

Study on the Characteristics of Fashion Leaders in College Clubs' Fashion Networks

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College Clubs'
Fashion Leaders

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Abstract Fashion leadership is divided into visual influence, linguistic influence, and dual leadership. We refer to people exercising such influential power as fashion innovators, fashion opinion leaders, and fashion double leaders, respectively. Scholars and marketers have raised continuous questions on this issue: who are these fashion leaders and what characteristics do they have? In this study, social network analysis is applied to grasp the existence of three types of fashion leaders in college clubs, examine their positions in fashion process networks and investigate their individual and social characteristics. For this study, three college clubs were recruited through convenience sampling and surveyed online. Peer nomination questions for structuring fashion process networks and self-evaluation questions for measuring personal characteristics are included. Two fashion networks, an opinion leadership network and an innovativeness network, embrace four to six leaders and illustrate similar structure patterns in the three groups, which indicates that dual leaders enjoyed the lion's share in college clubs. The number of fashion innovators tends to be fewer compared to that of fashion opinion leaders, and we infer that peer relationship appears to intervene with fashion opinion leadership. Other personal characteristics supporting results from previous studies are also confirmed in this study.

Key words fashion leader, innovator, social network, centrality

Introduction

The clothing behavior of an individual is affected by other people's clothing behaviors. A fashion leader is defined as a person who leads fashion in terms of clothing behavior, or seeks innovative means to greatly influence the clothing behavior of others. Fashion leadership is divided into visual influence and linguistic influence. A fashion innovator is defined as a person who adopts a new style prior to others and exerts influence in disseminating the existence of the new style in a visual way, while a fashion opinion leader is a person who delivers information on a new style in a positive way and has linguistic power. Those who possess both types of influence (visual and linguistic) are called fashion double lead-

ers (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971; Rogers, 1983; Ree & Rhee, 1988; Rhee, 1999).

Who are these fashion leaders playing such pivotal roles in fashion? What characteristics do they have? Such questions have been recognized as critical issues by scholars and marketers (Ree & Rhee, 1989; Cho, 2001), and have been studied continuously. Following studies to grasp the types of fashion leaders based on their roles (Ree & Rhee, 1989), researchers have made repeated attempts to identify social and psychological characteristics for fashion leaders each type and to discover the differences in their attitudes and behaviors (Lee, 1996; Kim & Rhee, 2001), enhancing the awareness of the general behavioral characteristics of fashion leaders.

Recently, the development of the Internet has allowed people to access information very quickly, and the vitalization of internet communities and mobile social networks have made fashion information sharing and exchanging easier. Accordingly, a lot of interest is given to studies that explore aspects of fashion leadership formed by new media (Song & Hwang, 2008; Park, Chung, & Jeon, 2012). Based on this context, this study is designed 1) to grasp the existence of fashion leaders in fashion process networks, their position in the networks, and their individual and social characteristics through Social Network Analysis (SNA) by examining college clubs which actively share and exchange fashion information, and 2) to compare any possible differences observed between this study and existing studies. SNA is widely used in the social science sector because it is the research methodology employed to visualize the relationships of actors with a view to understanding network structure. Recently, it has been applied to other areas apart from social science, and SNA-based research results are more frequently published. In particular, network analysis focusing on the relationships between actors is widely used to analyze the roles and responsibilities of leaders. However, there is insufficient research applying SNA for the purpose of confirming leaders in the fashion process. Consequently, the SNA method is used in this study to explore the position of leaders in the fashion process.

This study is significantly meaningful for the following reasons: SNA is utilized to unveil the positions and characteristics of fashion leaders in the fashion process network, which is conducive to drawing research results based on new approaches. In brief, this study puts a focus on the relation between individuals in social networks, allowing us to examine in-depth research results unavailable in the existing studies based on statistical analysis.

