

A Qualitative Assessment of Korean and American Consumers Decision Making Styles⁺

Vanessa Prier Jackson*, Hyun Ju Kwon**

Ph.D, Associate Professor, Dept of Merchandising, Apparel & Textiles, University of Kentucky*

Ph. D, Researcher, Dept of Merchandising, Apparel & Textiles, University of Kentucky**

Abstract : The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in the decision making styles of Korean and American consumers. Focus group interviews were used as the median to collect information related to their methods of approach to a market to buy a universal need such as clothing for personal use. Findings suggest that within each construct, there may be different factors that should be used to measure the decision making styles of Korean and American consumers. It also implies that the previously established Consumer Decision making styles instrument may not be a reliable measure cross-culturally. Recommendations for future research are suggested.

Key Words : Cross cultural research, decision making styles

I. Introduction

As more and more industries and countries attempt to get in on the globalization trends, cross-cultural and cross-national consumer behavior has and continues to be an increasingly relevant area of research. In a globalizing consumer market, decision making has become more complex and even more important for consumers than in the past (Kaynak & Kucukemiroglu, 2001). Previous researchers have concluded that consumers follow different styles or rules in making decisions when confronted with choices in the market (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Kendall & Sproles, 1990; Hafstrom, Chae, & Chung, 1992; Durvasula, Lysonski & Andrews, 1993; Lysonski, Durvasula & Zotos, 1996; Fan, Xiao, & Xu, 1997; Richmond, McCroskey & Roach, 1997; Fan & Xiao, 1998; Dollinger & Danis, 1998; Hui, Siu, Wang, & Chang, 2001; Walsh, Mitchell, & Hennis-Thurau, 2001; Wickliffe, 2004).

These styles or rules are defined as a mental orientation useful in characterizing a consumer's approach to making choices (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Previous researchers emphasized the need to compare decision-making styles of consumers from different countries. This emphasis was based on the belief that these comparison would contribute to the understanding of the effect of market environment as well as cultural factors on consumer decision-making styles.

An instrument developed by Sproles and Kendall (1986) has been the foundation for previous research that compared decision making styles cross-culturally. This study attempts to go beyond previous research by using a qualitative research approach. This type of research is used because detailed information regarding the factors in each decision making style can be identified cross-culturally. The research objectives for this study include: 1) determine the decision making styles of American and Korean consumers, 2)

Corresponding Author: Vanessa Prier Jackson, Ph.D, Associate Professor, Dept of Merchandising, Apparel & Textiles, University of Kentucky, 318 Erikson Hall, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506-0050 USA Tel: 859-257-4719

E-mail: vpjackson@uky.edu (Corresponding author)

+ This study was supported by a Research Activity Award grant from the University of Kentucky.

identify similarities and differences in decision making styles between the two cultures, and 3) compare findings of this study to that of previous research.

II. Literature Review

1. Consumer decision making styles

The original instrument developed by Sproles and Kendall (1986) identified eight consumer decision making styles that included Perfectionistic, Brand Conscious, Novelty Fashion, Recreational Shopping, Confused by Overchoice, Habitual, Brand Loyal, Price Value Conscious, and the Impulsive sub-scales. According to their research findings, the Price Value Conscious, and the Impulsive sub-scales were less reliable measures. Hafstrom *et al.* (1992) confirmed seven of the original constructs developed by Sproles and Kendall (1986). The researchers' identified Time-Energy as a new construct which included items from the Brand Conscious and Habitual Brand-Loyal decision making styles. Durvasula *et al.* (1993) identified eight factors for both samples (American & New Zealand). Lysonski *et al.* (1996) compared the decision making styles of developed and developing countries. The results of their study indicated that the Consumer Styles Inventory (CSI) instrument was more applicable to developed countries such as the United States and New Zealand, than to developing countries (India and Greece). Fan and Xiao (1998) examined the decision making styles of Chinese consumers and compared them to that of previous studies (See Table 1). Their findings suggest that there were possible overlapping among items from the original constructs, and recommended some new ones.

