

Adolescent Consumer Segmentation According to Retailer Patronage in the School Uniform Market

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Abstract The purpose of this study was to investigate differences in purchase behaviors for school uniforms among adolescent consumer groups which were segmented by the type of retailer they patronized. An online survey was carried out and 907 data sets were analyzed using SPSS. The results support that classifying adolescent consumers according to what type of retailers they patronize lead to a proper understanding of the segmentation of the school uniform market. The adolescent consumers consisted of five groups categorized by the retailer types. These types included special stores, department stores, discount stores, small custom-made stores and stores designated by schools. The results also indicated that consumer groups segmented by retailer patronage differ significantly in their use of multimedia information sources. Five consumer groups showed significant differences in two purchase evaluative criteria: utilities and promotions.

Key words Adolescent Consumer, Apparel Retailer Patronage, School Uniforms, and Market Segmentation

Introduction

In South Korea, 94% of adolescents who are middle school students or high school students wear school uniforms(Fair Trade Commission, May. 2007). The school uniform market of which size is \$540 million needs to be treated as a significant part of the apparel industry. Nevertheless, few recent studies can be found that appreciate the importance of the school uniform market(Jang, Joung, & Ahn, 2008; Jung, Kim, & Lee, 2008). Until the middle of the 1990s, consumers usually purchased school uniforms from small custom-made stores designated by the schools. Hence, researchers had little interest in the school uniform market. However, since the late 1990s, when the major companies such as 'SK Networks(SMART)', and 'Cheil Industries(IVY Club)' branched out into the school uniform industry, the school uniform market entered a new phase(Jang et al., 2008).

The expanding retail channel was one of the remarkable changes in the school uniform market in the 2000s. Many school uniform brands, like other fashion brands, tried to diversify their retail channels to accommodate consumer demands. Consumers can now purchase school uniforms at specialty

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stores, department stores, or discount stores. People can also purchase non-branded school uniforms at any type of retailer, including small stores. The type of retailer is an important variable that determines the purchasing behaviors of consumers(Lee & Hur, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to investigate adolescent consumer segmentation in the school uniform market according to their choice of retailer. When segmenting a market for a general clothing item, retailer choice is scarcely used as a segmentation criterion because currently most people purchase clothes from a broad range of retailers(Moon & Rhee, 2006). In contrast, retailer choice is one of the very useful criteria for school uniform market segmentation in South Korea. Most students purchase their school uniforms from a single type of retailer. Therefore, classifying consumers according to what type of retailer they patronize is a very simple and clear method that is feasible for the study of segmentation in the school uniform market. The specific objective was to compare customers of different retailers in terms of their demographic categories, purchase evaluative criteria, and their use of information sources.

Literature Review

Consumers' Retailer Choice of Apparel

The retailer choice behavior of apparel consumers can be described as a type of store choice behavior that represents an individual's preference for a particular store type for purchasing apparel products(Shim & Kotsiopoulos, 1992). Researchers have pointed out that little attention has been paid to retailer choice behaviors, although brand choice behavior has been widely used in traditional consumer behavior models. According to Darden(1980), retailer choice behavior is more important than brand choice behavior to retailers. He indicated that shopping and buying were separate phases in the purchase process. Many shopping trips are made to "buy something" or to "see what is available" , hence, store choice logically occurs prior to brand choice. In general, a store or retailer's reputation for carrying good brands appears to be the motivation that attracts shoppers. In other words, consumers first choose stores in which to shop without considering the brands they sell.

Retail choice can be measured by two ways according to purchase frequency or intentions and visiting or shopping frequency at a specific retailer(Park & Shin, 2005). The former is measured by asking about "a retailer from which a consumer purchases frequently"(Shim & Kotsiopoulos, 1992) or "a retailer at which a consumer has a purchase intention"(Summers & Wozniak, 1990). In the e-letter, consumers are given questions pertaining "which retailers a consumer shops or visits frequently"(Gutman & Mills, 1982). Park and An(2001) classified the types of casual apparel stores and investigated consumers' characteristics related to apparel store choice behavior. They found differences in an apparel store choice behavior across store types. Chung and Rhee(2002) suggested that the marketing strategy of retailer stores should be primarily developed and executed based on an examination of consumers' retailer choice behavior.

