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[Original Article]

What are Considered When Building Purchase Intention of Unfamiliar-Branded Cosmetics?

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Abstract

In this study, causal relationships of belief-attitude-purchase intention for unfamiliar-branded cosmetics (UBC) were tested based on the theory of reasoned action. Data of 249 consumers who have purchased UBC were submitted to the descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, and regression analysis with SPSS. In results of exploratory analysis, three factors of beliefs on UBC were generated and titled as ingredients, publicity, and subsidiary features. In regression analysis results, ingredient factor affected attitude toward UBC while publicity and subsidiary features did not influence attitude toward UBC. It implies that consumers build their attitude toward brands focusing on ingredients that are core elements of cosmetic products. Attitude toward UBC solely influenced purchase intention while the effect of social acceptance on purchase intention was not found. In conclusion, consumers depend much on ingredients when they purchase UBC so brands newly launched or brands without reputations need to focus more on an excellence in ingredients and special functions of UBC to appeal to consumers when penetrating to the new market.

Keywords: unfamiliar-branded cosmetics, belief, attitude, purchase intention

I. Introduction

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According to Korean Statistics Department, cosmetic industry is consistently growing, showing that the retail sales of cosmetic products are increasing as 9% every year and reaching 25 billion dollars in Korea as of 2014 (Shin, 2015). Diverse shopping channels such as mobile media, drug stores, and direct shopping from overseas internet shopping malls, provided opportunities for consumers to purchase cosmetic products of diverse brands (Im, 2015; Moon, 2011). Through diverse retail channels, little known brands are increasingly induced to the Korean cosmetic market in addition to famous brands since many brands are newly launched and international trades are more activated.

Therefore, consumers become having more chances to be exposed to unfamiliar-branded cosmetics (UBC) than before. UBC is considered as cosmetics with a brand

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that consumers have little heard about and have little knowledge on. As communications through SNS(social network service) become common, consumers share information and purchase postscripts of cosmetic products (Jung & Lee, 2009). Based on consumer postscripts of new cosmetic products posted in online shopping sites or online community sites, consumers build knowledge on UBC. Consumers try to gather as much information as possible to reduce risks of shopping failures before they make a final decision to purchase a certain product.

Therefore, consumers become having more chances to be exposed to unfamiliar-branded cosmetics (UBC) than before. UBC is considered as cosmetics with a brand that consumers have little heard about and have little knowledge on. As communications through SNS(social network service) become common, consumers share information and purchase postscripts of cosmetic products (Jung & Lee, 2009). Based on consumer postscripts of new cosmetic products posted in online shopping sites or online community sites, consumers build knowledge on UBC. Consumers try to gather as much information as possible to reduce risks of shopping failures before they make a final decision to purchase a certain product.

Consumers tend to consider diverse attributes of products to make an evaluation on a product. Among many attributes, quality is often considered as a crucial factor determining purchase decision for cosmetic products (Park, 1991). Since it is hard to figure out quality differences among cosmetic products just by observations of products, an increasing number of consumers tend to heavily depend upon brand names when to judge the quality of cosmetic products (Han, 2015; Kim, 2013). Consumers often use a brand as an evaluation criterion when there is not much difference in quality of products or when it is hard to estimate product characteristics without use experiences (Fournier, 1998). However, in the case that brand reputation is removed since it is new and/or unfamiliar brands to consumers, they may depend more on other product attributes than brand names of products in developing attitudes toward and purchase intentions of UBC.

Consumers would have more and more opportunities to encounter new and/or unfamiliar brands as online and offline distribution channels as the economy becomes globally expanded through a wider acceptance of FTA(free trade agreement) (Park, 2011; Song, 2015). There has been little research focusing on attributes considered in building attitudes toward and purchase intention of UBC. In this study, it will be explored which aspects of UBC products are crucially considered in the purchase decision making process by applying the theory of reasoned action of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975). The study results would provide a knowledge base for developing marketing strategies for cosmetic brands newly launched by small and medium sized companies.

II. Literature Review

1. Changes in the Cosmetic Brand Market

According to Korean Ministry of Food and Drug Safety (Choi, 2017), recent production of Korean cosmetic products showed about 20% growth that is twice higher than that of global market, presenting about the market size of 12 billion dollars. The number of cosmetic companies is radically increased as 4,853 in 2014, 6,422 in 2015, and 8,175 companies in 2016 (Choi, 2017). Korea shares 4% of world cosmetic market, ranked as the 6th in the world (Korea Contents Media, 2016). Korean female consumers buy cosmetic products at 12.5 times a year with an average expenditure of 420,000 won in a year (Lee, 2015). There are more than 8,200 Korean cosmetic brands in the market and more than 1,900 cosmetic online shopping malls are being operated (Korea Contents Media, 2016).