More recently, researchers have reported variations in findings related to the usefulness of the decision making instrument cross-culturally. Hui *et al.* (2001) found that five decision making styles were valid and reliable in the Chinese culture: Perfectionistic, Novelty-Fashion Conscious, Recreational, Price Conscious, and

Confused by Overchoice. The researchers also identified three new decision making styles and labeled them as "Trendy and Perfectionistic Consumer, Traditional, Pragmatic consumer, and Confused by Overchoice Consumer". Walsh *et al.* (2001) reported support for six factors: Brand Consciousness, Perfectionism, Recreational/Hedonism, Confused by Overchoice, Impulsiveness, and Novelty-Fashion Consciousness. Variety Seeking was novel to Germany and replaced brand loyalty and price-value consciousness factors found in previous countries. Wickliffe (2004) found that the Consumer Styles Inventory as previously established is not a reliable and valid measure of consumer decision-making styles in the United States or Korea.

Previous research has focused on consumer shopping orientations and motivations for shopping. Consumer shopping orientations include hedonic (shopping is fun) and utilitarian (shopping is work). The key motivator for shopping is the perceived outcome of a marketing activity (Babin *et al.*, 1994). The outcome of the marketing activity is the fulfillment of a goal or goals (Westbrook & Black, 1985). The goal in this case is to find and purchase a particular product. How the product is selected is based on pre-established criteria identified by the consumer. These criteria are used to classify consumers according to their decision making styles. This study focuses on how these criteria can be used to identify specific decision making styles of consumers cross-culturally.

III. Subjects and Methods

1. Qualitative research

The literature provides evidence that decision making styles of consumers may be characterized differently in varying cultures, and these differences may not be measurable using the same instrument. Based on the samples used in previous studies, concrete differences cannot be identified. This requires

<Table 1> Reliability Assessments (Cronbach Alphas)

Year	1986	1992	1993	1994	1996	1996	1996	1996	1996	1998	2001	2001	2004			
Country	U.S.	South Korea	New Zealand	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.	Greece	U.S.	India	China	China	German	U.S. Korea			
Authors	Spoles & Kendall	Hafstrom, Chae, & Chung	Durvasula, Lysonski, & Andrews	McDonald	Shim & Gehrt	Shim	Lysonski, Durvasula, & Zotos	Fan & Xiao	Hui, Siu, Wang & Chang	Walsh, Michel, Hemmig-Thurau	Walsh, Michel, Hemmig-Thurau	Wickliffe				
Sample	High School	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Elderly	High School	High School	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	Undergraduate	adult consumer	adult consumer	Undergraduate/Factory worker			
Sample Size	482	310	210	593	1846	1954	210	95	108	73	271	193	194	455	126	156
CONSUMER STYLES																
Perfectionistic	0.74	0.77	0.75	0.82	0.73	0.73	0.8	0.65	0.72	0.61	0.59	0.76	0.68	0.75		
Brand Conscious	0.75	0.84	0.59	0.81	0.72	0.72	0.59	0.68	0.63	0.71	0.6	0.45	0.37	0.73	0.84	
Novelty-Fashion Conscious	0.74		0.7	0.83	0.7	0.7	0.75	0.63	0.75	0.72		0.73	0.65	0.7		
Recreational Shopping	0.76	0.7	0.82	0.74	0.86	0.86	0.82	0.61	0.85	0.45		0.7	0.72	0.65		
Price Value Conscious	0.48	0.31	0.5	0.74	0.68	0.68	0.71	0.64	0.68	0.41	0.59	0.62	0.51	0.7		0.56
Impulsive	0.48	0.54	0.71	0.66	0.45	0.45	0.66	0.55	0.69	0.64		0.51	0.62	0.75		
Confused by Overchoice	0.55	0.54	0.66	0.76	0.62	0.62	0.66	0.34	0.62	0.51		0.34	0.4			
Habitual, Brand-Loyal	0.53	0.34	0.58	0.78	0.63	0.63	0.54	0.34	0.62	0.62						
Time-Energy Conserving		0.35														
Time Conscious																
Information Utilization																
Variety Seeking																
Perfectionistic, High-Quality Conscious														0.53		
Confused Impulsive Consumer																0.66
Brand/Quality Consumer																0.72
																0.84

