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Information Sources of Reference Used by Male College Students for Casual Wear Purchase Decisions

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Abstract

This study was designed to identify the information sources of reference used by male college students. Theoretical framework is based upon social comparison theory, reference group theory, and Kotler's model of personal and non-personal sources of reference. The subjects were 287 male college students. The questionnaire were distributed to the school area and the commercial area such as Shinchon, Myung-Dong, and Apkujung-Dong in Seoul. Means, standard deviation, frequency, T-test, one-way ANOVA, and Duncan's multiple range test were applied for the analyses of data. The result of hypothesis 1 showed that male college student utilize personal and non-personal sources of reference indiscriminately. The result of hypothesis 2 showed that male college students consult the socially high-proximal group such as a girl friend(a lover) and mother most actively. The result of hypothesis 3 found that male college students use position media most actively, especially in-store displays, followed by print media and broadcast media.

Key words : information source, buying behavior, marketing, merchandising, casual wear.

Ⅰ. Introduction

An important marketing challenge for the apparel manufacturers is how to persuade consumers in the target markets to purchase their products[1]. Clearly identifying the target audience through the careful use of demographics and needs analysis can help a manufacturer or retailer to clarify the potential reactions of consumers to products, packaging, and communications, even before a products is introduced. Accordingly, understanding the factors which contribute to consumer purchase and consumer satisfaction are among the most important roles a market researcher may hold[2]. The identification of information sources used by consumers in a target market for apparel purchase decisions as well as in-depth knowledge regarding the shopping behavior of groups with various demographic commonalities, are an indispensible aid to marketers concerned about reaching their target markets more efficiently[3].

Men's apparel has been the area in the fashion industry experiencing the rapid growth recently. That is, among apparel categories, the market for men's clothing is the most promising sub-sector in the economy, and is growing much faster than the market for women's wear[4]. Particularly, The men's casual wear market steadily increased by over 10% a year since 1990's until right before IMF financial crisis, even though there was a little fluctuation. Even after the IMF crisis, this market has recovered rapidly and has

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showed the steady growth, thanks to the increase of the consumer's interests and demands[5].

While many studies have been conducted to determine the shopping behavior and characteristics of various groups of consumers, little research has been done concerning men's apparel shopping behavior, despite rapid growth in this market, predictions of the continued expansion of this market and a emerging interest among manufacturers and retailers[6,7]. Thus, the research regarding the apparel purchase behavior of male college students could be regarded very meaningful at this moment.

In order to help manufacturers and marketers of casual wear to promote apparel products more efficiently and to aid them in instilling brand names or brand images more distinctively in the minds of male college students who are the primary customers of casual wear, this study was conducted to identify the information sources used by male college students in the decision to purchase casual wear. The findings of this study will assist apparel manufacturers and marketers in better identifying the target market, and in subsequently adjust their promotional activities in order to reach the targe market more efficiently.

Ⅱ. Review of Literature

During the past several decades, hundreds of research papers have been published concerning the factors which influence a person's shopping behavior. More Precisely, a great deal of research has focused upon identifying those sources which might influence a person's decision to either purchase or not purchase a particular product.

There are many possible influences upon an individual's decisions to purchase product. These may include practical factors, such as cost and availability, as well as need and the role of the product. Personal factors, such as desire and motivation of the purchaser, may also come into play. It is clear that the general market milieu consists of a host of factors which influence, either directly or indirectly, a person's purchasing behaviors and decisions. Among them are studies that examine the effects that a person's social networks and contacts have on their apparel purchasing behavior, as well as studies which examine the relationship between the specific medium influences and the resulting apparel purchasing behavior.