Cosmetic sales in Korea are increased as 18% in online shopping malls and 4.5% in offline shopping malls in 2016, compared to the previous year (Han, 2017). Cosmetic sales through mobile devices are also consistently growing, reached to 500 billion won of monthly sales in February 2017, sharing 61% of online sales of cosmetics (Park, 2017). Direct buying of cosmetic products from overseas shopping sites has been growing as well. According to Korea Customers Service (Song, 2017), import for consumers' directing buying in Korea is increased as 13% from the US, 68% from the EU, 70% from China, and 101% from Japan. Cosmetic product is highly ranked as the category preferred to be purchased through overseas direct shopping.

As indicated, cosmetic product market is consistently growing and it is full of diverse domestic and foreign brands in Korea. As retail channels become more varied including select shops, drug store, direct buying from overseas shopping malls as well as internet and mobile shopping spots, consumers have more chances to meet diverse unfamiliar or unknown brands (Im, 2015; Kim, 2011). In this market situation, it is important to understand which factors affecting consumers' attitudes toward and buying intention of UBC.

2. Effect of Brand Familiarity

Brand familiarity is described as how much they feel the brand as familiar to them (Hao, 2014). Alba and Hutchinson (1987) said that consumers become familiar to a certain brand through advertisements, purchase experiences, information search, etc. Brand familiarity strongly influence the purchase decision making process (Shin, 2007). Consumers tend to be hesitant to purchase a product when they have little information about and/or have little knowledge on its brand. Specifically in the case of cosmetic products, it is hard to discover the benefits and strengths of the cosmetic products only from the physical features without pre-use experience or information of the products. Since consumers perceive risks less when they are more familiar to the brand (Ha & Perks, 2005; Kim, 2014), they can augment positive expectation and trust toward well-known brand products (Kim, 2012).

In the experimental research, Allison and Uhl (1964) confirmed that most of informants do not recognize the flavor difference of beer brands when brand labels are removed, and that beer flavors were more highly evaluated when the brand labels are existed compared to when the labels are removed. In another experiment, Makens (1965) tested the same turkey meats with and without a famous brand label. In results, consumers evaluated turkey meat with a famous brand label better than the same turkey meat with infamous brand label. These findings indicate that consumers use brand as key reference information in building attitude toward a product. When a certain brand is familiar to consumers, brand name is a core influencer on quality evaluation of the product (Behling & Witch, 1988).

3. The Theory of the Reasoned Action Applied to UBC

According to the theory of the reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), behavioral intention is explained as a function of two determinants: attitude toward the behavior and social norms. Attitude toward the behavior is measured by the component of beliefs about a certain behavior and the individual's evaluation of the outcome resulting from the behavior. Social norm is an individual's perception of normative social pressure to perform or not perform the behavior. Social norm is calculated as an individual's belief that a relevant reference group thinks the person should or should not perform the behavior and the individual's motivation to comply with the reference group (Yoh, Damhorst, Sapp, & Laczniak, 2000).

When applying it to UBC purchase, attitude is assessed by each belief on diverse aspects of the product, multiplied by the importance of each belief. Social supports are assessed by the incorporation of how much the reference people think they should purchase UBC and how much the opinions of the reference people are important to them. Social norm can be understood as social acceptance, indicating how much the reference people accept the UBC. Social norms are determined by social support for purchasing UBC. In addition, purchase intention is predicted by attitude and social norms of UBC.

Since cosmetics are applied directly to consumer's skin, consumers may tend to be more concerned about the maleficence and side effects of UBC. In the prior research dealt with cosmetics in general, function, quality, and fit to skin were considered as crucial elements besides brand name on product evaluation. In addition, sense, package design, and expiration date were also considered significantly for the purchase of cosmetic products. In detail, several researchers (Han, 2015; Kim, 2013; Lim, 2014) found that quality, fit, image, price, package design, and promotion are important factors affecting cosmetic purchase. In a study focusing on fermentation cosmetics, Park (2012) found that function and effect are the most important concerns in the purchase of fermentation cosmetics that are often likely to have little known brand names. Chae (2012) indicated that the credibility of salesmen, prior users' scripts, and product information are important for decision making of cosmetics purchase. In summary, consumers tend to meaningfully consider the function and quality of ingredients, subsidiary features besides contents such as scent, package design, etc., and others' evaluations or opinions on the cosmetics when they make purchase decisions. Evaluations of these elements would be considered as beliefs and social supports with regard to the purchase decision making process of UBC.