the use of more in-depth research that would provide detailed information regarding the factors that could influence the decision making styles of consumers cross-culturally. Comparisons to other methods have led to the conclusion that the real strength of focus groups is not simply in exploring what people have to say, but in providing insights into the sources of complex behaviors and motivations (Morgan & Krueger, 1993). In this study, focus group interviews were used to explore the criteria used by a convenient sample of Korean and American consumers to select a product. Once these criteria were identified, they were then compared to those specific to previously identified decision making styles.

2. Sample selection

Barbour & Kitzinger (1999) emphasized that the appropriate number of focus groups will depend on the research question, the range of people you wish to include and time and resource limitations. Morgan (1992) reported that small groups tend to generate high levels of participant involvement, while large groups worked better with more neutral topics that generated lower level of involvement. For the purpose of this study, small groups of six to ten people were used in each focus group session.

A common sampling problem in both single-country and cross-cultural research is that it is “unclear which subjects represent a nation’s (culture’s) central tendencies” (Nasif, Al-Daeaj, Ebrahimi, & Thibodeaux, 1991, p84). Some researchers contend that students are not representative of the general population (Gordon, Slade, & Schmitt, 1986; Kinnear & Taylor, 1983). Accordingly, the sample used in this study was the shopping public (eighteen and older) as conducted by Walsh *et al.* (2001).

The focus group discussions were conducted on a university campus and a local church in a Midwestern university town in the United States. Participants were recruited via recruitment fliers posted on bulletin boards at the church and the university. Participation

was voluntary and all responses were recorded anonymously. The American participants were offered a free lunch as an incentive to participate in the study, and the Korean sample were offered a shopping card to a local retailer. A set of times was identified to make it convenient for the individuals from each group to participate in the study. Each session lasted no more than one and one-half hour including the lunch where applicable.

3. Conducting focus group interviews

Each focus group session was started with a briefing about the research project, and the process that would be followed throughout the focus group discussion. Before the sessions began, each participant was given a number. The purpose of the number was to allow the researchers to match the demographic information with the participant responses. The participants were told that each time they responded to an issue they were to say their number. After a briefing about the purpose of this research, participants were asked to sign informed consent forms attesting to their consent to be interviewed, as well as granting permission for the focus groups to be audio taped. Once this part of the focus group session was complete, each member was asked to complete a demographic profile sheet, and place their number on the sheet. At this time, the participants were also explained how they could stop their focus group participation at any time, without any loss of benefits or rights they had before volunteering.

The Korean focus groups were conducted in the same manner as the American sample focus groups except the focus group discussions were conducted in the Korean language. Both the American and Korean focus group sessions were recorded and a transcriber also typed their responses as they spoke. The Korean sessions were moderated by our Korean researcher, and the American focus group sessions were moderated by our American researcher.

Focus group questions were standardized and open-ended, and were designed to investigate the

participant's point of view "without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories" (Patton, 1990, p.24). Each group was asked to discuss "in their own words" their views regarding how they feel about shopping, and what is important to them when they purchase a fashion product. Once a reasonably comprehensive list of topics was identified from the discussion, the groups were asked each one in detail. The topics identified included the importance of brand, information seeking, value of a product, shopping as being recreational, time spent shopping, and the importance of comparative shopping,

according to professionals (50%) and nonprofessionals (50%). The nonprofessionals consisted of students, housewives, and part-time workers. The professional participants consisted of ministers, college professors, small business owners, managers, and researchers. In order to make sure the level of acculturation was controlled, the Korean participants were classified according to the length of time in the United States (less than one year: 5(25%), one to three years: 2(10%), three to five years 7(35%), and more than five years: 6(30%). For the purpose of this study, the professional and nonprofessional participants were combined for each culture.

