

Differences in Clothing Selection Criteria of Regional Subculture Groups

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Abstract This study regarded fashion selection criteria as clothing consumption value and desired fashion images, and examined selection differences according to regional subculture groups. Clothing consumption value is a direct value that people seek with clothing products and a perceived value which is divided into emotional, social, price, quality values. Fashion image which is a feeling communicated to others by wearing a certain fashion style is the most superficial value. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was performed to test the differences between regional subculture groups in clothing consumption values and desired fashion images. We found some differences in clothing consumption value specifically in emotional value and social value. The group differences were remarkably significant in fashion image comparison. 'Kang-nam' group pursued 'lively', 'sophisticated', 'charming', 'feminine', 'gorgeous' image more than 'Kang-buk' group. While 'Kang-buk' group produced lower scores in ideal fashion images, the group had significant higher seeking in 'sportive' image compared to 'Kangnam' group.

Key words clothing consumption value, desired fashion images, regional subculture, clothing selection criteria

Introduction

A sub-cultural group is a critical factor that determines consumers' clothing selection. What people wear based on what criteria are closely related to their identities, and in this modern society, their identities are affected by subcultures to which they belong (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This study is designed to examine the effects of regional subculture groups that have the largest influence on society. In Korea, a region or physical area is a critical attribute that defines and determines subcultures, including fashion and lifestyle, just as seen in the cases of Gangnam vs Gangbuk styles, Cheongdam-dong Luxury fashion, Jeongja-dong Young Mom style, Garosu-gil café style and so forth.

There are a wide spectrum of views on regional differences reflected in fashion, from a case that region-specific style is a social phenomenon that does exist, to a case that such regional characters are mere illusions concocted, distorted and spread by media. However, considering comparative experiments and research, it can be said that regional differences do exist. Subjects of such studies have mostly been students, (Nam Goong, 1999; Koh et al., 2000; Lee & Yoo, 2004), since they show more contrasting

differences than other demographic groups as they are more likely to identify with peers and manage their routines in relatively limited areas. SMART, a school uniform brand of SK Networks, conducted in-depth interviews with 9,789 students nationwide to examine different patterns and styles in reforming school uniforms (Different School Uniforms in Different Towns and Trends, 2006), and found that students as a single and identical social class demonstrated different fashion behavior in accordance with regional subcultures to which they belong. Students living in Gangbuk area, or north of the Han River, preferred short and tight blouses and A-line skirts, while those in Gangnam area, or south of the Han River, preferred long blouses and short skirts with a loose silhouette.

Does the same apply to adults? Unlike adolescents who live their everyday lives within limited areas and only with limited interactions with other regions, adults including university students are going to school or work located far from where they live. Accordingly, it is hard to predict what influence regional characters have on individual consumption behavior. In order to generalize the regional differences found in teenagers' behavior, objective verification is required. Therefore, this study intends to examine differences in adult fashion behavior according to regional subcultures: how regional subcultures are established among adults, how different the values and images that they try to obtain by consuming fashion goods are.

Research Background

Regional Differences in Clothing Behavior

Comparative studies on regional fashion behavior covered wide-ranging concepts of various dimensions, from It-items, purchasing factors like brand loyalty and price sensitivity to innovative tendency and unique individual style. According to findings, Nam Goong (1999) confirmed that different regions embraced different trends: retro style in Gangbuk area vs hip hop style in Gangnam area; and Jeon (2000) verified that male adolescents in Gangnam area showed stronger brand loyalty and higher price sensitivity than their counterparts, while both groups disclosed little, or no, difference in innovative tendency. Koh et al., (2000) looked into differences between teenagers in Seoul and other major cities, rather than south vs north of the Han River in Seoul, and identified that Seoul adolescents had stronger and more unique styles in their fashion. Before this study, the researchers (1997) also examined shopping behaviors of female adults living in Yeongdeungpo area and new towns, and verified that different factors affected different groups. However, the study did not conduct direct comparative analyses on visible shopping behavior of different groups. In this regards, this study plans to examine how regional subcultures influence adults' clothing selection criteria by directly comparing different sub-cultural groups.