Theoretical Background

Fashion leadership

The group of fashion leaders armed with fashion leadership is categorized into three groups in terms of visual and linguistic influences: fashion innovators, fashion opinion leaders, and fashion double leaders. Rogers (1983) argued “a fashion innovator who adopts new fashion prior to others tends to possess more information than late followers. Therefore, the fashion innovator has high opinion leadership, and an opinion leader also shows higher innovation momentum than followers.” He also indicated the existence of double leaders who show off both fashion innovativeness and fashion opinion leadership. Since then,

plenty of researches have reported positive relationships between the two concepts: fashion innovativeness and fashion opinion leadership (Ree & Rhee, 1989). How much of such fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership overlap varies according to each study. For example, Workman and Johnson (1993) argued these two types of leadership play different roles but the characteristics of the two types of leaders are similar. Since then, more and more studies have dealt with fashion innovativeness and fashion opinion leadership from a single dimension (Kim & Rhee, 2001), enabling studies addressing the two leaderships in a single dimension to become part of the academic mainstream (Jeon & Park, 2011; Park, Chung, & Jeon, 2012).

However, it is obvious that visual influence plays a different role from that of linguistic influence, and it is too early to say that the leaders of both types are definitively the same. Accordingly, it is necessary to conduct more qualitative studies on such differences. This study, therefore, purports to investigate whether the fashion leadership of both types exists in a single dimension in college clubs, or if there are indeed qualitative variations.

Leaders and Social Networks—Innovator (or Lead User), Opinion Leader

Recently, in the discipline of social science, SNA has been applied to interrogate the types of leadership found in social networks for individuals. The perception of social network theory is based on the assumption that the characteristics and behaviors of individuals are influenced not only by personality and attitude but also by the attributes of relations with others and positions within social networks (Scott, 2000). It is reported that a person existing at the central position of a social network shows more influence on others, and these leaders having central positions are divided into two types: innovators (or Lead Users) and opinion leaders.

An innovator stands at the contact point between network groups and is adjacent to other groups, showing a higher value for *betweenness centrality*. Thanks to such an intermediate position of networks, they can access various types of information, knowledge, and thoughts, and they show an overall propensity for innovation. They also tend to create new ideas. Because of this, they assemble a variety of information in order to draw creative solutions shifting from the existing paradigm, and deliver innovation and work as opinion leaders in a certain context. However, given that the position of innovator and network structures continue to change, they are differentiated from opinion leaders in playing the role of leaders.

By building direct relations with many people in a certain group, opinion leaders exist at the center of a network, performing critical roles in information dispersion (Brass & Burkhardt, 1992). Opinion leaders have a high *degree centrality* value, but do not show high betweenness centrality, which indicates that opinion leaders only exert their influential power on the group they belong to. In short, opinion leaders are able to propagate innovation but lack the power to influence various groups.

Kratzer and Lettl (2009) confirmed that attributes of innovators and opinion leaders in peer relations of middle/high school students are linked to betweenness centrality and degree centrality re-

spectively in the advisory networks. Likewise, this study aims to identify fashion innovators and fashion opinion leaders in college clubs and verify whether they have significantly-high betweenness centrality and degree centrality in fashion process networks.

Lifestyle and Sources of Fashion Information

Various studies have explored the existence of demographic, social, & psychological variations or lifestyle differentiations between fashion leaders and followers. Chowdhary (1988) investigated the differences between fashion leaders and followers, and proved that the two groups showed differences in terms of media exposure, age recognition, social activities, and self-esteem. Furthermore, Hirschman and Adcock (1978) also argued that the group of fashion leaders lived a younger lifestyle than ordinary people, engaged feverishly in social activities, and showed distinguished interests, such as a preference for Jazz and rock music. Lee (1996) discovered, in her study on female college students, that a student's major, monthly income, monthly allowance, and expenditures on clothing were significantly relevant to fashion leadership.