III. Research Methods

1. Research Hypotheses

In this study, it is explored: 1) whether beliefs affect attitudes toward UBC, 2) whether social supports affect social norms of UBC, and 3) whether beliefs and social norms influence purchase intention on UBC. Operation definition of unfamiliar brand is a brand that consumers get to know for the first time and a brand that is new to consumers. Usually, unfamiliar brand tends to be a brand that consumers have little information about it regardless of its familiarity to others.

Research hypotheses are as follows.

H1. Beliefs about unfamiliar-branded cosmetics (UBC) will positively affect attitude toward UBC.

H2. Social support for UBC positively will affect social acceptance of UBC.

H3. Attitude toward UBC positively will affect purchase intention of UBC.

H4. Social acceptance of UBC positively will affect purchase intention of UBC.

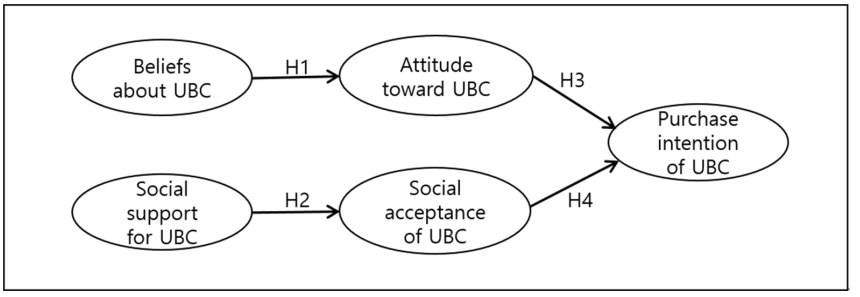

Figure 1. Research model

2. Research Process and Measurements

Females who have experiences in purchasing UBC at least once were recruited through the convenient sampling method, and invited to participate in the survey. After making sure participants' understandings on the operational definition of UBC, participants are allowed to respond to the questionnaire. An average age of participants is 21.8, and an average annual expenditure on cosmetics is 383,600 won(KW).

In order to develop question items about beliefs on UBC, attributes of cosmetics were explored by investigating top 20 cosmetic brand shopping malls listed in a shopping mall ranking site (www.rankey.com). From product descriptions posted in shopping malls, 18 product attributes were generated. About each attribute, a belief item (i.e., ingredients of the UBC were excellent) and an importance item (i.e., excellence in ingredients are important to purchase UBC) were developed with 7-point Likert scales. In addition, attitudes toward the UBC were measured with four items (i.e., bad-good, unfavorable-favorable, useless-useful, negative-positive) with bi-polar scales, referring to Fiore, Yah, & Yoh (2000).

Measurements of social support, social norms, and purchase intention were adopted from Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) and modified, referring to Yoh et al. (2000). Social support was assessed with two items (i.e., My friends or family think that I should purchase UBC; My friends or family encourage me to purchase UBC) multiplied by an importance item (i.e., When it comes to cosmetic shopping, how likely are you to do what your friend or family say you should do). Social acceptance item was measured with an item (i.e., Some of my friends or family purchase UBC).

Also, questions asking about experiences of UBC (i.e., annual expenditure, purchased items, shopping place, kinds of products purchased, information source of UBC) were included in a questionnaire. Questions asking about demographic characteristics were also used. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, and regression analysis with SPSS.

IV. Results

1. Profile of Respondents

Descriptive analysis is applied to assess the characteristics of respondents and the results are summarized in Table 1. A total of 249 respondents had purchase experiences on UBC products. Kinds of UBC products that they have purchased were lotion/cream(45.4%), Toner(35.7%), eye makeup(19.6%), and lip makeup(18.4%), etc. Respondents often purchased UBC products in online shopping malls(62.7%), cosmetic specialty stores(28.5%), and dermatology

of the hospital/skin care shop(8.4%), etc. Main information sources for UBC were online community/blog/customer reviews(54.6%), reference people(35.7%), TV beauty program(14.9%), etc. In summary, there is a wide range of UBC items purchased. Consumers get information of UBC from online communities or reference people and often purchase UBC through online shopping malls.