Clothing Selection Criteria

Among clothing selection criteria, most influential factors are clothing consumption value and desired fashion images that consumers seek for. Clothing consumption value is a direct value that consuming fashion goods provide consumers (Choi Jeong, 2003). Sweeney et al. (2001) cited four components of consumption value: emotional value generated by products, social value promoting socialization of in-

dividuals, economic value saved by short-term or long-term cost reduction, and quality value perceived by product quality and performance. Choi Jeong (2003) assumed three dimensions of fashion product value, i.e. desired benefits, clothing evaluation criteria and quality performance, and derived emotional, expressional, physical and economic value each corresponding to variables from previous studies. Emotional value is emotional utilities achieved by consuming fashion goods, and comprised of overall pleasure, comfort, positive emotions, satisfaction, reliance and sense of belonging. Expressional value encompasses pursuit of beauty, self-expression and others' evaluation on one's self-expression, and consists of esthetic, trendy, symbolic and social attributes. Physical value is tangible utilities obtained from physical functions of fashion goods, like ease of management and practicality, and economic value includes economical aspects. Lim (2005a) identified regional differences in clothing consumption between large and small/medium cities, which provides a ground for assuming regional differences in clothing values.

A desired fashion image is a self-image that a consumer intends or wants to demonstrate and/or emphasize by wearing fashion products with visual accessories (Jeong, 2001), and an ideal and phenomenal self-image (Kim & Kim, 2010). When purchasing fashion products, most people try to promote their images up to the level that they perceive ideal. However, if there is too big a gap between ideal and actual images, desired fashion images intermediate the two images (Yeom & Kim, 2004). Therefore, desired fashion images play a critical role in the selection of fashion products. In the review of previous studies on fashion image descriptions which are mostly rendered in adjective, Lee et al., (2004) found that most frequently cited were graceful, advanced, active, unique, modern, attractive, feminine, sexy and matured. Lim (2005b) divided four desired fashion images into four dimensions: dignity, sociability, splendor and comfort, examined regional differences in each dimension, and identified that consumers in large and small/medium cities showed differences in splendor and activity dimensions. Accordingly, this study also expects to verify regional differences in desired fashion images. However, in order to minimize the influence of income levels, this study is designed to sub-divide large cities into sub-cultural regions and look into each region.

Another factor that has a great influence on individual consumption is value of life that one is pursuing. Value is behavioral concepts and patterns that members of society share (Yang Yoon and Lee Eun-ji, 2002), and consistent belief that serves as an ultimate standard, not limited to a specific circumstance or temporary period (Rokeach, 1973). Value is a critical factor that hugely influences individual behavior and attitude, and has been heavily studied as an indicator to predict consumer behavior (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994). It is expected that clothing selection is also closely related to value that individual consumers are pursuing.

There are two major views in understanding value. First view understands value in a double structure of objective value and means value (Rokeach (1973)), in an attempt to interpret individual value in a structured way. Second view put more importance on individual value that is closely related to daily lives (Kahle (1985)). Previous studies that have tried to explain individual consumption behavior by value have preferred the second view (Yoon Seong-wook and Yang Yeon-jo, 2009). This is attributable not only to the individual-oriented perspectives of Kahle (1985), but also the study methodology of nine-question LOV (List of Value) scale that easily measured and explained individual value. This study also intends to utilize Kahle's LOV scale to examine individual value as clothing selection criteria.

Based on previous studies, the following hypotheses are established.

- H1. In accordance with the area of routine, different regional subculture groups will show different pursuing value of life.
- H2. In accordance with the area of routine, different regional subculture groups will show different desired value of clothing consumption.
- H3. In accordance with the area of routine, different regional subculture groups will show different desired fashion images.

Methodology

Survey questionnaires included 1) benefits of clothing and desired fashion images to measure clothing selection criteria, 2) the amount of time spending in each region to define subculture groups according to area of routine, and 3) variables of pursuing value of life to identify characteristics of each subject group. Clothing value was measured by 13 questions of Choi Jeong (2003) that identified dimensions of clothing value, and desired fashion images were evaluated by 13 questions derived from most frequently-appeared descriptions that Lee Hyeong-jeong and Kim Mi-young (2004) determined after reviewing previous studies on clothing images. Desired value was tested by LOV 9 questions of Kahle (1985). In order to define the area of routine, respondents were asked to answer how much time they were spending in the given commercial regions, except their home or school. The answers were presented in percentages (%) out of their total leisure time. Based on preliminary research, identified were 14 commercial areas: Sinchon, Ewha Womans' University, Hongik University, Jongno, Daehangno, Myeong-dong, Apgujeong, Cheongdam, Gangnam Station, Banpo, Samseong, Jamsil, Sicheon and Sillim.