Previous research indicated that groups of fashion leaders were different from ordinary people in terms of using fashion information sources including exposure to media and their selection of media. People with high fashion leadership emphasized marketer-dominated information sources and their experiences of purchasing activities, while people with low fashion leadership turned to consumer-led information sources such as family and friends (Summers, 1970; Choi & Rhee, 1987; Jung, 1999). Kim and Kim (1997) proved that stronger fashion leadership indicated a tendency to follow more information sources and search for information more actively. This study puts a focus on whether the lifestyle of fashion leaders in college clubs and their usage of information sources show a differentiation from follower groups at this time.

Study Issues

Issue 1. Confirm fashion leaders in the fashion process network.

The building of fashion process networks enables us to identify fashion innovators and fashion opinion leaders in college clubs, and to confirm their differences and similarities.

Issue 2. Confirm the relationship between fashion leaders and network centrality.

We need to examine whether the fashion innovators and opinion leaders observed through network connections have significantly meaningful betweenness centrality and degree centrality.

Issue3. Analyze the lifestyles of fashion leaders.

It is necessary to explore the characteristics of lifestyle differentiated between the group of fashion leaders and the group of other members.

Methodology

Data Collection

This study targeted clubs composed of university students, and data was obtained through convenience sampling of the three clubs selected by researchers. Two clubs of a university, in which members have frequent mutual exchanges, and an associated club of various universities were selected as the target group. Among these clubs, the study participants showing a willingness to respond to questionnaires were convened, and their names were listed and displayed in the beginning of questionnaire. In the case of the social network survey, group members were required to write down their peers' names, so when the respondents were recruited, they were notified of the fact that the names would be encoded in the form of symbols (e.g., A01, A02, and B01, etc.) immediately after data collection, and were processed anonymously. This survey was conducted online. 30, 30, and 50 would-be respondents were selected from the three groups, respectively, but the final numbers of respondents were 29, 29, and 33, respectively, with these responses being those utilized for final analysis.

Research Methods

Sociometric techniques or peer nomination were used to grasp 1) the fashion process network flowing into the clubs consisting of university students and 2) the network of peer relations. Peer nomination is the method devised by Moreno (1934) instructing participants to write down the names of their friends and peers that fall under specific criteria. Most studies on fashion leadership measure fashion leadership through self-evaluation such as questionnaires, photos, or diagrams. In this study, however, not only self-evaluation questions but also questions of nominating others were employed for measuring fashion leadership. By doing so, we attempted to determine whether differences could be found between self-evaluation and assessments made by others.

In this study, to investigate network connections in the fashion process of clubs, research performed by Kim et al. (2008) and Kratzer & Lettl (2009) was used as a reference. The questionnaire consisted of instructions including "Write down the names of three friends in order of whom you would want to ask for advice when buying fashion products," and "Write down the names of three friends in order of who you think best demonstrates fashion style." Regarding the network of peer relations, there was the instruction to "Write down the names of your three best friends in your club."

The Goldsmith (1991 and 1996) and Park et al. (2012) scales were borrowed and revised for this study. A 5 points Likert scale, 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 5 being "Strongly Agree", was used to measure fashion opinion leadership and fashion innovativeness.

Questions to examine self-esteem in appearance (Gim, 2007), leisure participation (Kim, 2011), and usage of fashion information sources (Je, 2011) were developed to unveil lifestyle characteristics using a 5 points Likert scale and by refereeing to the previous studies.

Data Analysis

For the analysis of collected data, SPSS 21.0 and Netminer4 software were used in this study. Frequency analysis was used to assay the demographic attributes of respondents, and t-tests and other techniques including regression analysis were utilized to validate the differences between the groups for each variable based on fashion innovativeness. In the case of SNA, fashion opinion leaders and innovators were confirmed in a visual way, and degree centrality and betweenness centrality were calculated in order to quantify their influences. Degree centrality is the concept of exploring how many direct relationships exist between the specified node and other nodes. This level of degree centrality is measured by the number of directly connected nodes. Betweenness centrality is the concept of measuring the level of intermediates going from one node to another. If a node shows a high degree of betweenness centrality, it may imply that the node is located in the center, indicating the shortest path connecting two other nodes.