The retailer choice is a critical factor when segmenting school uniform consumers. Most school uniform consumers buy their school uniforms from a single type of retailer, such as a department store, a discount store, or a brand franchise store. Therefore classifying consumers according to which type of retailers they choose and patronize is an important means of segmenting of school uniform

consumers. Consumer clusters classified by retailer choice may show different purchase behaviors for school uniforms. The retailer format choice is considered to be a decisive factor of market segmentation for purchasing school uniforms. Therefore, in this study, adolescent consumers were classified according to the retailer format choice for buying school uniforms. We then investigated differences in school uniform purchase behavior (i.e., information sources, purchase evaluative criteria) according to consumer groups of retailer choice.

Adolescents' Clothing Purchase Behaviors

General profiles of adolescent consumers

The adolescent consumer is a consumer group categorized according to their age and lifecycle. They are teenagers with their own lifestyle and specific consumer characteristics. Adolescence is defined as the period from twelve to twenty-three or twenty-four years old and generally, therefore, includes middle and high school students of 13-18 years old including approximately 10 years after the point they enter puberty (Kim & Rhee, 2001). Adolescents start to become physically mature and build an identity through having independence, being well adjusted sexually, cooperating with friends or others, and earning a moral sense. In this very decisive period of one's socialization, adolescents develop their values, attitudes and functions that are required for their social participation (Jeong, 2003).

As a consumer, adolescents present ambivalent consumption patterns with both economic and hedonic shopping orientations (Sohn & Park, 2001). Hwang and Yang (2006) indicated teenagers show considerable interest in foreign and luxury brands, with purchases of luxury products for teenagers showing a gradual increase. Choi (2009) pointed out that teenager consumers were impulsive and were deeply affected by their peer groups and celebrities. They also showed that their consumption patterns were often irrational.

Information source

Information sources can be described as the base of information used by consumers when they seek information before buying something. Consumers gather information to reduce uncertainty and risk before making a purchase decision (Cox & Rich, 1964). Understanding consumer information-seeking activities has been considered essential in the design of efficient communications between consumers and marketers (Shim & Drake, 1988).

Researchers have used several different methods to categorize information sources. Blackwell, Miniard and Engel (2001) classified information sources as "personal" including friends, family, and salespeople, and "impersonal" such as mass media and retailers' sales promotions. In a study of adolescent consumers' clothing purchase behavior in South Korea, researchers found four sub-dimensions of information sources: printed media, wearing experience/observing others, mass media, and salespeople/promotions (Sohn & Park, 2001). They explained that the preferred information source for adolescents was the category of wearing experience/observing others.

Choo and Koo (1998) indicated that looking around in stores and communicating with friends were the most important information sources for adolescent consumers when buying clothing. Hwang

(1999) examined the clothing purchase behavior of high school girls and found that adolescent consumers considered friends most useful as an information source. The category of buying/wearing experiences was next as a useful information source.

Purchase evaluative criteria

Purchase evaluative criteria are defined as products' attribute dimensions or characteristics that consumers consider important when they buy apparel products. Sohn and Park(2001) investigated adolescents' purchase behaviors of apparel products and categorized four sub-dimensions of product evaluative criteria. These were the self-suitability of the design, the functional factor, the psychographic factor, and the brand. The results showed that adolescents considered design and a suitable appearance to be most important when they make approval or rejection decisions about apparel product purchases. Jang and Ko(2004) found that adolescent consumers considered functional and aesthetic factors including quality, price, fitting, color, and design to be more significant than the socio-psychographic factor of uniqueness.

Cho(2003) found that there were differences in purchase evaluative criteria between male and female teenagers when buying well-known casual wears. Female students tended to consider the colors and patterns as more important while male students tended to consider the brand name and the latest fashion style as more important compared to how females perceived these factor. Due to the nature of school uniforms, information sources and purchase evaluative criteria for school uniform purchases may be different from those of other apparel items. In particular, there may be differences in school uniform purchase behavior among consumer groups as classified according to their choice of retailer type.

