

The Effect of Materialism and Agent of Socialization on the Symbolic Consumption in Clothing

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물질주의 성향 및 사회화대행자의 태도가 의복의 상징적 소비에 미치는 영향

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the elements which influence the symbolic consumption in clothing. Materialism and agent of socialization have been studied and the affect of these two are also developed. The theoretical study and survey methods were used. The survey was administered to 426 women in their twenties living in Seoul and Kyungki region. SPSS packages were applied to find out the results of ANOVA Duncans multiple range tests, means, standard deviation, factor analysis, and regression analysis.

The major findings of this study could be summerized as follows;

First, the subordinate parts of symbolic consumption was divided into these three parts; fashion oriented consumption, brand oriented consumption, hedonic consumption. The average of hedonic consumption was higher than other subordinate parts of symbolic consumption.

Second, symbolic consumption was seemed to have the differences according to materialism and its subfactors. The higher materialism indicated, the higher symbolic consumption was.

Third, symbolic consumption was proven to have the differences according to agent of socialization such as reference group and mass media. The higher the influence of the reference group and mass media was, the higher symbolic consumption was.

Fourth, according to the results of the regression analysis examing the relative influences of variables affecting symbolic consumption in clothing, the influence of the reference group was the most important variable. The influence of mass media and materialism was related positively to the symbolic consumption.

Key words: Symbolic consumption, Materialism, Agent of socialization; 상징적 소비, 물질주의, 사회화
대행자

I. Introduction

As consumer researchers reflect on the 20th century, one of the most striking trends over the years has been the evolution of consumption as a culturally accepted means of seeking success, happiness, and the notion of the good life. The result of eco-

nomie development in Korea brings abundant environment and the people are much interested in the symbolic consumption.

Some studies on the symbolic consumption have focused on teenagers or housewives and founded that income, the effect of reference groups and materialism were important factors(Hong & Lee, 1998;

Kim, 1998; Paik, 1996). However, women in their twenties are very interested in their appearance and also have a high level of purchasing power. They are the ones of the main consumption groups in apparel market. Therefore, it can be said that a more specific and precise study of the symbolic consumption should be established.

So the goal of this study was to identify young women's symbolic consumption including demographic characteristics and investigate the influence of materialism and agent of socialization. From the marketing perspective, the results of this study will provide valuable understandings of and predictions of consumers.

II. Review of Literature

1. The Symbolic Consumption

During the 1950s there was substantial discussion concerning the symbolic aspects of products. As Levy(1959) noted, people buy products not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean. This thought went forward during the 1960s to incorporate the notion of congruence between the lifestyle a consumer chose and the symbolic meaning of the products he/she purchased.

However, during the 1970s there was a hiatus of research and discussion regarding product symbolism. This dearth of interest possibly was due to the excesses of the motivation research era, yet there is much to be gained-both pragmatically and conceptually-from inquiries into the esthetic, intangible and subjective aspects of consumption as showed as studies like Hirschman(1980), Holbrook(1980), Levy(1980). Several recent consumer behavior studies(Fischer & Arnold, 1990 ; Sherry et al., 1993) focus on a shopping as work theme, providing accounts of distressed consumers experiencing the dark side of shopping.

There is a long history of evidence and observation establishing the fact that we attempt to encode messages about ourselves through at least some of our consumption selections, but such messages about self at least appear to be an important consideration in a

variety of consumption choices. Whether or not consumption communicates status as clearly as was once, it is clear that there are still a number of inferences about people which are affected by the goods and services that they presumably have selected. The most heavily researched of these cues is clothing. It has been found to affect reactions to people in a number of ways, including judgments of status(Douty, 1963), personality(Gibbons & Schneider, 1980), attractiveness(Holman, 1980), and attitudes toward social issues(Buckley & Roach, 1974).

Choi & Kim(2000) segmented X-generation consumers by the types of symbolic clothing consumption behavior and examined the differences among consumer groups with self-respect, the influence of reference group, materialism, and demographic characteristics.

2. Materialism

Materialism is widely viewed as an important life value as seen as studies like Kasser & Ryan(1993), Mick(1996), Richins & Dawson(1992). As defined by Rokeach(1968), a value is a centrally held, enduring belief which guides actions and judgments across specific situations and beyond immediate goals to more ultimate end-states of existence. Building off Rokeach's conceptualization, Richins and Dawson (1992) define materialism as a set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possessions in one's life. In other words, materialism can be viewed as the value a consumer places on the acquisition and possession of material objects.