Results

Respondents' Group and Characteristics of Group Members

Demographic characteristics and group attributes were assayed prior to verifying the study issues. To understand group attributes, 'group cohesion' and 'group diversity,' which can affect fashion processes, were measured, and the following table (Table 1) indicates the results.

The gender ratio of Group 2 is almost balanced, and Group 1 and Group 3 had similar gender ratios, showing a ratio of male to female respondents of around 35:65. The respondents were largely university students, so their answers on monthly allowances and expenditures on clothing purchases do not show any significant differences.

In terms of group attributes, diversity was higher than the cohesion level, which enables us to interpret that 'group conformity' will not be strongly influential. Group 1 and Group 2 showed similar trends, but Group 3 had relatively high values for group cohesion and group diversity, allowing us to infer that the group members had high cohesion with the group but the group was made up of different individuals.

Table 1.
Demographic characteristics of respondents and group attributes

Variables	Attribute	Group 1 (Dance Club)		Group 2 (Orchestra Club)		Group 3 (Advertising Club)	
		Frequency	Ratio (%)	Frequency	Ratio (%)	Frequency	Ratio (%)
Gender	Male	10	34	16	48	11	38
	Female	19	66	17	52	18	62
Age	Mean	21		21		22.7	

Monthly Allowance (Unit: 1,000 KRW)	Below 200	2	7	0	0	1	3
	200-400	8	28	3	9	7	24
	400-600	3	45	20	61	11	38
	600-800	4	14	7	21	8	2
Monthly Expenditure On Clothing (Unit: 1,000 KRW)	800-1,000	2	7	3	9	2	7
	Below 200	27	93	29	88	24	83
	200-400	1	3	4	12	5	17
Group Cohesion	Mean	3.45		3.91		4.22	
	Mean	4.45		4.45		4.61	

Fashion Leaders in the Fashion Process Network

Based on the obtained data, fashion opinion leaders and fashion innovators standing at the center of fashion process networks were identified and they were analyzed and probed to find out more information on their characteristics. Netminer4 software was utilized to visualize the two structures of fashion process networks, respectively, for the three groups.

In the case of **Figure 1**, **Figure 2**, and **Figure 3**, a dot indicates a club member and the line refers to their relationships. The following picture is a visualized diagram based on degree centrality by taking advantage of respondents' answers to the questions about fashion opinion leadership and fashion innovation. A person located in the center is shown to have high degree centrality.

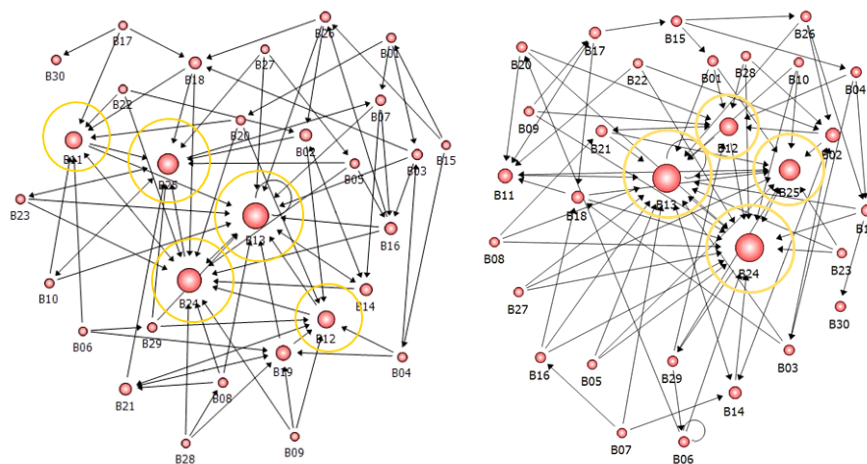


Figure 1. Group 1's Fashion opinion leadership network (left) and fashion innovativeness network (right)