Methods

Data Collection

Considering the high rate of adolescents' Internet usage(98.2%, National Internet Development Agency, 2006), a survey was carried out online, and survey questionnaires were sent to middle and high school students in Seoul, South Korea. Data were collected from November 9th to November 16th, 2006, by employing a marketing research firm. A total of 5,500 adolescents were sent questionnaires by e-mail and 970 respondents completed the questionnaires. Finally, a total of 907 data were analyzed after eliminating incomplete data.

The surveys were completed by 407(44.9%) males and 500(55.1%) females. Respondents consisted of middle school students(33.1%) and high school students(66.9%). The majority of respondents(81.8%) reported that they had no part-time job. Most of the respondents(60.9%) indicated that their monthly household income was approximately US\$ 3,000, with 113(12.4%) stating that it exceeded US\$ 5,000.

Measures

This study modified the purchase evaluation criteria items and the use of information sources items

of the study of Sohn and Park(2001) to measure the school uniform purchase behavior through a pilot test. Scales were comprised of 22 items for purchase evaluative criteria, 10 items for information source, and a single question for retailer type. Purchase evaluative criteria and information sources were measured on a five-point scale ranging from “not at all important” (1) to “extremely important” (5). Finally, respondents were asked about the demographic items of gender, age, middle/high school attendance, and family income.

SPSS Version 12.0 was employed for the statistical analysis. Factor analysis was run to identify sub-dimensions of purchase evaluation criteria and information sources. Cronbach’s alpha analysis was performed for internal consistency of each factor. A multivariate analysis of variance(MANOVA) was conducted to identify differences in information sources and purchase evaluative criteria when buying school uniforms among the retailer choice groups.

Results and Discussion

School Uniform Market Segmentation according to Retailer Choice

Retailers visited by adolescent consumers to purchase their school uniforms were classified into specialty stores, department stores, discount stores, small custom-made stores, stores designated by schools, and internet shopping malls. The stores designated by schools were similar to the small custom-made stores, but they offered lower price owing to the exclusive right endowed by the school. The category ‘Internet shopping malls’ was excluded because it included only three adolescents in the sample. To examine the characteristics of the school uniform market segments, we divided adolescent consumers into the five groups according to the retailer type used for the school uniform purchase (Table 1). Specialty store user was the largest segment in the school uniform market, followed department store users, school-designated store users, discount store users, and small custom-made store users in that order.

Table 1.
Store types for school uniforms

Retailer Type	Specialty Stores	Department Stores	Discount Stores	Small Custom-made Stores	Stores designated by Schools
Respondents (N=904)	647 (72%)	135 (15%)	27 (3%)	21 (2%)	64 (7%)

School Uniform Market Segment Characteristics

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to test the differences among the five customer groups in their demographic variables. Factor analysis and MANOVA were then used to assess the differences among groups in their purchase evaluative criteria and information sources. As each group had different sample sizes, type III sums of squares for the MANOVA effect was used for imbalanced samples. Duncan test was executed as a post hoc test of MANOVA.

Significant differences were found in family income among the school uniform market segments according to retailer choice ($F=8.24, p \leq 0.001$). The results are shown in Table 2. No significant differences were found in gender. Department store users and users of stores designated by school were significantly different in terms of the family income.

Table 2.

Differences in demographics among school uniform market segments

	Specialty Stores	Department Stores	Discount Stores	Small Custom-made Stores	Stores designated by Schools	F-values
Family Income (1000\$)	2.42 ABC	3.04 A	2.59 AB	2.00 BC	1.94 C	8.24***

*** $p \leq .001$

α : Results of Duncan test, same letter indicates no significant statistical difference at $p \leq .05$

Purchase evaluative criteria

The principal components factor analysis was conducted using Varimax rotation to examine the dimension of purchase evaluative criteria. As a result, utilities, aesthetics, promotions, shopping conveniences, and external norms were derived with Eigen values higher than 1, as shown in Table 3. Total variance as determined among the five factors was 63.5%. Factor 1, *utilities*, was associated with ease of care, function, fabric, and comfort. Factor 2, *aesthetics*, was associated with design, color figure, and fashionableness. Factor 3, *promotions*, was associated with gift, event, and advertising. Factor 4, *shopping convenience*, was associated with salesperson, location, and services. Lastly, Factor 5, *external norms*, was associated with parents' recommendation, and school regulations.