Jo & Lee(2000) analyzed the relationship between materialism and the symbolic consumption. They founded that the higher symbolic consumption was, the higher was materialism. Ju et al.(2001) examined that materialism and hedonic shopping orientation had a effect on adolescent's symbolic consumption.

3. Agent of Socialization

Socialization is the process by which young people are taught to honor the values and embody the

norms of a society (Churchil & Mochis, 1978). The term first appeared in 1828 and was used by Mead and Cooley to explain the way in which human behavior is patterned by interaction within primary groups such as family, school and play groups. After socialization is completed, a rite of passage confers adult status on a person. That status carries with it the rights and obligations to reproduce existing social relationships or to work within the system to change it (Churchil & Mochis, 1978).

Socialization is often viewed as a social process by which norms, attitudes, motivations, and behaviors are transmitted from specific sources, commonly known as "socialization agents", to the learner. According to Brim (1968), agent of socialization may be a person or an organization directly involved in socialization because of frequency of contact with the learner, primacy over the individual, and control over rewards and punishments given to the person. The learner may acquire cognitions and behaviors from the agents through the processes of modeling, reinforcement, and social interaction.

Many research (Bearden & Etzels, 1982; Hong & Lee, 1998; Paik, 1996) has focused on the relative influences of various socialization agents such as family, reference group, and mass media.

III. Methods

1. The Theme of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the elements which influence the symbolic consumption in clothing. Materialism and agent of socialization have been studied and the affect of these two are also developed. In this study, the following objectives were set up: (a) to subordinate parts of symbolic consumption in women's clothing, (b) to examine the differences of symbolic consumption according to materialism and its subfactors, (c) to examine the differences of symbolic consumption according to agent of socialization, (d) to examine the relative influences of variables affecting symbolic consumption.

2. Measures

The measures had been developed and refined based on previous researches. The symbolic consumption in clothing was measured by scale which was composed by researcher of this study. The scale referred to previous studies of Kim J. Y. (1998) and Hong B. S. & Lee O. H. (1998) and had been recomposed to 20 statements.

Materialism was measured using the Richins and Dawson's (1992) Material Values Scale and was composed of 13 statements. This scale has been widely used in consumer research and consistently displays strong psychometric properties. Scale was separated by sub-variables such as possession-defined success, the pursuit of happiness, acquisition centrality.

Agent of socialization was measured by scale with 11 statements which was composed by the Jung Y. J. (1993) and Lee J. Y. (1999).

Five point Likert Scales were used for most measures with 1=never or strongly disagree and 5=always or strongly agree.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

The theoretical study and survey methods were used. The survey was administered to 426 women in their twenties living in Seoul and Kyungki region. SPSS packages were applied to find out the results of ANOVA Duncans multiple range tests, means, standard deviation, factor analysis, and regression analysis. Composition of the age was at the ratio of 45.0% for early twenties, 25.8% for mid twenties and 29.2% for late twenties. 83.6% was single and 16.4% was married women.

IV. Results and Discussion

1. The Symbolic Consumption in Clothing

Factor analysis was used to identify dimensions of symbolic consumption as seen as (Table 1). The three factors explained 58.35% of the variance. The

Table 1. Factor Analysis of the Symbolic Consumption

Factors	Sample statement	Factor loading	Eigen value	% of variance	Cronbach's α
Fashion oriented	• When I buy clothes, I consider whether it keep up with the fashion or not.	.87	3.84	21.68	.90
	• I am proud when I dressed in the fashion.	.83			
	• I don't feel like to wear clothes that go out of fashion even I purchased it lately.	.83			
	• I tend to buy clothes that follow the fashion.	.80			
	• I want to be one of the first to try new fashion and purchase them.	.79			
	• I would like to buy the latest fashion, even though I may not always be able to afford it.	.60			
Brand oriented	• It is important to buy well-known brands for clothes.	.83	2.92	19.86	.84
	• I prefer to buy well-known brands even if the clothes are more expensive.	.80			
	• I like to choose clothes that brand mark or logo is well noticed.	.78			
	• I often buy clothes at department store or famous brand house.	.71			
	• Even I buy t-shirts or belt I think about brand name.	.65			
	• A well-known brand means good quality.	.52			
• I would probably buy the imitation of well-known brands if I can't afford to buy real one.	.35				
Hedonic oriented	• It is pleasure to wear fine clothes.	.73	1.91	16.81	.82
	• You can tell a lot about a person by the clothes he/she wears.	.70			
	• Fine clothes helps people to be favorably impressed.	.69			
	• I feel very confident and happy when other people praise my clothes.	.69			
	• Clothes are one of the most important ways I have of expressing my individuality.	.66			
	• Clothes is fascinating and amusing.	.61			
• Shopping for clothes puts me in a good mood.	.49				

first factor was termed as fashion oriented consumption and included statements regarding the traits of the latest style of clothing. The second factor, brand oriented consumption, included statements on that factor indicated a tendency toward well-known brand. The third factor termed as hedonic consumption because statements related emotive aspects of one's experience with clothing.