1. Social Comparison Theory, Reference Group Theory, and Sources of References

In 1954 Leon Festinger[8] developed a model of social comparison processes that would later come to be known as "social comparison theory" Festinger's theory postulates that social comparison is a primary motivational force in human behavior. It argues that most people have a need to compare themselves with others along a number of attributional dimensions[9]. In essence, social comparison theory proposes that individuals rely upon others for the establishment of normative guidelines in social situations and for standards by which they may evaluate themselves[10]. A comparison group does not need to be a group to which one aspires or in which one places considerable trust or confidence. Thus, individuals in the media celebrities, and superiors in the work environment may all function as comparison groups[11].

A reference group is defined as "the group with which the individual identifies or aspires to belong[12]. Reference group theory holds many commonalities with social comparison theory. Both emphasize the primacy of a social group in influencing behavior[13]. Both hypothesize that groups to which a person has high affinity(or proximity) will function as stronger influences upon behavior than groups to which the person holds rather low affinity[14]. Like social comparison theory, reference group theory includes social referents which are comparative in nature. However,

reference group theory does make some finer distinctions between types of associations. Cocanogher and Bruce[15] distinguished between socially proximal referents, who are individuals that operate in a person's immediate social network, and socially distant referents, who are individuals that operate on the boundaries of a person's normal social circles. Socially proximal referents provide ample opportunity for social comparison. Different types of referents likely will exert differing degrees of influence.

Kotler(1994)[16] examined such sources of reference in individual purchasing behavior by conceptualizing them as personal and non-personal channels of influence. In Kotler's model, the personal channel included sources of reference such as salespeople, peers, family, etc. and non-personal channels included sources of reference such as television, radio, magazines, etc.

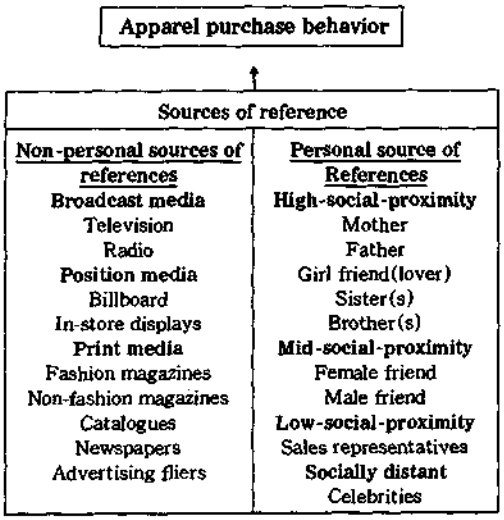
2. Personal and Non-personal Reference Sources Used by Men

In an attempt to identify gender differences, Byrd(1986)[17] found that young, single males were more likely to use media references for apparel purchase information, while young, single females were more likely to use retail and professional references for that information. In Byrd's study, media references included radio, television, and newspapers; retail references included window displays and fashion magazines; professional sources of information included fashion consultants and fashion shows. According to Midgley(1983)[18], to protect a position of high status, men with prestigious occupations might not seek information directly from peers, but rather rely on less conspicuous sources of reference such as store personnel or their spouse. To acquire reference sources for apparel purchase, the elderly relied upon newspapers, followed by friends and salespeople, while younger consumers had a tendency to use television primarily[19]. In questioning male college students in terms of sources of reference used for clothing purchase, Burns(1966)[20] found that printing media such as magazines, newspapers, and pamphlets were used most frequently as a source of information. In their survey of male college students, Hystron Fiber and Time magazine[21] reported that magazines ranked first as a source of reference, followed by friends, store displays, and salesmen. In this research, television and newspapers were at the bottom of the list. In a study to identify reference usage, Chowdhary(1989)[22] found that college-age consumers used market-dominated references(such as displays advertisement, and catalogs), consumer-dominated references(such as peers, co-workers, and friends), and neutral references(such as media personalities) more often than did consumers over the age of 65. In a study to compare clothing purchase behavior of two age groups of adult men-college students and middle aged, Nam and Koh(1995)[23] found that male college students utilized consumer-dominated references such as people's opinion and the observation of people's clothing most frequently. However, Kim(1992)[24] found that college students used neutral references such as displays. A study conducted by Whirlpool and reported by Braus(1990)[25] found that men between the ages of 18 and 24 are mostly influenced by advertising when making purchase decisions.