IV. Results and Discussion

1. Sample characteristics

The age of all focus group participants ranged from 18 to 64, with 84.3 percent (30) being in the 25-44 age range. There were a total of 35 focus group participants consisting of 25 females (71.4%), and 10 males (28.6%). Sixty-two percent (22) of the sample was married, with 48.6 percent having a graduate degree. Level of income of the sample varied, with a range of under \$15,000.00 to more than \$150,000.00. Fifty-one percent (18) of the total sample indicated that they shopped 1~2 times per month, and 20 percent (7) indicated that they shopped more than 5 times per month. Monthly clothing expenditure was under 50 dollars for 37.1 percent (13) of the overall sample, 50~100 dollars for 34.3 percent (12), and more than 100 dollars for 28.6 percent (10) of the overall sample.

The American sample consisted of 15 persons, with 33 percent (5) being professionals, and 66.7 percent (10) being nonprofessional consumers. The nonprofessionals consisted of students, and part-time workers, and the professional focus groups consisted of college professors, researchers, and administrative staffs.

The Korean participants (20) were also identified

V. Identifiable Themes from Responses

The researchers first read all of the interview transcripts. Each researcher read the transcripts and identified specific themes for each cultural group (Korean and American). Once the categories were identified, each response was coded using 'a consensus coding scheme' (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to the coding, recreational, comparative shopper, brand conscious, information seeker, time conscious, and price quality conscious were the major identifiable themes.

1. Recreational shopping

The Korean participants described shopping as recreational (4 respondents), and considered it a stress reliever (3). One typical comment of the recreational type was "...I am very excited when I think about shopping, and I am so happy to buy new things... I feel it is like home". Some Korean participants indicated that the enjoyment of shopping was based on their experience shopping with their spouses (8). Most of the men participants did not like to shop for clothing, but preferred to shop for other items such as

electronics. A comment made by one of the participants was: "I am not happy when I think about shopping for clothes because women usually take a lot of time when shopping for clothes and I hate following my wife around. I don't like to go shopping for clothes, however, I love to go shopping for electronic items. But at the same time, my wife doesn't like to go and spend a lot of time doing that, so it can cause some problems."

Some American participants reported that shopping is recreational (3). Typical comments included: I enjoy shopping... I was born to shop... I find pleasure in shopping. Other American participants seem to have an aversion to shopping because they find it to create financial strain (1), and it is not fun because it creates problems (1). Other American participants stated: "I don't enjoy shopping... I don't like shopping because it creates a financial strain on me... I do not like shopping because I have limited time for shopping... I just hate shopping because it creates problems for me... if I don't have anything else to do then I will go shopping."

Some of the Korean participants indicated that shopping is burdensome (2), tiring (2), or stressful (2), and only shop for what they need (5). Typical comments were: "...I don't like window shopping... I look for and buy what I need, then I come home.", or "...I think about money. When I shop, I try to stretch the dollar as far as possible. I think about how I can save the most money while getting what I need to buy." Another comment was "I was very happy, however nowadays because I am so busy, I feel like shopping has become a burden. I think that shopping takes too much time and these days I usually go shopping alone, so I don't like going shopping that much."

2. Comparative shopping

Some Korean participants reported that they prefer to visit more than one place before they choose an apparel item (4). Some typical comments include: "I

always comparative shop... Even if I like the item, I always look for similar item and compare... or...I never buy anything without first comparatively shopping." Some of the Korean participants reported (3) that they prefer to shop in one shopping area (one stop shopping) or online shopping. Some comments included: "I usually finish my shopping in one shopping area...I don't like to spend a lot of time shopping because I am busy, or ...my husband does not have a lot of time, so we usually buy everything online."