MANOVA was conducted to verify the differences in the purchase evaluative criteria consisting of utilities, aesthetics, promotions, conveniences, and external norms among the school uniform market segments according to retailer choice. Several significant differences were found (Wilks' Lambda ≤ 0.001). Differences among segments were observed especially in utilities ($F=2.83, p < .05$) and promotions criteria ($F=4.750, p < 0.001$) as shown in Table 4. The utilities ($M=3.96$) were the most important evaluative criteria when students purchased their school uniforms. These were the fundamental benefits demanded in the school uniforms. In particular adolescent consumers using stores designated by their school regarded utilities as critical evaluative criteria.

Table 3.
Factor analysis for purchase evaluative criteria

Purchase Evaluative Criteria	Factor loadings	Eigen value (Percentage of Variance)	Cronbach's α
Factor 1: Utilities • Ease of care • Function • Fabric • Comfort	.84 .84 .79 .75	7.17 (31.19%)	.82
Factor 2: Aesthetics • Design • Color • Figure • Fashionableness	.87 .87 .73 .61	2.92 (12.70%)	.87
Factor 3: Promotions • Gift • Event • Advertising model	.87 .86 .78	1.98 (8.62%)	.82
Factor 4: Shopping Conveniences • Retailer's salesperson • Retailer's location • Retailer's services	.82 .80 .68	1.35 (5.85%)	.76
Factor 5: External Norms • Parents' recommendation • School regulations	.82 .80	1.18 (5.14%)	.63

Table 4.
Differences in purchase evaluative criteria among school uniform market segments

	Specialty Stores	Department Stores	Discount Stores	Small Custom-made Stores	Stores designated by Schools	F-values
Utilities	3.93 AB ^a	3.91 AB	3.70 B	4.04 AB	4.20 A	2.83*
Aesthetics	3.71 A	3.69 A	3.37 A	3.49 A	3.55 A	2.19
Promotions	2.85 AB	2.86 AB	3.19 A	2.24 C	2.51 BC	4.75***
Shopping Conveniences	3.88 A	3.76 A	3.88 A	3.63 A	3.88 A	1.25
External Norms	3.08 A	3.14 A	3.31 A	3.19 A	3.33 A	1.63

*** $p \leq .001$, * $p \leq .05$

a: Results of Duncan test, Same letter indicates no significant statistical difference at $p \leq .05$

Use of information sources

A principal components factor analysis was conducted using Varimax rotation to examine the dimension of the use of information sources. As a result, multimedia information, personal information, and store base information were derived with Eigen values higher than 1, as shown in Table 5. Total variance among these five factors was 60.15%. Factor 1 was associated with items related to multimedia information, in this case internet surfing, brand internet site, and radio advertising. Factor 2 was associated with items related to the store based information of the store showcase, salesperson's explanations, and pamphlets. Unlike the results of previous study(Black et al., 2001), multimedia information and store based information were classified to a separate factor. Factor 3 was associated with items related to personal information. This included former purchasing experience, and peer group.

Table 5.
Factor analysis for information source

Information Source	Factor loadings	Eigen value (Percentage of Variance)	Cronbach's α
Multimedia Information			
• Internet surfing	.83	4.84 (40.33%)	.78
• Brand internet site	.79		
• Radio advertising	.73		
Store based Information			
• Store showcase	.82	1.22 (10.12%)	.75
• Salesperson's explanation	.75		
• Pamphlets	.71		
Personal Information			
• Former purchasing experience	.79	1.17 (9.70%)	.67
• Peer group	.66		

MANOVA was tested to verify the differences in the information sources consisting of multimedia information, store based information, and personal information among the school uniform market segments. We found that consumers used different information sources depending on their retailer choice, as shown in Table 6(Wilks' $\Lambda \leq 0.05$). The use of multimedia as information sources was especially different($F=2.83$, $p<0.05$) among groups who chose different retailers. There were no significant differences in the personal information factor among the five groups, but respondents in this study tended to consider personal information sources more important than other sources like the results of previous research(Sohn & Park, 2001).