As seen in <Table 2>, the subject characteristics like age, marriage, occupation, and income showed differences by subfactors of the symbolic consumption.

The younger they were, the more fashion oriented they were. Young women who just graduated from highschool and became college students have very interested in fashion and appearance and tend to buy clothes that follow the fashion. The average of

hedonic consumption was measured higher than other subfactors of symbolic consumption. Hirschman & Holbrook(1982) noted that hedonic consumption designate those facets of consumers behavior related to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one's experience with products. Women generally concern about their fashion and they think consumption not only as just shopping the products but also enjoyable activity. Married women (and especially housewives) showed this tendency more than single women did. The tendency toward symbolic consumption were higher among those women who got more income.

2. Materialism and the Symbolic Consumption

Exploratory factor analysis from the first survey

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics as related to the Symbolic Consumption

Demographic characteristics statistic figures	Partition of groups	Fashion oriented		Brand oriented		Hedonic oriented	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Age	19-22	2.82	.78a	2.71	.72	3.71	.52a
	23-26	2.53	.62b	2.70	.68	3.65	.53b
	27-30	2.44	1.07b	2.81	.62	3.88	.52a
	F	9.18***		.95		6.37**	
Marriage	single	2.70	.81a	2.72	.73	3.70	.53b
	married	2.30	1.02b	2.81	.32	3.97	.47a
	t	3.08**		-1.70		-3.94***	
Occupation	student	2.74	.76ab	2.73	.71	3.70	.52b
	housewife	2.90	.52a	2.87	.30	4.05	.50a
	professional	1.82	.89c	2.77	.60	3.81	.62b
	officergovernment employee	2.82	.66ab	2.82	.46	3.72	.30b
	serviceindependent enterprise	2.46	1.35b	2.50	1.05	3.87	.74ab
	F	15.08***		1.40		3.04**	
Income (unit=ten thousand won)	under 100	2.47	.79cd	2.71	.74bc	3.52	.66c
	101-200	2.16	.98d	2.59	.57cd	3.84	.47ab
	201-300	2.61	.70bc	2.37	.58d	3.51	.37c
	301-400	2.79	.76abc	2.85	.57b	3.69	.54bc
	401-500	2.89	.76ab	3.17	.55a	3.95	.56a
	over 501	3.06	.82a	3.10	.76a	3.97	.56a
	F	11.67***		21.89***		12.40***	

The same superscripts (e.g., a a or b b) indicate a significant difference among the three groups as tested by Duncan test.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 3. Factor Analysis of Materialism

Factors	Sample statement	Factor loading	Eigen value	% of variance	Cronbach's α
Success	• I admire people who own expensive clothes, cars, and homes.	.88	2.47	24.55	.87
	• I like to own things that impress people.	.77			
	• Expensive and fine things help people look like in high social standing.	.72			
	• The things I own say a lot about how well I'm doing in life.	.61			
	• I don't want to stay behind other people economically.	.55			
Happiness	• I would happier if I owned nicer things.	.83	2.03	19.96	.75
	• Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure.	.79			
	• My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have.	.67			
	• I'd be happier if I could afford to buy more things.	.66			
Centrality	• I don't place much emphasis on the amount of material objects other people own.	.78	1.75	14.51	.66
	• I usually buy only the things I need.	.78			
	• I try to keep my life simple, as far as possessions are concerned.	.74			
	• I put less emphasis on material things than most people I know.	.53			

suggested a scale with three moderately correlated factors. To show the relationship among scale items, <Table 3> provides the analysis with data from the Richins and Dawson's (1992) Material Values Scale.

The first factor (possession-defined success) represents the use of possessions as an indicator of success in life. The second factor (the pursuit of happiness) concerns the perception that possessions are needed for happiness, and the third factor (acquisition centrality) concerns the importance of acquisition and possession generally. The three factors explained 59.02% of the variance.