American participants indicated that they shop many places first before choosing an apparel item (2), only go to one place (4), and sometimes shop more than one place (1). Some comments by the American participants included: "I shop and compare a whole lot of stores... I do it more online... I shop around for stuff...stores and internet and I call people... Depends on what I am buying, if it's important then I'll probably look around". Others stated that when shopping for apparel they do not comparative shop. A typical comments was "I just buy it... if you go to a store and you see something that you like you just go and get it...it's just an impulse."

3. Information seeking

Some participants discussed whether they sought out information on a clothing item before they went shopping. Many Korean participants did seek out information on the item before going to shop. For example, Koreans stated that "I go online to get information and then go to the store to purchase the clothing (4)... or...I look through magazines and watch TV to see what the celebrities are wearing and although I cannot afford the same clothing that they wear, I try to match the styles that they wear... when I was in Korea, I looked through the advertisements, but now because my English fluency is not very good, I cannot do it well."

American participants felt they did not have time to seek out information on a clothing item (3), and they

just went to the stores and shopped (3). Others stated that they did seek out information on a clothing item. For example, a participant stated “I look on the internet.” Another stated “I must admit that there are a couple of websites that I shop at, they send me emails about sales and they have online outlets and if I get a notice on my email about a sale on my favorite website, I’ll go that website.”

4. Time conscious

Some Korean participants seem to spend a great deal of time shopping (3), spend as much time as needed to find what they want (2), don’t have a great deal of time to shop (7) or spend very little time at all shopping (3). Typical comments were… “I spend a lot of time shopping for clothes… I think shopping is like resting. I spend as much time as I can afford to… I spend only as much time as I need to spend… Compared to when I was in Korea, I don’t shop all that much… I really don’t have the time to go shopping. In Korea, shopping was easier compared to America, so I don’t go shopping that much”. Other Korean participants indicated that the amount of time spent on shopping is sometimes dependent on the circumstances (2), such as if they are shopping for a gift (2). One participant commented “most of the time I spend shopping is used towards buying presents for people. I think that this takes a lot of time and effort. It is hard to buy present.”

American Participants reported that they spend a great deal of time shopping for apparel (5), but sometimes it depends on what type of apparel it is (4), and they prefer to spend time finding information about the clothing item before they purchase it (2). Respondents stated “It all depends on what it is, basic items no, I just want to get in and get out. If it is something that I want, which I’m an impulsive shopper, I have to spend enough time to buy it… I prefer to spend time online finding information about the product before shopping for any product.” Other American participants do not like to spend a great deal of time shopping (4). Some stated “short time, I don’t

find stores interesting because the aisles are too close together and you bump up against people and I don’t like that… I get burnt out quickly.” They prefer to spend more time shopping for other items such as shoes, books, jewelry and antiques.

5. Brand conscious

Participants also discussed brand importance and brand preferences when shopping. The Korean participants implied that the importance of brand is dependent on the clothing category (4). One comment was:

“The brand that I prefer depends on the type of clothing. I am a pastor so I wear suits often. When I go to purchase a suit, I go a department store to compare the different brands. I guess I go to department stores to purchase casual clothing as well.”

In some cases the selection of a clothing item was dependent on fit and comfort (4), value/price (4) and country-of-origin (2). Some Korean consumers living in the United States preferred brands made in Korea, because the fit and construction seem to be better. A typical comment was, “American suit don’t fit the Korean frame very well. Because the clothes don’t present well on me and because of the price I typically don’t buy suits in America. Korean participants also indicated that they only care about sales. For example, some participants stated “I don’t buy brand name clothing because they are too expensive… I will buy brand names if they are on sale… I care more about price than brand”. Some Korean participants indicated that brand indicated quality (3), they typically buy brand name clothing because they do not know clothing very well (2), and they buy the same brand(s) all the time (4). Typical comments were “I think the quality of expensive clothing is good. I think that is the reason brand name clothing is expensive… I do not feel comfortable buying cheaper clothing. When I buy brand name clothing items, it brings me peace of mind

because I trust the quality of the clothing... I buy brand name clothing because I don't know clothing very well. I trust brand name clothing... If I don't know the brand I don't even look at it."