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents

Item		Frequency(%)
Monthly household income(KRW)	Under 1,000,000	74(29.7)
	1,000,000-less than 2,000,000	23(9.2)
	2,000,000-less than 3,000,000	29(11.6)
	3,000,000-less than 4000,000	48(19.3)
	More than 4,000,000	72(28.9)
Kind of unfamiliar-branded cosmetics purchased*	Lotion/Cream	113(45.4)
	Toner	89(35.7)
	Eye shadow/Mascara/Eye liner/Eye brow	49(19.6)
	Lipstick/Lip gloss/Lip tint	46(18.4)
	Liquid foundation/BB cream	34(13.7)
	Serum/Essence/Eye cream	30(12.0)
	Sunblock	25(10.0)
	Powder/Compact	17(6.8)
	Blusher	5(2.0)
	Others	29(11.6)
Place to purchase unfamiliar-branded cosmetics*	Online shopping mall	156(62.7)
	Cosmetic specialty store	71(28.5)
	Dermatology of the hospital/Skin care shop	21(8.4)
	Discount store	15(5.2)
	Personal sales	14(5.6)
	TV Home shopping	13(3.3)
	Others	13(3.3)
Information source for unfamiliar-branded cosmetics*	Online community/Blog/Customer review	136(54.6)
	Reference people	89(35.7)
	TV beauty program	37(14.9)
	Online advertisement	22(8.8)
	Sample use	21(8.4)
	Dermatology of the hospital/Skin care shop	20(8.0)
	TV/Newspaper/Magazine advertisement	16(6.4)
	Salesman	16(6.4)
	Others	11(4.4)

* Multiple response items: The percent is out of all the respondents.

2. Exploratory Factor Analysis

In order to confirm credibility and reliability of belief and attitude that were measured with multiple items, an exploratory factor analysis was run(<Table 2>, <Table 3>). After removing 5 items with low factor loadings, four factors were generated through varimax rotation, embracing 13 belief items. Beliefs about UBC were assessed by multiplying each item asking about diverse aspects of cosmetic products by an intensity component asking about the importance of each aspect. Factor loading values were between .53 and .88 with reliability more than .70, fulfilling the credibility and reliability standards (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006).

First factor was *ingredients* including six components about the excellence of ingredients, little inclusion of pernicious ingredients, good function, having quality insured marks, credible country of origin, and appropriate expiration date. Second factor was *publicity* embracing three items such as whether to be used by celebrities, exposed to TV programs, and recommended by an expert. Third factor was *subsidiary features* comprising scent, texture, package, and convenience. Attitude and social supports were converged as one factor for each with the eigen value higher than 3 and reliability higher than .90. When examining the mean of each factor, it is found that evaluations on ingredients and subsidiary features of UBC were much better than publicity of those, reflecting the lack of publicized opportunities of new brands in spite of favorable quality of products.

Table 2. Result of exploratory factor analysis of beliefs on unfamiliar-branded cosmetic products

Factor	Items	Factor loadings	Eigen value	variance (%)	Cumulative variance (%)	Cronbach's alpha	Mean (*S.D.*)
Ingredients	Ingredients were excellent x Importance of excellence in ingredients	.88	3.22	24.80	24.80	.82	25.21 (8.93)
	Pernicious ingredients were little included x Importance of inclusion of pernicious ingredients	.83					
	Function was positive x Importance of function	.70					
	It had a quality insured mark x Importance of having a quality insured mark	.55					
	Country-of-origin was incredible x Importance of credible country-of-origin	.68					
	Expiration date was appropriate x Importance of expiration date	.53					
Publicity	It was used by celebrities. x Importance of being used by celebrities	.88	2.31	17.80	42.60	.80	14.10 (8.76)
	It was exposed to the TV programs x Importance of being exposed to the TV programs	.86					
	It was recommended by an expert x Importance of expert's recommendation	.74					
Subsidiary features	It had a good scent x Importance of good scent	.73	2.30	17.65	60.25	.72	24.73 (7.07)
	It had a good texture x Importance of good texture	.69					
	It had s good package x Importance of good package	.68					
	It was convenient to use x Importance of convenience in use	.75					

Table 3. Result of exploratory factor analysis of attitude toward unfamiliar-branded cosmetic products

Factor	Items	Factor loadings	Eigen value	variance (%)	Cumulative variance (%)	Cronbach's alpha	Mean (S.D.)
Attitude	Bad - Good	.92	3.44	86.11	86.11	.95	5.49 (1.10)
	Unfavorable - Favorable	.93					
	Useless - Useful	.93					
	Negative - Positive	.94					

3. Hypotheses Test with Regression Analysis

Research hypotheses were tested with linear regression analysis. Referring to the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), the causal relationships among beliefs, attitude, social support, social acceptance, and purchase intention were tested. Among beliefs, ingredients positively affected attitude toward UBC. Publicity and subsidiary features are not factors influencing attitudes toward UBC. Social support is a factor impacting social norms. Attitude is only a factor affecting purchase intention of UBC. Social acceptance is not a determinant of purchase intention. Results were summarized in Table 4.