One-way analyses of variance were run to test whether there were significant differences between the three groups of consumers by materialism on the three symbolic consumption dimensions.

<Table 4> illustrated that the higher materialistic

sense of value group displayed a greater symbolic consumption than did the lower materialistic sense of value group. The average of hedonic consumption was higher than other subfactors of symbolic consumption.

The symbolic consumption showed the differences according to subfactors of materialism. As a results of analyzing, women in twenties who have higher materialism show higher symbolic consumption in clothing.

3. Agent of Socialization and the Symbolic Consumption

Factor analysis was used as a data reduction technique for the attitudes according to agent of socialization as seen in (Table 5). Varimax rotation was employed and our factors with eigenvalues equal to

Table 4. The Effect of Materialism on the Symbolic Consumption

Variables		Group	High materialism M(SD) Duncan	Middle materialism M(SD) Duncan	Low materialism M(SD) Duncan	F-value
		Symbolic consumption	Fashion oriented		3.15(0.75)a	2.44(0.74)b
Brand oriented			3.20(0.52)a	2.55(0.59)b	2.32(0.58)c	99.64***
Hedonic oriented			4.02(0.50)a	3.66(0.34)b	3.45(0.54)c	56.47***
Total			3.47(0.41)a	2.90(0.46)b	2.67(0.34)c	156.64***

The same superscripts (e.g., a a or b b) indicate a significant difference among the three groups as tested by Duncan test.
p*<.05, *p*<.01, ****p*<.001

Table 5. Factor Analysis of Agent of Socialization on the Symbolic Consumption

Factors	Sample statement	Factor loading	Eigen value	% of variance	Cronbach's α
Reference group	• I often buy similar styles like what my friends have.	.87	3.23	29.34	.84
	• I like to get suggestion from my friends and peers.	.85			
	• I seek information from my friends before I shop for clothes.	.72			
	• I enjoy talking about clothes with my friends.	.71			
	• Sometimes I dress like my seniors or friends do.	.57			
	• I shrink into myself when I don't wear clothes like my friends do.	.56			
Mass media	• I tend to buy similar style showed in TV programs or magazines.	.77	1.22	28.61	.77
	• Sometimes I buy clothes that I saw in TV programs or magazines.	.74			
	• I consult TV programs or magazines before purchase clothes.	.71			
	• I sometimes feel that it would be nice to have clothes which has shown in TV or magazines.	.56			
	• Mass media star (like singers and actress)'s fashion serves as a good reference when I purchase clothes.	.43			

or greater than 1.0 were generated. These two factors together explained about 57.95% of the total variance. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for Factor 1, reference group, was .84 and Factor 2, mass media, was .77.

Analysis of variance(ANOVA) was used to examine the effects of agent of socialization of clothing on symbolic consumption. The symbolic consumption was proven to have the differences according to agent of socialization such as reference group and mass media as seen in (Table 6). The higher the influence of the reference group and mass media was, the higher symbolic consumption was. The analysis of variance for symbolic consumption was highly significant, especially in fashion oriented consumption($F=162.08$, $p<.001$).

Young women may aspire to have the material blessings of certain television characters and get lots of information from reference group. Therefore the influence of the mass media and reference group appeared to be an important socialization agents

related in the symbolic consumption.

4. The Relative Influences of Variables Affecting the Symbolic Consumption

The relative influence of the explanatory variables was assessed by means of regression analysis. <Table 7> showed relationships between the independent variables and each of the dependent symbolic consumption variables.

Reference group was the strongest predictor of symbolic consumption including brand oriented consumption($\beta=.52$, $p<.001$), hedonic oriented consumption($\beta=.45$, $p<.001$), and fashion oriented consumption($\beta=.37$, $p<.001$).

Success-materialism was the strong predictor of brand oriented consumption($\beta=.48$, $p<.001$); it was also related positively to hedonic oriented consumption($\beta=.34$, $p<.01$), and fashion oriented consumption($\beta=.17$, $p<.05$). Centrality-materialism was related negatively to brand oriented consumption

Table 6. The Effect of Agent of Socialization on the Symbolic Consumption

Variables		Group	High materialism M(SD) Duncan	Middle materialism M(SD) Duncan	Low materialism M(SD) Duncan	F-value
Symbolic consumption	Fashion oriented		3.15(0.66)a	2.79(0.65)b	1.87(0.62) c	162.08***
	Brand oriented		3.10(0.58)a	2.81(0.56)b	2.23(0.55)c	93.79***
	Hedonic oriented		3.99(0.48)a	3.72(0.45)b	3.45(0.53)c	53.44***
	total		3.42(0.41)a	3.10(0.39)b	2.52(0.46)c	103.10***