American participants reported that brand was very important (4), they prefer designer labels (1) that are on sale (2) and others indicated that they are not brand loyal, that it depends on what is on sale (3). Typical responses were "I have all designer clothes... but if I get designer wear on sale I buy that... I buy what I like and what suits my price bracket." Other Americans indicated that it depends on the occasion as to whether they prefer brands (2). One response was "It depends on the occasion... if I'm dressing up then I want to wear something designer, if I lounge around at home I don't care... yes with jeans, but then no with everything else."

Another factor related to brand was preferences for stores that are specific to a particular brand. Korean (3) and American (5) participants indicated that they prefer to shop at specialty stores that carry a specific brand. Both the American (2) and Korean (2) participants indicate that they shop at discount and department stores for specific brands. American participants (3) reported that they shop the same brand specific store all the time.

6. Price/quality conscious

Related to attributes of clothing, both focus groups made mention of their viewpoint about the relationship between price and quality. Korean participants felt there was a correlation between price and quality (10). For example some statements about this relationship included... "I think that the quality agrees with the price... I feel as though if I buy more expensive clothing, the quality is better... I think that the quality agrees with the price... In Korea this is not always the case, but I think that in America it is more applicable... If the quality is good, even if it is a little pricey, it is worth it."

Americans thought that there was little correlation

between quality and price (6). They felt that it was important that you get what you pay for, but that is not always the case. For example one participant stated "I think that the blinds are getting kind of blurred lately, because you can go to Store X and I think that Store X clothes are going downhill. You still pay that high price, but you are getting the quality that you get at Store X... I think it varies just because there's a lot of stuff that I might have gotten for a lower price that would last me a really long time and there is stuff that I spent a lot of money on that didn't so I think it varies, like you have to get to know the store quality"... I think quality not necessarily is associated with price, sometimes if one looks around, good quality can be purchased at lower price. Higher price does not necessarily mean good quality.

VI. Conclusions

In 1986, Sproles and Kendall began their research on identifying the decision making styles of consumers. They believed that consumers approached the market with a specific decision making style when making a purchase. Over the years the Decision Making Styles instrument created by the above mentioned researchers has been tested in various cultures using mainly undergraduate and graduate students as their sample (Hafstrom *et al.*, 1992; Durvasula *et al.*, 1993; Shim & Gerht, 1996; Shim, 1996; Lysonski *et al.*, 1996; Fan & Xiao, 1998). Others used elderly, adult consumers and factory workers as their samples (McDonald, 1994; Walsh *et al.*, 2001; Wickliffe, 2004).

Most of the previous studies have shown that the majority of the constructs could be used cross-culturally to measure the decision making styles of consumers. Some found that a few of the constructs were more stable, needed further refining, were less reliable than others, and were less applicable in less developed countries (Durvasula *et al.*, 1993; Lysonski *et al.*, 1996). There were instances where the results of

some studies identified new constructs or combined original constructs (Fan & Xiao, 1998; Hafstrom *et al.*, 1992; Walsh *et al.*, 2001; Wickliffe, 2004).

All of these findings indicate that further research should be conducted to determine how consumers cross-culturally approach the market when making a decision to buy a product. Two reasons support the need for new research. First, as more and more industries and countries attempt to get in on the globalization trends, cross-cultural and cross-national consumer behavior has and continues to be an increasingly relevant area of research. Secondly, in a globalizing consumer market, decision making has become more complex and even more important for consumers than in the past (Kaynak & Kucukemiroglu, 2001). Globalization brings into play the question regarding the need to standardize or customize product advertising and marketing strategies that are used to convince consumers to purchase a product.