3. Theoretical Model of the Present Study

This study consulted the study of Shin & Dickerson(1998)[26] which was integrated from the following sources to create the theoretical model shown in 〈Fig. 1〉.

1. Kotler's(1994)[27] conceptualization of personal and non-personal channels as influences upon a person's purchasing behaviors was utilized as the major framework for the model. Kotler's division of influence channels into two distinct groups-personal and non-per-



<Fig. 1> Proposed model of the present study.

sonal sources of reference-is echoed in this model

2. Cocanogher and Bruce's(1971)[28] model of socially proximal and socially distant referents, and Childers and Rao's(1992)[29] conceptualization of affinity level and its impact on strength of influence from a referent, were integrated together under the comparative assumptions proposed by reference group theory. To be precisely, reference group theory asserts that many behaviors are comparative in nature, and that the nature of the comparison influences the choice of the consumer. To this basic assumption, the present research adds the influence of level of affinity and social proximity. The resulting construct implies that as affinity and social proximity increase, level of influence will also increase. As affinity decreases and relationships between the consumer and the referent become more socially distant, level of influence from that referent should also decline.

3. Irving's(1991)[30] classification of advertising media(such as broadcast media, print media, position media) has been borrowed to categorize non-personal sources of reference.

4. Terminology used in the present study

The following terms are used in this study :

1. References were described by Childers & Rao(1992)[31] as "whatever individuals employ in evaluating their own status, behaviors, norms, and values." In this study, the sources of reference are classified into personal and non-personal sources of reference.

2. Personal sources of reference in this study include the respondents' mother, father, a girl friend(a lover), brother(s), sister(s), female friends, male friends sales representatives, and celebrities. These items are categorized into four groups according to the function of social proximity: socially high-proximal group, socially mid-proximal group, socially low-proximal group, and socially distant group.

3. Function of social proximity means that groups to which a person has high affinity (proximity) will function as stronger influences upon behavior than groups to which the person holds a rather low affinity[32].

4. Socially proximal groups are individuals that operate in a person's immediate social network. Socially proximal groups provide opportunity for direct social interaction[33]. In this study, socially proximal groups are divided into three groups: socially high-proximal group[mother, father, a girl friend(a lover), sister(s), and brother(s)], socially mid-proximal group(female friend and male friend), and socially low-proximal group(sales representatives).

5. Socially distant groups are individuals that operate outside the boundaries of a person's normal social circles. Socially distant group provides relatively little direct social interaction[34]. In this study, socially distant group includes celebrities.

6. Non-personal references in this study are classified into three broad categories: broadcast media (television and radio), print media (fashion magazines, non-fashion magazines,

catalogs, newspapers and advertising flyers), and position media(billboard and in-store displays).

Ⅲ. Research methodology

1. Research Hypothesis

H1. Male college students will use personal sources of reference more often than non-personal sources of reference for casual wear purchase decisions.

H2. Male college students will differ in their use of personal sources of reference across social proximity categories for casual wear purchase decisions.

H3. Male college students will differ in their use of non-personal sources of reference across media categories for casual wear purchase decisions.

2. Data Collection

The data collection method was a convenient sampling. A self-administered questionnaire was developed consisting of the measures of personal and non-personal sources of reference used by male college students when making apparel purchase decisions. To enhance data accuracy and reliability, the questionnaire was pre-tested by 30 male college students on April 9th, 1999. Results from the pre-test indicated that the questionnaire was easily understood by the respondents without any major difficulty. The main survey was conducted from April 12th, 1999 to April 16th, 1999. The questionnaire was distributed to the school area and the commercial area such as Shinchon, Myung-Dong, and Apkujung-Dong in Seoul where the respondents could be easily found. 287 usable questionnaires out of 300 questionnaire were used for the data analyses.