The same superscripts (e.g., a a or b b) indicate a significant difference among the three groups as tested by Duncan test.
* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

Table 7. Regression Results of the Symbolic Consumption

Variables		Fashion oriented consumption		Brand oriented consumption		Hedonic oriented consumption	
		β	t	β	t	β	t
Materialism	Success	.17	2.44*	.48	7.99***	.34	5.39**
	Happiness	.16	2.06*	.04	.58	.26	3.83***
	Centrality	-.14	-2.44*	-.19	-3.98***	-.03	-.68
Agent of socialization	Reference group	.37	7.48***	.52	11.36***	.45	8.73***
	Mass media	.30	6.05***	.22	4.84***	.18	3.49***
R^2		.26		.41		.31	
F		161.08***		293.86***		194.10***	

* $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$

($\beta = -.19, p < .001$) and fashion oriented consumption ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$). Mass media was found to be significant including fashion oriented consumption ($\beta = .30, p < .001$), brand oriented consumption ($\beta = .22, p < .001$), and hedonic oriented consumption ($\beta = .18, p < .001$).

The R^2 value indicated that 41% of the variability of brand oriented consumption could be explained, 31% for hedonic oriented consumption, and 26% for fashion oriented consumption.

V. Conclusions and Implications

Korean society has achieved rapid economic success and living standard highly improved as a result. So the study of the culture of consumption has become an important topic in the consumer behavior literature.

The major findings of this study could be summarized as follows;

First, the subordinate parts of symbolic consumption was divided into these three parts; fashion oriented consumption, brand oriented consumption, hedonic consumption. The average of hedonic consumption was higher than other subordinate parts of symbolic consumption.

Second, symbolic consumption was seemed to have the differences according to materialism and its subfactors. The higher materialism indicated, the higher symbolic consumption was.

Third, symbolic consumption was proven to have the differences according to agent of socialization such as reference group and mass media. The higher the influence of the reference group and mass media was, the higher symbolic consumption was.

Fourth, according to the results of the regression analysis examining the relative influences of variables affecting symbolic consumption in clothing, the influence of the reference group was the most important variable. The influence of mass media and materialism was related positively to the symbolic consumption.

Marketing implication are generated based on study results.

First, the younger and single women have a tendency of fashion oriented consumption so the market specialists have to be quick on the young customers needs and show new styles as possible.

Second, the older and married women have a tendency of hedonic oriented consumption so the more convenient and entertainment shopping environments should be provided in helping their enjoyable shopping activity.

Third, mouth to mouth advertising activities might be effective for the targeting market of young women.

The study was focused on women in their twenties so more studies should be explored or these results to women and men over twenties and hedonistic perspective in extend marketing research on consumer behavior could be recommended for further studies.

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요 약

본 연구는 제품의 기능적 측면보다는 제품이 지니고 있는 사회적, 주관적 의미를 더 중요하게 생각하는 소비지향적인 사회분위기 속에서, 이론적 연구와 예비조사결과를 토대로 물질주의 성향과 사회화대행자의 영향력에 따른 의복의 상징적 소비에 차이가 있는지를 알아보고자 하였다. 연구대상은 수도권에 거주하는 20대 여성 500명을 편의 추출하여 설문조사하였으며, 불성실한 응답을 제외한 426명을 SPSS 통계 Package를 이용하여 요인분석, 신뢰도 검증, 분산분석, Duncan-test, 회귀분석 등을 실시하였다. 연구결과, 의복의 상징적 소비는 유행추구적 소비, 유명상표지향적 소비, 쾌락적 소비 요인으로 분류되었으며, 20대 여성 소비자에게 의복은 기능적 측면으로서 뿐만 아니라 쾌락적 소비의 수단으로써 중요한 존재임을 알 수 있었다. 또한 물질주의 성향이 높을수록, 사회화대행자의 영향력을 많이 받을수록 의복의 상징적 소비와 하위요인의 성향도 높게 나타났다. 다중회귀분석 결과 의복의 상징적 소비에 영향을 미치는 가장 큰 요인은 준거집단의 영향이었으며, 물질주의성향과 대중매체의 영향도 큰 것으로 나타났다.