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences in the decision making styles of Korean and American consumers. Focus group interviews were used as the median to collect information relative to their methods of approach to a market to buy a universal need such as clothing for personal use. Sproles and Kendall (1986) originally identified Recreational-Hedonic, Price Conscious/Value for Money Conscious, Impulsive/Careless, Confused by overchoice, Habitual Brand Loyalty, Novelty Fashion, Brand Conscious/Price Equals Quality, Perfectionist/High quality decision Making styles. Other studies reported new DMS such as Time Energy Conserving, Time Conscious, Information Utilization, Value Seeking, Perfectionistic High Quality Conscious, Confused Impulsive and Brand Quality (Hafstrom *et al.*, 1992; Fan & Xiao, 1998; Walsh *et al.*, 2001; Wickliffe, 2004). The six themes identified in the focus group discussions include Price/Quality Conscious, Brand Conscious, Time Conscious, Information Seeking, Comparative Shopper, and Recreational Shopper.

The Recreational Shopping decision making style is

defined as “the enjoyment of shopping as a leisure time activity, and includes wasting time in stores, and shopping just for fun” (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). A review of the reported reliability coefficients of previous studies suggest that this decision making style may be one of the more stable constructs. Most reported Alpha coefficients of .70 or above (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Hafstrom *et al.*, 1992; Durvasula *et al.*, 1993; McDonald, 1994; Shim & Gerht, 1996; Shim, 1996; Hui *et al.*, 2001).

Variation in the types of items listed in the origin construct and those identified in this study as measures of shopping enjoyment are not all identical. For example, some Korean and American participants indicated that shopping for apparel was enjoyable. Koreans reported that shopping for apparel served as a stress reliever, however some American participants indicated that they do not like shopping because it creates financial strain and sometimes creates other problems. Some Koreans reported that shopping is a burden and can be tiring and stressful, therefore, they only shop when they need to. Korean men reported that they did not enjoy shopping for clothing, but they do enjoy shopping for other things such as electronics. Based on the findings of this study, financial and other unspecified problems may hinder American participants from enjoying shopping. This was not a factor identified by Korean participants. These findings imply that shopping enjoyment cannot be measured in different cultures using the previously establish “Recreational Shopping” construct.

According to this study, both Korean and Americans seem to compare products before they decide to buy a particular item. The findings of this study suggest that some Korean and American participants visit more than one place before making a decision as to what clothing item they may purchase. On the other hand, some Korean and American participants also indicated that they do not comparative shop for apparel they just buy what they need. Comparison shopping seemed to be connected to the amount of time a participant had to comparison shop. The original decision making style

instrument did not include a Time Conscious construct (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Studies that followed Sproles and Kendall (1986) identified a Time Energy Conserving construct (Hafstrom *et al.*, 1992), and a Time conscious construct (Fan & Xiao, 1998). The construct included items that discussed comparison shopping and time constraints. From this study we find that there seems to be a link between the availability of time and the collection of information by comparison to help in the choice of a product.

This study identified consumers who seem to be information seekers, meaning they use what ever resources to get information about a product before they go and buy it. However, it does not suggest how the information is used by the participants to make their decisions about the purchase of a product. Fan and Xiao (1998) developed Information Utilization, which is defined as “how consumers use information that is made available to them relative to products and stores.” The reliability of the Information Utilization factor was reported as .55, and this suggest perhaps the Information Utilization construct is not a strong measure of how customers use information to help them select a product. Because this study supports the need for an information Utilization construct, more research is needed.