3. Research Instrument

A questionnaire used in this study was composed of 23 questions consulting the related studies such as Rabolt(1984)[35], Byrd (1986)[36], Kotler(1994)[37], and Lamb(1993)[38].

Personal and non-personal sources of reference used for casual wear purchase decisions were measured in the first and second sections of the questionnaire. These sections, consisting of the 18 questions (Q1-Q18) asked to the respondents to indicate their degree of use of personal and non-personal sources of reference when gathering information concerning casual wear purchase decisions. A five-point Likert scale ranging from "never (=1) to "always(=5)" were used to measure degree of use. The third section included the demographic information such as grade in school, monthly income of household, and monthly clothing expenditure of the respondents.

4. Data Analysis

Data were statistically analyzed for application to the specific hypotheses of the study using SPSS statistical package. Means, standard deviation, and T-test were applied for hypothesis 1. Means, standard deviations, one-way ANOVA, and Duncan's multiple range test were used for analyses of hypotheses 2 through 3. A probability level of 0.05 or less was deemed significant. Frequency and percentage were applied to find out the demographic information.

Ⅳ. Result and Discussion

1. Description of the Sample

The subjects were comprised of freshmen (14%), sophomores(21.2%), juniors(24.5%), and seniors(40.3%). In terms of monthly household income, the majority sample respondents were represented by the category of 2 million~3 million won(31.9%), followed by the category of 1 million~2 million won (29.0%), and category of 3 million~4 million won(21.9%). With regard to monthly clothing expenditure, the majority sample respondents were represented by the category of 50,000~100,000 won(46.0%), followed by the category

of less than 50,000 won(35.1%), and category of 100,000~150,000 won(13.3%).

2. Results of Hypothesis Tests

H1: Hypothesis 1 was formulated to determine whether there was a significant difference between the use of personal and non-personal sources of reference for male college students when making casual wear purchase decisions. The T-test result showed that there was not a significant difference between the use of the personal and non-personal sources of reference. This finding stands in contrast to research by Moore(1971)[39], Braus(1990)[40], and Lamb(1993)[41] which indicated that male consumers tend to utilize non-personal sources of reference more frequently when purchasing apparel. On the basis of the results shown in 〈Table 1〉 and 〈Table 2〉, hypothesis 1 was rejected.

H2: Hypothesis 2 was focused on whether there was a significant difference in the use of personal sources of reference across social proximity categories for male college students when making casual wear purchase decisions. The one-way ANOVA revealed that there was a significant differences among the four group means being tested as indicated in 〈Table 3〉. Post hoc comparisons using Duncan's test were conducted to isolate the significant differences of the means within four groups. Duncan's test indicated that means of socially low-proximal group (M=1.98) and socially distant group(M=1.88) were significantly lower than the means of the other two groups. It also found that the mean of the socially high-proximal group (M=2.93) was significantly different from the mean of the socially mid-proximal group (M=2.60). Among the individual categories of the socially high-proximal group, a girl friend(a lover) was ranked highest(M=3.56), followed by mother(M=3.33). This findings are similar to Arnold's[42] finding that male consumers were heavily dependent upon their mothers and girl friends(lovers) when making

<Table 1> Summary statistics for the personal and non-personal sources of reference used by male college students for casual wear purchase decisions

Reference group	n	Mean	SD	T-value
Personal references	287	2.62	0.62	0.43
Non-personal references	287	2.59	0.57	

<Table 2> Summary statistics for individual variables of the personal and non-personal sources of reference (n=287)

Variables	Mean	SD	Variables	Mean	SD
1. Television	2.70	0.96	10. Mother	3.33	1.13
2. Radio	2.26	0.91	11. Father	1.96	0.89
3. Newspapers	2.51	0.92	12. Lover(Girl friend)	3.56	1.25
4. In-store displays	3.27	0.91	13. Female friend	2.26	0.95
5. Brand's catalogue	2.85	1.00	14. Male friend	2.83	1.01
6. Billboard	2.33	0.85	15. Sisters	2.91	1.07
7. Advertising fliers	2.20	0.90	16. Brothers	2.88	0.97
8. Fashion magazines	2.82	1.13	17. Sales representatives	1.98	0.96
9. Non-fashion magazines	2.73	1.10	18. Celebrities	1.88	1.05