In hypotheses test results, H1 and H2 were partially supported, and H3 was supported whereas H4 was rejected. The theory of reasoned action can be applied to partially explain the formation of purchase intention of UBC. Specifically, it can be assumed that ingredients of cosmetics are the most important attribute determining attitudes toward UBC. Whether it is exposed to the mass media or whether it has good subsidiary features such as good scents or textures are not crucial to make consumers have good attitude toward UBC. Social norm is not an important factor forming the purchase intention of UBC. Only when consumers are satisfied with ingredients, consumers have favorable intention to purchase UBC. It may be resulted from consumers' ability to compare it with other alternatives based on rich knowledge on cosmetic products. Although consumers have not heard about a certain brand name before, they want to evaluate the product based on ingredients not on other subsidiary features or publicity of UBC.

Table 4. Regression analysis results

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Std. β	*t*-value(*p*-value)	R^2
Attitude	Ingredients	.55	7.65***(.000)	Adjusted R^2=.20 F=22.05***
	Publicity	-.03	1.14(.255)	
	Subsidiary features	-.00	.02(.985)	
Social Acceptance	Social Support 1	.17	1.71(.089)	Adjusted R^2=.25 F=41.44***
	Social Support 2	.36	3.64***(.000)	
Purchase Intention	Attitude	.68	14.44*** (.000)	Adjusted R^2=.50 F=120.42***
	Social Acceptance	.08	1.71(.089)	

***p<.001

V. Conclusion

In this study, it is explored whether the purchase decision making process of unfamiliar-branded cosmetics (UBC) is explained through the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Important findings are summarized as follows. First, before investigating the causal relationships among belief, attitude, and purchase intention of UBC, consumers' purchase experiences of UBC were examined. Consumers have purchased a wide range of cosmetic products although they are not familiar with the brand at all from lotion/cream, eye makeup, lip makeup, etc. UBC products are often purchased through online shopping malls and cosmetic specialty stores. The most important information source of UBC is online community/blog/customer reviews.

Second, three factors generated as beliefs of UBC were ingredients, publicity, and subsidiary features. When examining the means of belief factors, consumers more positively evaluated ingredients and subsidiary features than publicity of UBC.

Third, attitude toward UBC was determined by ingredients not by subsidiary features and publicity. It is different from previous findings of general cosmetics (Kim, 2013; Lim, 2014), showing that diverse attributes of cosmetic products formed attitudes toward those products. In the case of no brand credibility, consumers may depend more on product quality rather than on other subordinate aspects of the cosmetic products. Purchase intention of UBC was determined by attitudes toward UBC, not by social acceptance of UBC. In the case of UBC, there is lack of social support and acceptance of products because of low familiarity of the brand and little experience on the UBC products. Social support and social acceptance related to UBC may not be sturdy. Consumers tend to use online community/blog/customer reviews as the most important information source of the product rather than being influenced by the reference people's acceptance of UBC. In results, the purchase intention formation of UBC can be partially explained with the theory of reasoned action. When applying this theory to the UBC, social acceptance factor may not be a key element to consider.

Based on results, practical implications were generated to develop marketing strategies for UBC. In the case of UBC that is lack of credibility and preference previously built among consumers, positive postscripts of ingredients and functions are vital factors appealing to consumers. Since consumers who have a lower level of expectation due to the lack of knowledge on UBC, consumers may be likely to have a higher level of satisfaction when experiencing high quality UBC. Therefore, developers of new brands that are launched by small and medium sized companies may want to make an effort to develop specialties in certain functions and upgrade qualities of UBC. While consumers become more knowledgeable on ingredients of cosmetics products in information flood of the internet environments, consumers may check ingredients and functions of products more precisely, not just depending on the halo of famous brand names. In addition, previous users' comments on internet communities and the reference peoples' opinions are considered as an important information source but whether the reference people use the UBC is not an important factor affecting purchase intention of UBC. Consumers have a tendency to trust information of previous users more than advertisements of companies or seller-generated information. Therefore, active postings of power community users about UBC would be effective for UBC promotions in online shopping sites, blogs, and social network services.

The results should be applied in the light of some limitations of the study. Data were collected from females who have purchased UBC. When having more data from consumers who are males or older than 30's, results may be more widely applicable. Since the concept of UBC can be subjectively interpreted, respondents may not be clear enough to categorize UBC although the operational definition of UBC was given before answering the questions. Also, research

dealing with diverse product categories besides cosmetics may contribute to expanding the applicability of study findings.

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