Another decision making style reported in previous studies was that of Price Conscious. It is defined as “awareness of the best value, and buying at sale prices or lowest prices” (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Korean and American participants disagree on the relationship between price and quality. Both groups are aware of prices, but the Korean participants believe that there is a relationship more so between brand, quality and price than just being price conscious. This takes us back to the Brand and quality relationship where they indicated that buying certain brands assured quality. Now we add price to the equation, where they (Koreans) believe that buying certain brands assures quality, and it is okay to pay a higher price. Price consciousness comes into play when the Koreans and Americans indicated that they would shop at discount and department stores for a

particular brand. On the other hand, Americans reported that perhaps value is not related to quality because sometimes you can pay a higher price for apparel and the quality is not good. Still the link goes back to brand in some cases, because some Americans prefer brand labels, but they indicated that they would still shop for the best value for their money. Therefore, in some instances, the preference may be as stated above, or the apparel preference may just be based on price. The previous used to measure Price Conscious also showed low reliabilities among the previous studies (Sproles & Kendall, 1986; Hafstrom *et al.*, 1992; Lysonski *et al.*, 1996). These studies reported Cronbach Alphas of less than .50, which suggest the need for further refinement.

In prior research brand is used in many different ways to describe its importance to consumers decision making styles. The original decision making styles included Brand Conscious/Price Equals Quality and Habitual Brand Loyalty. Brand Conscious/Price Equals Quality was defined as the need or desire to purchase well-known national brands, higher price brands, and/or the more advertised brands (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Habitual Brand Loyalty was defined as only buying specific brands repeatedly (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Korean participants listed brand loyalty, brand equals quality, fit and comfort, clothing category and value as the top factors that influence brand importance or brand preference of apparel for purchase. Some Korean participants indicated that they buy the same brands because they do not know clothing very well. The dependence on the occasion was not an important factor to the Korean participants. A similarity between the American and Korean participants was that they like to shop at specialty stores that carry a specific brand, but they will shop at discount and department stores for specific brands. American participants reported that they prefer designer brand labels, but sometimes it depends on the occasion and if they are on sale. These findings suggest that there are some differences and similarities in factors related to what makes the importance of brand choice in clothing

purchases between Korean and American consumers.

New important factors reported by Korean and American participants were the relationship between brand and brand loyalty to product category, occasion, and price. According to previous research, the constructs for Brand Loyalty and Brand Conscious reported varying reliability scores from low to high. The samples used with these studies also varied from students to adults. The alpha coefficients for the Brand Loyalty construct ranged from .34 to .78 (4 studies below .50). The alpha coefficients for Brand Conscious ranged from .37 to .84 (2 studies below .50). This supports the need to further refine the Brand Loyalty and Brand Conscious constructs. The results of this study support the idea of further refinement of the two constructs. That is because the results also imply that perhaps different factors related to brand preference and brand loyalty exist cross-culturally. It also reports some overlapping of items from both constructs into each other.

The Perfectionistic decision making style is defined as “an awareness of and desire for high quality products, and the need to make the best or perfect choice versus buying the first product or brand available” (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). This factor is reported to be one of the most stable of the decision making styles. The reliability coefficients reported by previous studies ranged from .59 (Fan & Xiao, 1998) to .82 (McDonald, 1994). From this study, we found that Koreans choose brands because they do not know what is considered good quality in a product. By choosing a specific brand(s) Koreans believe that they were making sure they were getting good quality in a product. Americans, on the other hand, do prefer brands but not because they indicate quality. Further research would indicate if this factor is more related to the Korean reasoning when selecting a brand than to American consumers.

Lastly, this research project did not identify a construct consistent with the Novelty-fashion, confused by overchoice, and Impulsive conscious constructs as previously developed by Sproles & Kendall (1986).

VII. Future Research

Information on consumer decision making styles can be useful to businesses when attempting to target a consumer niche different from their domestic market. As more and more industries and countries attempt to become a part of the globalization trend, it is necessary for firms to understand how consumers approach a market when trying to make the decision to purchase a product. This study veered away from the typical testing of the original instrument and used qualitative research methods to seek out criteria used by Korean and American consumers related to the creation of a decision making style. The findings provide support for the need to develop an instrument that could be used cross-culturally. However, before instrument development is pursued, more qualitative research should be conducted using the Korean and American as well as other cultures as samples. Replicating the study using other Korean and American samples would be necessary to make sure the identified constructs are inclusive of all possible decision making styles.

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Received March 6, 2006

Accepted June 8, 2006