<Table 3> Personal sources of reference used by male college students across proximity categories for casual wear purchase decisions (n=287)

Reference group	Mean	SD	F-value
The socially high-proximal group	2.93[a]	0.66	99.79*
The socially mid-proximal group	2.60[b]	0.91	
The socially low-proximal group	1.98[c]	0.97	
The socially-distant group	1.88[c]	1.05	

Note. A pair with the same subscript indicates no significant statistical differences at the .05 level.
*p<0.001

apparel purchase decisions. This findings also supported Childers & Rao's[43] theory that groups to which a person has high affinity(proximity) will function as stronger influences upon behavior than groups to which the person holds a rather low affinity.

H3: Hypothesis 3 was performed to determine whether there was a significant difference in the use of non-personal sources of references across media categories for male college students. The one-way ANOVA revealed that there were significant differences among the three group means being tested as indicated in 〈Table 4〉. Thus, hypothesis 3 was not rejected. The result of Duncan's test found that male college student use position media most actively(M=2.78), especially in-store displays, followed by print media (M=2.61) and broadcast media(M=2.48). This finding is similar to the works of Lamb (1993)[44] and Moore(1971)[45].

V. Summary and Implications

The primary purpose of the present study was to identify the sources of reference that male college student commonly consult when making casual wear purchase decisions. The theoretical model at the core of this study conceptualized these sources of reference as being broken into two broad categories: personal and non-personal sources of reference. These categories were then broken down into sub-groups such as socially high-proximal group, socially mid-proximal-group, socially low-proximal group, and socially distant group, broadcast media group, position media group, and print media group, each of which consisted of specific reference sources.

Hypothesis 1 was formulated to determine whether there is a significant difference between the use of personal and non-personal references for male college students when making casual wear purchase decisions. The result showed that male college students

<Table 4> Non-personal sources of references used by male college students across media categories for casual wear purchase decisions (n=287)

Reference group	Mean	SD	F-value
The broadcast media group	2.48[c]	0.86	10.57*
The position media group	2.78[a]	0.74	
The print media group	2.61[b]	0.72	

Note. A pair with the same subscript indicates no significant statistical differences at the .05 level.
*p<0.001

utilize personal and non-personal sources of reference indiscriminately.

Hypothesis 2 was focused on whether there is a significant difference in the use of personal sources of reference across social proximity categories for male college students when making casual wear purchase decisions. The result showed that male college students consult the socially high-proximal group such as a girl friend(a lover) and mother most actively. This finding supported Childers and Rao's[46] reference group theory that groups to which a person has high proximity(affinity) will function as stronger influences upon behavior than groups to which the person holds a rather low proximity.

Hypothesis 3 was performed to determine whether there is a significant difference in the use of non-personal sources of reference across media categories for male college students. This result found that male college students use position media most actively, especially in-store displays, followed by print media and broadcast media(M=2.48).

These findings suggest several implications. Marketers wishing to persuade the male college students are recommended to establish a strong in-store presence that are highly visible in the store where the male college students are seeking for information when making casual wear purchase decisions. Another way to reach the male college students are utilizing the print media such as fashion magazines, brand catalogue and non-fashion magazines instead of using costly broadcast media. If marketers wish to address personal sources of references in their promotional efforts, they are recommended to persuade the socially high-proximal-group such as mother and a girl friend (a lover) since they have a strongest influence among the personal references.

For further study, since this study was conducted in a large urban center, it would be interesting to examine whether or not differences exist between rural and urban populations in the reliance upon particular sources of reference. Additionally, the study on other populations may generate useful findings.

This study employed the convenience sampling method; therefore caution is needed in generalizing the results.

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