self-experiences and fashion magazines showed highest score among the fashion information sources of college female students.

No significant difference was found between high school and college in observation of other's attire, actors and actresses on TV, and Internet sites. However, there were significant differences in friends, knowledge acquired by self-experience of buying or use of the products, window and store displays, fashion magazines, family members, fashion ads on TV, printed catalogs and direct mails, salespersons, newspapers, and fashion shows. High school girls use friends more often than college students. Considering this results, it can be said that high school girls than college students have higher concerns on conformity in their clothing behavior. High school girls use family members and salespersons also more often than college students. On the other hand, college students use self-experience (high school 3.80; college 4.12), store displays (high school 3.31; college 3.81), fashion magazines (high school 3.02; college 4.02), catalogs and direct mails (high school 2.83; college 3.12), fashion ads on TV (high school 2.77; college 3.00), newspapers (high school 1.68; college 1.98), and fashion shows (high school 1.97; college 2.63) more often than high school girls. In general, college students than high school students showed higher score in using each fashion information sources except friends, family members, and salespersons. This implies that college students have higher degree of search for fashion information than high school girls have. This result suggest that marketers have to differentiate advertising activities for high school students from those for college students

When the data gathered from high school and college were compared in accordance with students' sense of personal self-concept, here, interesting result is that the difference was found in the use frequency of family member according to high school girls' personal self-concept, while no difference was found in the use frequency of family member according to college students' personal self-concept. In both high school and college students, significant difference was found between the high personal self-concept group and the low group in the use frequency of knowledge acquired by self-experience. This result suggests the increasing importance of person to person marketing activities for getting customer's positive self-experience. It is also suggest that detailed informations on the characteristics of the high personal self-concept group can be utilized to improve the effectiveness of advertising activities especially for the group using self-experience often.

In general, college students than high school girls showed bigger difference in the use frequency of fashion information sources according to the sense of personal self-concept. This suggests that information related to personal self-concept would be more useful for college student market than high school student market.

V. Conclusion and Implications

(1) Friends, self-experiences, and observation of other's attire are the most important fashion information sources of high school girls. Self-experiences, fashion magazine, and display are the most important fashion information sources of college female students. And major fashion information sources of both high school girls and college female students are not only the information sources led by consumers including self experience, friends and observation but also the information sources led by the industry, including magazines, printed catalogs and store displays.

(2) Significant differences were found between high school and college students in using amount of each fashion information sources except observation of other's attire, actors and actresses on TV, and Internet sites. Personal information such as friends, family members, and salespersons are used more by high school girls than by college students, while the information sources led by the industry such as display, fashion magazine, direct mails, fashion ads are used more by college students than by high school girls. In general, college students than high school girls showed the higher degree of using each fashion information sources.

(3) According to personal self-concept, significant differences were observed in fashion information sources of high school girls and college female students. High school girls with high personal self-concept use knowledge acquired by self-experience and family members more often than those with low personal self-concept. In the case of college female students, newspaper, actors and actresses on TV, fashion ads on TV, printed catalogs and direct mails, internet sites, and knowledge acquired by self-experience were used more frequently by high personal self-concept group than low group.

Considering the results mentioned above, followings are suggested.

(1) Mouth to mouth advertising activities might be more effective than any other types of ads for the market targeting high school girls. On the other hand, ads led by industry such as magazines, printed catalogs, and store display would be more effective for the market targeting college students than the market targeting high school students.

(2) Advertising activities targeting the two groups have to pay more attention in selecting and differentiating ads media for each group. Especially for high school girls, marketers have to make an effort more for having well trained sales persons.

(3) Along with advertisements and person to person marketing activities, marketers have to improve the variety and effectiveness of customer management after purchase so that they have self experience with positive image of the products and

services.

(4) Data regarding personal self-concept could be utilized as an information for fashion ads market segmentation. Detailed informations on the characteristics of the high personal self-concept group can be utilized to improve the effectiveness of advertising activities especially for the group using self-experience frequently as a fashion information source.

(5) There should be further researches related to clarifying differences between high school and college students not only in fashion information sources but also in other aspects of clothing buying pattern.

<table 2> Differences in Fashion Information Sources of High School and College Female Students according to Their Personal Concept

variables	self-concept	high school girls (n=433)			college female students (n=423)		
		mean	SD	t-value	mean	SD	t-value
friends	low	3.89	0.98	-0.18	3.47	0.79	0.08
	high	3.91	1.01		3.46	0.93	
knowledge acquired by self-experience of buying & use of the products	low	3.69	1.05	-3.25**	3.98	0.84	-4.12***
	high	3.91	1.09		4.33	0.83	
observation of other's attire	low	3.52	1.10	-0.18	3.40	1.03	-3.60***
	high	3.54	1.05		3.78	1.06	
window and store display	low	3.32	1.11	0.13	3.72	0.78	-2.49*
	high	3.30	1.25		3.95	1.01	
family members	low	2.81	0.97	-5.85***	2.70	0.96	-0.03
	high	3.26	1.01		2.71	1.02	
fashion magazine	low	3.01	1.11	-0.18	3.97	0.97	-1.45
	high	3.02	1.08		4.11	1.05	
actors and actresses on TV	low	3.02	1.12	0.13	3.01	1.05	-3.96***
	high	3.01	1.05		3.45	1.04	
catalogs and direct mails	low	2.80	0.99	-0.81	2.98	1.03	-3.26**
	high	2.86	1.16		3.33	1.10	
fashion ads on TV	low	2.81	1.11	1.32	2.87	1.10	-3.20**
	high	2.72	0.98		3.22	1.11	
sales persons in stores	low	2.70	0.94	0.10	2.00	0.90	-1.13
	high	2.68	0.93		2.11	1.01	
newspapers	low	1.71	0.99	0.78	1.77	0.84	-3.32***
	high	1.65	1.21		2.10	1.07	
fashion shows	low	1.95	0.96	-0.03	2.58	0.97	-3.19**
	high	1.99	0.97		2.95	1.25	
internet sites	low	2.16	1.21	1.23	1.78	0.84	-3.85***
	high	2.01	1.08		2.16	1.04	

*** p<0.001 ** p<0.01 * p<0.05

<table 1> Degree of Using each Fashion Information Sources of High School and College Female Students

variables	high school girls		college female students		t-value
	mean	SD	mean	SD	
friends	3.90	1.00	3.47	0.85	5.84***
knowledge acquired by self-experience of buying & use of the products	3.80	1.05	4.12	0.85	-4.37***
observation of other's attire	3.53	1.00	3.55	1.06	-0.18
window and store display	3.31	1.05	3.81	0.88	-6.26***
family members	3.14	1.18	2.71	0.99	5.81***
fashion magazine	3.02	1.17	4.02	1.00	-11.36***
actors and actress on TV	3.01	1.14	3.18	1.13	-1.93
catalogs and direct mails	2.83	1.13	3.12	1.07	-3.36**
fashion ads on TV	2.77	1.09	3.00	1.11	-3.25**
salespersons in stores	2.69	0.94	2.05	0.95	8.88***
newspapers	1.68	1.07	1.98	0.95	-3.34**
fashion shows	1.97	0.96	2.63	1.10	-8.35***
internet sites	2.08	0.98	1.83	0.94	1.84

*** p<0.001 ** p<0.01

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