Clothing Involvement and Commitment to Cyber Community of Fashion Brands

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Ⅰ. Introduction

With the increase of using internet shopping malls, consumers are used to shop goods on-line (Domzal, 1993). Contemporary young consumers who spend more time on the cyber market place rather than traditional shopping malls are now more involved in e-marketplace activities. The popularity of communities on the Internet has captured the attention of marketing professionals because the effects of e-word-of-mouth and e-opinion leadership on shopping behavior. The words "community" and "cyber-relationship" become new marketing strategies

In this study, the effects of product involvement and committment to cyber communities on clothing shopping behavior were examined. The interplay of clothing involvement and community committment may take significant role in formulating positive attitude toward and purchase intention of fashion brands.

Ⅱ. Literature Review

Involvement has been a useful variable in explaining various consumer behaviors (Poisez & Ceez, 1995) and involved consumers are considered important for the success or failure of a business (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1993). It is related to personal relevance of a product to a consumer (Celsi & Olson, 1988). Especially, the symbolic characteristics of apparel products and how they are used in society encourage the condition of high level of product involvement (Bloch & Richins, 1983). Among the durable goods that create conditions of high involvement, apparel had been regarded as extremely related to one's ego due to the product characteristics. Involvement in product may evoke different responses in cognitive, affective, and coactive aspects by consumers (Beaty, Kahle & Homer, 1988).

Cyber communities are products of the human interaction among members of the online social groups (Dye, 2000). People who have similar interests get together and share knowledge and feelings in the computer mediated space (Rieingold, 1993). The contents uploaded and communication among the community members can be useful marketing tools (Armstrong &

Hagel, 1997). Commitment can be defined as the willingness and desire to maintain valuable relationships (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992). Some researchers noted the importance of the emotional attachment when referring commitment to something (Anderson & Weitz, 1992). Committment to cyber communities is the willingness and desire to maintain valuable relationship through e-interaction and e-communication. People who are loyal to certain online community will have positive attitude toward the community (and the hosting brand) and thus will play an active role in spreading positive words about the community they are in and are likely to purchase and repurchase the products made by the hosting brands.

These studies indicate that the interplay of clothing involvement and commitment to cyber communities of fashion brands may result in positive relationship-oriented behavior such as positive repurchase intention or spreading positive world-of-mouth (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). However, the involvement in the object (clothing product) and committment to the environment (cyber community of fashion brands) may play different effects in evoking relationship oriented behavior. The joint effects need to be further explored.

III. Methods

A questionnaire was developed for the empirical study. Scale items measuring clothing involvement, committment to fashion brands, re-purchase intention, world-of-mouth and demographic variables were included in the questionnaire. Scale items were modified from prior researches. Respondents were asked to rate on a seven-point scale ranging from "does not apply at all" (1) to "strongly apply" (7). Cronbach's alphas for internal consistency were within the acceptable range for all research variables. The subjects of the study were members of cyber communities of well-known fashion brands. Moderators and managers of such communities were contacted and the survey URL was provided to each online communities for online data collection. Data were obtained from 345 usable questionnaires were used for statistical analysis. Major statistical methods are descriptive and one-way ANOVA.

IV. Results and Conclusion

Based on the median scores of clothing involvement (Median= 6 10) and committment to cyber community of fashion brands (Median= 5.14), respondents were segmented into four groups. Consumers who had higher scores on clothing involvement and community committment were called high clothing involvement and high cyber community committment group (HCHO, hereafter; n=99). Consumers who had lower scores on clothing involvement and community committment were called LCLO group (n=88). Consumers who had lower scores on clothing involvement but higher scores on cyber community committment were LCHO group (n=84). Consumers who had higher scores on clothing involvement but lower scores on cyber community committment were called HCLO group (n=74)

Significant differences across four groups were found for monthly clothing expenditure

variable ($F = 8.61$, $p < .001$). HCHO group showed the highest score. Community membership duration, visits to community, and amount of Internet usage did not show significant differences across four groups. No demographic differences such as age, income, gender, residential area, and educational level were found. A significant difference was found for word-of-mouth across four groups ($F = 4.31$, $p < .01$). HCHO group showed the highest score. HCLO group showed the second highest score and LCLO/LCHO groups showed the lowest scores of word-of-mouth effects. These results indicate that consumers who are involved in clothing products are the ones who spread positive information. Commitment to the community were not the influential factor in arousing positive word-of-mouth effect. However, no difference was found for re-purchase intention across four consumer groups.

The benefits of the present study reside in helping researchers understand the underlying causes of the cyber community and relationship management behavior of fashion brands. Application of the findings will help marketers, merchandisers, retailers, and product developers to have better understanding of how clothing involvement interplay committment to cyber community of fashion brands and how these two affect consumers' market behaviors. Future studies should include more outcome variables as relationship oriented behaviors. Scales measuring re-purchase intention should be further investigated.

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