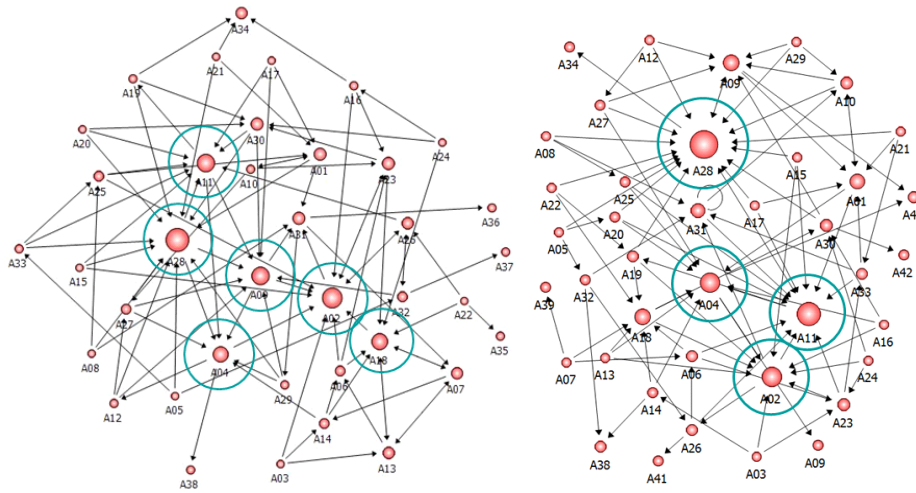


Figure 2.
Group 2's Fashion opinion leadership network (left) and fashion innovativeness network (right)

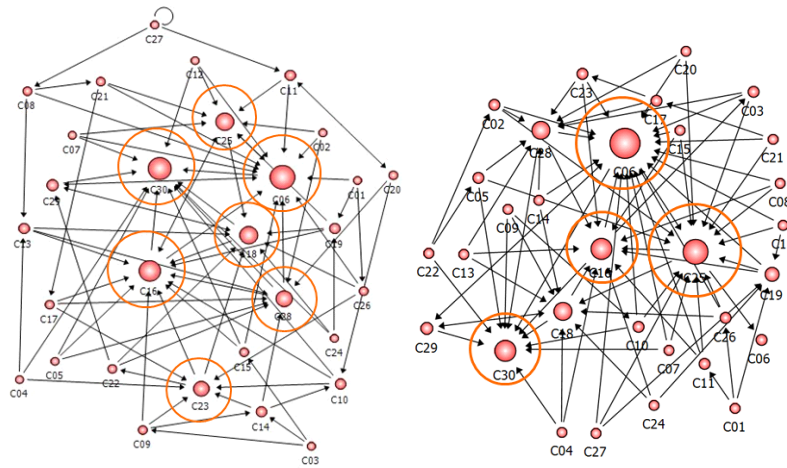


Figure 3.
Group 3's Fashion opinion leadership network (left) and fashion innovativeness network (right)

The two fashion process networks (fashion opinion leadership network and fashion innovativeness network) for the three groups showed structures led by a few fashion leaders (4-6 people). The structures were similar, but not identical. All three groups showed that there were fewer leaders confirmed by fashion innovativeness networks than those observed by fashion opinion leadership networks, leading to

the inference that visually-recognized fashion leaders were clearly confined to a few members, while other elements, apart from visual influence, could intervene when people asked for advice.

Leaders represented in two networks, however, were significantly overlapping. Accordingly, the correlations between the two network connections were analyzed, which resulted in there being significant correlations between fashion opinion leadership networks and fashion innovativeness networks. The correlation coefficient in all three groups hovered over .90, proving that double leaders, who played dual roles as fashion opinion leaders and fashion innovators, had the lion's share. Furthermore, factor analysis for questions examining fashion innovativeness and fashion opinion leadership, among the self-evaluation questions, verified that a single concept had higher explanatory power, which supported the results of previous studies based on the assumption that fashion opinion leaders and fashion innovators were dealt with as a single entity (Kim & Rhee, 2001; Jeon & Park, 2011; Park, Chun, & Jeon, 2012).