Survey respondents were female university students in Seoul, and the average age was 21, spanning from 18 to 27. Among collected, 180 questionnaires were analyzed. To analyze the data, SPSS 15.0 was utilized. By hierarchical cluster analysis, the subjects were categorized into different groups, and by *factor analysis* and *MANOVA*, differences in clothing value and desired fashion images by group were examined.

Findings and Discussion

Classification of Regional Subculture Groups

To divide female university students living in Seoul into regional subculture groups, *hierarchical cluster analysis* was conducted on how much leisure time they were spending in the identified commercial regions. The analysis found two different regional groups: those who mainly spent time in Jongno, Myeong-dong and Sinchon, and those who mainly spent time in Gangnam station and Apgujeong. According to the identified regions, the former was named "Gangbuk Group ($n=149$)," and the latter "Gangnam Group ($n=41$)." Interestingly, Gangbuk Group also spent their leisure time in other areas including Gangnam Station area, while Gangnam Group hardly spent their time in other areas than Gangnam Station and Apgujeong, telling that the latter group managed their routine in very limited areas. The reason why samples were highly concentrated on Gangbuk Group is that most universities in

Seoul are located in Gangbuk area, and thus students spent most of their time in and around school during the week. Analysis results are as presented on the Table 1.

Table 1.
Results of Hierarchical Cluster Analysis on Regional Subculture Groups

Group	N	Leisure time in the identified commercial regions						
		Sinchon	Jongno Myeong-dong	Daehangno	Gangnam Station Apgujeong	Jamsil Sicheon	Samseong	Sillim
Gangbuk	149	20.4%	37.4%	13.4%	11.4%	0.1%	0.2%	3.5%
Gangnam	41	5.3%	6.9%	0%	71.9%	0%	10.2%	0%

Differences in Pursuing Value of Life by Regional Subculture Group

To verify Hypothesis 1, differences about LOV 9 questions were examined by group. According to *MANOVA*, no statistically significant difference was found (*Wilks' Lambda*=0.89, *F*=1.05, *p*=.41). This demonstrates that there is little, or no, difference between sub-cultural groups in their pursuing value of life (*H1 was not supported*). It can be interpreted that, at the life value level, female university students of different regional groups have no significant difference, but are more affected by their common status as students.

Differences in Desired Value of Clothing Consumption by Regional Subculture Group

Before looking into differences in desired value of clothing consumption by groups, factor analysis on clothing consumption was performed. Factor analysis through 13 questions about clothing value derived emotional, social, economic-physical and self-expressive values (*Table 2*). In comparison with previous studies, this finding is different in that trend sensitivity is included in social value along with sense of belonging and recognition by others. This demonstrates that trend-sensitive fashion products for female university students are not something of self-expression, but of social value that conforms to others. Unlike Choi Jeong (2003)'s study that divided economic and physical values, this study combined them into one dimension. Choi's expressive value was re-named as self-expressive value in this study as trend sensitivity was integrated into social value and expressive value was only comprised of lifestyle and value expression.

To determine differences in desired value of clothing consumption by group, *MANOVA* was conducted with putting each group as independent variables and four identified clothing value as dependent variables (*Table 3*). The analysis found a statistically significant difference between Gangbuk and Gangnam groups (*Wilks' Lambda*=0.89, *F*=2.50, *p* < .05). Looking into each dimension of clothing consumption value, differences were identified in emotional and social values, which partially supported Hypothesis 2. In both dimensions, Gangnam Group scored higher on average, meaning that Gangnam Group is more affected than its counterpart by individual emotions and social desires about recognition in their fashion selection. On the other hands, economic-physical and self-expressive values delivered no difference between groups. These findings can be interpreted that different emotional and social values

Table 2.
Results of Factor Analysis on Clothing Value

Clothing Consumption Value Factor	Variables	Factor loadings	Cronbach's α
Emotional value	Gaining confidence	.873	.860
	Having Fun	.823	
	Being satisfied	.823	
	Feeling beauty	.696	
Social value	Being fashionable	.787	.617
	Feeling self-belonging	.731	
	Being respected	.526	
Economical-Physical value	Easy to clean	.787	.521
	Good quality	.655	
	Durability	.653	
Self-expression value	Representation of life styles	.836	.667
	Representation of principles	.797	

generate differences between groups when they select and evaluate fashion products at the clothing consumption value level.