The results of the analyses support retailers' building their marketing strategies based on their customer characteristics, as their customers have different shopping characteristics in terms of their product evaluative criteria and use of information source compared to those who use other types of retailers. We found that adolescent consumers use different evaluative criteria and information sources based on their retailer choice. The results of this study can give marketers and scholars a better understanding adolescent consumer' school uniform purchase behavior can inform school uniform com-

panies to adjust multi-channel strategies more effectively to satisfy adolescent consumers' needs in South Korea.

Table 6.
Differences in information sources among school uniform market segments

	Specialty Stores	Department Stores	Discount Stores	Small Custom-made Stores	Stores designated by Schools	F-values
Multimedia Information	2.64 A ^a	2.61 A	2.42 AB	2.19 B	2.50 AB	2.83*
Store base Information	3.08 A	3.01 A	2.95 A	2.86 A	2.85 A	2.19
Personal Information	3.29 A	3.34 A	3.19 A	3.19 A	3.27 A	1.63

* $p \leq 0.05$

a: Results of Duncan test, Same letter indicates no significant statistical difference at $p \leq .05$

Conclusion and Implication

This study was designed to provide a better understanding of adolescent consumer purchase behavior of school uniforms. It sought to investigate differences in the school uniform purchase behavior and differences in demographic characteristics among adolescent consumer groups as segmented by their choice of retailer type. Based on the data collected and on the results of statistical analyses, the following conclusions and marketing implications were developed.

The results supported that classifying adolescent consumers according to what type of retailers they choose is a viable means of segmentation the school uniform market. Adolescent consumers were found to consist of five groups that could be categorized according to the types of retailers they used. These included special stores, department stores, discount stores, small custom-made stores and stores designated by schools. Marketers and retailers of school uniforms can consider retailer choice as a crucial measure to segment the school uniform market.

Factor analyses provided three sub-dimensions of information sources(i.e. multimedia information, store based information, and personal information) along with the five sub-dimensions of purchase evaluative criteria(i.e. utilities, aesthetics, promotions, shopping conveniences, and external norms). Definite factorial structures for information sources and purchase evaluative criteria were identified among adolescent consumers of school uniforms.

The results also indicated that consumer groups segmented by retailer choice differed significantly in their use of multimedia information sources. The two consumer groups who purchased at department stores and specialty stores tended to place more importance on multimedia information such as Internet surfing, brand Internet sites, and radio advertising compared to other groups. According to these results, these two retailers can attract consumers by providing useful multimedia sources and formulating efficient communication strategies using these types of multimedia.

Five adolescent consumer groups showed significant differences in two purchase evaluative criteria: utilities and promotions. For the utility factor, the retailer choice group that chose a store des-

ignated by their school considered utilities to be more important than did other groups. Retailer stores designated by school are suggested to offer their consumers definite benefits through product development to prove the ease of care, function, comfort, and other factors in this category. In terms of the promotion factor, the group who chose discount stores tended to place more importance on promotions such as gifts, events, and on the advertising model compare to other groups. For this group, discount retailers can appeal to consumers by staging various and creative events and by using promotional gifts to meet adolescents' needs.

This study provides useful sources about adolescent consumer behavior for school uniform purchases by market segmentation based on retailer choices in South Korea. However, as with any study, our research has limitations. Consumer behavior may differ from region to region. In this study, participants were recruited in the large metro city, Seoul. Therefore, the representativeness of school uniform consumers is limited. In this study, adolescent consumers were classified by retailer choice to examine differences in school uniform purchase behaviors among segmented groups. However, other critical factors may have an influence on the purchase behaviors of school uniforms, such as the socio-psychographic characteristics of adolescents.

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