Table 2.
Correlations between fashion opinion leadership networks and fashion innovativeness networks

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
Pearson Coefficient	.959**(0.000)	.931**(0.000)	.913**(0.000)

a: p-Value (significance probability) b: **p<0.001

As shown in the two results above, it has potentially been asserted that two influential powers, those being fashion innovativeness and fashion opinion leadership, may belong to the same person, but they do not represent the same role, requiring us to make note of their differences. We identified those who were not double leaders among fashion opinion leaders, and four people could be extracted from Group 2. The respondents who nominated these four people were identified to verify their answers on other questions, leading to the conclusion that the four people were also selected in the case of questions asking about peer relations by the same respondents (see **Table 3.**). With this results, we can presume that fashion opinion leadership was partially related to peer relations with the respondents. Such results coincide with previous studies' findings, arguing that peer relations played a pivotal role in the acceptance of fashion style (Kim et al., 2008).

Table 3.
Relations between fashion advice and peer relation

Nominated For leader	Respondent	Fashion Advice	Fashion Innovativeness	Peer Relation
A34	A		3 rd	
	B	3 rd		1 st
	C	3 rd		3 rd
	D	1 st		1 st

A13	E	2 nd	2 nd
	F	2 nd	
A32	G	1 st	1 st
	H	2 nd	3 rd
A06	I		3 rd
	J	1 st	2 nd
	K	3 rd	2 nd

The mean value of self-evaluated fashion innovativeness for the fashion leaders nominated in each group was relatively higher than for other members. Accordingly, we can infer from these results that fashion leadership is related to a person's inherent innovative character.

Correlations between fashion leadership and network centrality

Recently, research has reported betweenness centrality as a variable to explain innovativeness in general social networks. With this regard, network connections were structured on the basis of betweenness centrality, in this study, to analyze whether the results of previous studies in other areas could be applied to fashion processes or not. The following figures (**Figure 4** and **Figure 5**) show a network structure where the value of betweenness centrality is expressed with figures in the order of those with the highest betweenness centrality. A few members showing significantly high betweenness centrality were chosen by each group, and one, one, and three people were extracted, respectively. Those selected in the top bracket were compiled in a sub-group and the other remaining club members were sorted into another sub-group for each club. Next, a t-test was utilized to validate the differences in self-reported fashion innovativeness between these two sub-groups.

The results of the t-tests are presented in **Table 4**. In Group 1, statistical significance was not verified by the results of the t-test, while Group 2 showed significance at the level of 5% in the case of the assumption of equal variance. Group 3 indicated statistically significant differences ($t=2.46$, $p<.05$) in two sub-groups. The people with high betweenness centrality answered questions on fashion innovativeness with relatively higher average values than other members. This guides us to infer that the results of previous studies arguing that betweenness centrality is a variable expressing innovativeness were partially applied to the fashion process.



Figure 4.
Network connection based on betweenness centrality for Group 1 and Group 2

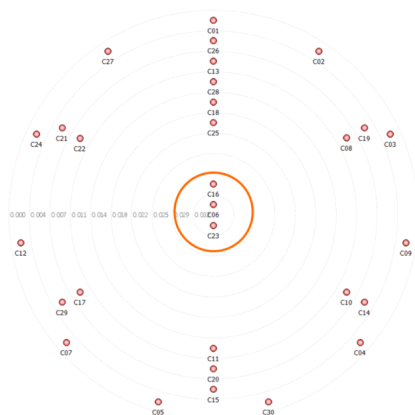


Figure 5.
Network connection based on betweenness centrality for Group 3

Table 4.
Results of t-tests on fashion innovativeness for the group of fashion innovators and ordinary members

Dependent Variables	Cluster	Mean	S.D	t-value	df	Significance (two-tailed)
Fashion Innovativeness	Fashion Leaders[Group 1]	3.60		.711	27	.483
	Other Members[Group 1]	2.97	0.87			