Table 3.
Results of MANOVA on Differences in Desired Value of Clothing Consumption by Regional Subculture Group

Clothing Consumption Value	Mean		F-value	Clothing Consumption Value	Mean		F-value
	Kang-buk	Kang-nam			Kang-buk	Kang-nam	
Emotional Value	3.69	4.26	8.86**	Economical-Physical value	3.42	3.22	1.45
Social Value	2.98	3.35	4.12*	Self-Expression Value	3.37	3.46	0.14

$p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Differences in Desired Fashion Images by Regional Subculture Group

To verify Hypothesis 3, desired fashion images were tested as the last criteria of clothing selection. MANOVA delivered significant differences in some questions (*Wilks' Lambda=0.80, F=1.98, p < .05, H3 was partially supported*). Garment image descriptions about which two group demonstrated differences included sophisticated, gorgeous, sportive, lively, charming and feminine (Table 4).

Table 4.
Results of MANOVA on Differences in Desired Fashion Images by Regional Subculture Group

Fashion Image	Mean		F-value	의복이미지	Mean		F-value
	Kang-buk	Kang-nam			Kang-buk	Kang-nam	
Intelligent	3.11	3.44	3.33	Vivid	3.33	3.92	5.25*
Unique	3.07	3.56	12.74	Charming	3.28	4.22	17.51**
Sophisticated	3.34	4.19	17.51***	Feminine	2.98	3.89	11.30***
Sexy	3.32	2.58	0.59	Mature	3.09	3.53	3.03
Gorgeous	2.68	3.22	4.16*	Romantic	2.80	3.42	3.85
Neat	3.21	3.67	3.85	Comfortable	3.39	3.22	0.49
Sportive	2.93	2.25	6.11*				

$p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Among desired fashion images that showed meaningful differences as presented in Table 4, five descriptions—lively, sophisticated, charming, feminine and gorgeous—, except sporty, scored higher among Gangnam Group. Considering clothing images tend to directly influence fashion style selection, the difference between groups may directly appear in their actual styles. Gangbuk Group showed preference for “comfortable, sophisticate and lively” images. Gangnam also sought for “sophisticate and charming” images, while expressed low preference for a “comfortable” image. “Sexy” scored low in both groups. Meantime, Gangbuk Group showed low deviations among images, while Gangnam Group delivered higher deviations, implying that the survey results were more driven by the characteristics of sample groups and thus possibilities of misrepresentation or errors in comparison cannot be ruled out.

Conclusions

This study regarded fashion selection criteria as clothing consumption value and desired fashion images, and examined selection differences according to regional subculture groups. Female university students living and studying in Seoul were divided by their leisure-spending area into two groups: Gangbuk group which has relatively large leisure-spending areas, and Gangnam group which has limited leisure-spending areas. Differences in desired value of clothing consumption were identified, and Gangnam Group put more significance on emotional and social values when consuming fashion products. Differences in desired fashion images were also verified. Different preferences for lively, sophisticated, charming, feminine and sporty images were found. Among them, only the sporty image was preferred by Gangbuk Group, while others were preferred by Gangnam Group.

This study has its significance in that it verified that there are differences in fashion selection by regional subculture groups, and the difference stems from clothing consumption level, not from ultimate values like pursuing value of life. In particular, the identified differences in emotional and social values by group help understand different consumer behavior by different group. However, considering that the samples of this study are somewhat skewed, it is hard to generalize all the findings. It also has limi-

tations in that samples were selected and studied only limited areas of Seoul. Despite the weaknesses, this study did prove regional differences in fashion styles that could be predicted by desired fashion images and desired value of clothing consumption.

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