Fashion Innovativeness	Fashion Leaders[Group 2]	2.80	0.00	.676	31	.030 (Equal Variance Assumed)
	Other Members[Group 2]	2.49	0.64			
Fashion Innovativeness	Fashion Leaders[Group 3]	4.05	0.49	2.46	27	.021
	Other Members[Group 3]	2.83	0.68			

Lifestyle Characteristics of Fashion Leaders

To analyze the lifestyle characteristics of fashion leaders, two groups were clustered on the basis of a fashion opinion leadership network's degree centrality. As a result, 6, 5, and 6 fashion leaders were selected, respectively. A t-test was undertaken to check the differences between leader groups and ordinary groups in terms of self-confidence in appearance, leisure participation, and usage of fashion information sources. Unfortunately, statistically significant results could not be drawn. Given, however, that network analysis was conducive to finding meaningful results not identifiable through statistical analysis – owing to the notion that network analysis illustrates member relationships (Lee, 2012) – and that the samples of respondents filling out questionnaires were insufficient, it is safe to say that it is not proper to rely on the techniques of statistical analysis in the case of a small amount of network data. Consequently, the characteristics of fashion leaders were explored with the replies of people belonging to the group of fashion leaders.

We examined the answers to the questions concerning confidence in appearance for fashion leader sub-groups in the three groups, so as to conclude that they experienced an overall sense of self-confidence in their appearance. As for the questions on leisure participation, the fashion leader groups made more affirmative responses to items asking about their attitudes for constructive participation in leisure activities, while items asking about passive participation in leisure activities were given relatively fewer answers, implying that people in the fashion leader group enjoyed active participation in leisure activities. There were more positive respondents, answering "Agree" or "Strongly Agree," about questions regarding whether they received information from professional sources dealing with fashion, such as advertisement, magazines, and celebrities, while there were a lot of negative respondents, answering "Disagree", for questions asking whether they acquired fashion information from their friends, family, or other people's fashion styles. This supports the results of previous studies indicating that people with high fashion leadership utilize the information provided by fashion professionals, while people with lower fashion leadership rely on information sent by consumers (Summers, 1970; Baumgarten, 1975; Choi & Rhee, 1987; Ree & Rhee, 1987).

Conclusions and Implications

With a chance to understand the types of fashion leader groups and their lifestyle characteristics, this study was designed to confirm fashion leaders in college groups which exchange information vividly in

mobile social communities. Based on the results of previous studies performed under the assumption that fashion leader groups were categorized into three types by visual and linguistic influence, this study also purported to identify fashion leaders in three types of college clubs. Self-evaluations and assessments by others were made in the college clubs to verify fashion leadership.

To grasp the existence of fashion leaders nominated by others, social networks were analyzed to measure the existence and positions of leaders of groups in a visual and quantitative way, leading us to the confirmation that all three groups had 5~6 fashion leaders and that leaders pinpointed as fashion innovators were fewer than those nominated for their fashion opinions. In addition, fashion innovativeness self-reported by such innovators was relatively high, allowing us to interpret that fashion innovativeness was related to individuals' inherent innovative attributes. In two fashion networks defined by visual influence and linguistic influence, the two types of influence showed considerable correlations, implying that the percentage of fashion double leaders who played both visual and linguistic roles was quite high. Furthermore, through comparisons between the fashion process network and peer relations, we could make reasonable deductions that some parts of fashion opinion leadership were linked to peer relations in college clubs.

The relationship results between higher betweenness centrality in the network and high innovativeness, which is the conclusion drawn in studies in other areas, were applied to fashion networks, which created meaningful results from two of the three groups. Consequently, we could prove that this study was in line with the results of previous studies.

Lastly, lifestyle characteristics of fashion leader groups were assayed, showing that the person standing in the center of a fashion process had high confidence in his/her appearance, actively participated in leisure activities, and relied on information provided by fashion professionals.

This study was conducted on a total of 91 participants; an insufficient number to acquire statistically significant results. However, some results of this study showed the same direction with results of previous studies in other areas, which triggers expectations that more intriguing conclusions can be made by future studies involving larger networks.

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