Clothing Knowledge and Clothing Consumption Behavior:
Comparison between Clothing Majors and Non-Majors

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Abstract   The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences of clothing majors and non-majors in clothing knowledge and consumption behavior. Subjective and objective knowledge were compared and factors of clothing consumption behavior were analyzed across the two groups. The subjects of this study were female student who went to University in Seoul. Data from 150 college female students were analyzed using SPSS. Results indicated that clothing majors had significantly higher level of clothing knowledge. The differences were smaller for subjective knowledge levels than objective knowledge levels. Clothing majors tended to reform their clothes and coordinate their clothing items better than non-majors. They considered styles more importantly than brands but have some level of conformity. Among clothing consumption behavior factors, reform ability and coordination ability significantly affected clothing knowledge.

Introduction

For an individual, clothes represent a way of expressing one's self-concept, attitude, value, and personality. It is also a type of non-verbal communication, where people use their clothes to express their intentions as well as to perceive and evaluate others. These roles that clothes play have become more important in today's society, and the rapid changes in social environment have had huge influences on clothing habits. As society's need for decoration, or looks, change, an individual's clothing habits have changed with it.

Consumption is something that consumers partake in, not only during purchase of the clothes, but throughout its use and until its disposal. Future consumption is influenced by how the consumer wears the clothes that he or she bought, and companies should understand this and apply it in their marketing campaigns. Before these types of consumption behavior and usage behavior are analyzed, it is necessary to examine the type and the amount of influence people's interaction with each other have on their decision-making process because people are social animals.

Compared to other products, there is a huge emphasis on when the clothes were purchased, thanks to societal pressure known as "fad", or trend. From the perspective of fashion marketing, there is additional value to a product when that product is considered to be a trendy item, however its value is very volatile and changes quickly within a short span of time, so it is important to analyze the groups that are at the source of spreading the newest trends. Their innovative clothing styles influence the normal consumer groups when they are in process of choosing the latest trend because their use of clothes provides positive vibes and attitudes for the normal consumer groups.

Members who make up this key group consist of individuals who study fashion, professionals in the fashion industry, and consumers who have a keen sense of style. This study will focus on students who are currently majoring in a fashion-related field, and its aim is to take a look at the amount of influence their knowledge of fashion has on their clothing consumption behavior. In order to fulfill the purpose of the research, a comparative analysis is necessary between the clothing consumption of students majoring in fashion-related fields and students who are not involved in fashion. The expected result from the research is that there is a strong correlation between clothing knowledge and creative clothing usage behavior.

Theoretical Background

Clothing Knowledge

Knowledge is the amount of accurate information stored in memory in addition to the level of awareness regarding the product by the consumer (Brucks, 1986); it is also a concept that intertwines two major components, familiarity and professionalism (Alba & Hutchinson, 1993). Consumer knowledge consists of the following subparts: knowledge of the product's existence, purchase knowledge, and usage knowledge, and of these, product knowledge is knowing the product's attributes and associations (Engel, Blackwell & Miniard, 2001). This would be an objective way to measure knowledge, however there are also subjective ways to measure knowledge as well (Rao & Montoe, 1988). An objective measurement is measuring the depth of the consumer's actual product-related knowledge, while subjective measurement is measuring the amount of knowledge that the consumer perceives he or she has regarding the product. These two types of knowledge influence decisions and the method of researching information in different ways. The concept of subjective knowledge includes factors such as familiarity of the product, perceived knowledge of the product, and personal experience (Rao & Monroe, 1988). Many researches have shown that there is a gap between a consumer's perceived knowledge and actual knowledge, and this is because subjective knowledge is closely related to their level of confidence, so it includes not only perceived knowledge, but also the confidence in their knowledge as well (Park & Lessing, 1981).

This study will measure the objective and subjective knowledge of students who major in fashion-related majors, the group that the study expects will have higher level of knowledge, and students who major in studies not related to fashion.

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Clothing Consumption Behavior

How an individual wears his or her clothing goes beyond being a functional behavior of protecting one-self; it is an extension of the user's psychological state such as desire, need for attention, and habits (Koh & Kim, 1996). The clothes that an individual wears are used to develop one's image; it is a method of expression, and so one's clothing style is an important variable in analyzing a person's image. People select the clothes of their preference from a wide range of possibilities so the image that they have of themselves have huge influences in consumer's purchasing behavior (Yeom & Kim, 2004).

People use clothes to try to build a good image with other people, and the way they wear their clothes plays an important role in boosting their ego, so they use clothes in order to satisfy their psychological needs (Evans, 1964). Clothing consumption behavior that goes beyond physiological desire or conformity to trends, and is meant for psychological satisfaction will involve acts of creativity. Though an applicable previous research could not be found, there are indications that individuals who have lots of information or knowledge about clothes tend to be more concerned with aesthetic and intrinsic factors such as the entire silhouette of the clothes, design or style of the clothes, appropriateness of the clothes to situation, and quality. There is a clear difference between groups that have high subjective knowledge and low subjective knowledge regarding their view of clothes in all facets, whether it is their sense of maintenance, their sense of aesthetic appreciation, their ability to match their outfits, and knowledge of brands; and so the individuals who feel that they are very knowledgeable about clothes are much more confident in their usage of clothes (Kim, 1998). It has been reported that consumers with high level of knowledge regarding clothes are more likely to be trend setters and that they put more emphasis on factors such as brand, reputation, approval from others, and coordination of clothes. This study looks at clothing consumption behavior as a type of psychosocial behavior where clothes represent an individual's image. It aims to do research on the relationship between this behavior and consumers with high level of knowledge regarding clothes.

Research Method

Purpose of Research and Subject of Inquiry

The purpose of this study is to find out if the amount of knowledge regarding clothes affects clothing consumption behavior of people by comparing the behaviors of students who major in fashion-related fields and students who are in other majors. Detailed subject of inquiry is as follows:

1. Find out if there is a difference in knowledge regarding clothes between students who study fashion-related majors and students who are in other majors
2. Find out if there is a difference in clothing consumption behavior between students who study fashion-related majors and students who are in other majors
3. Find out if there is a relationship between having knowledge regarding clothes and clothing con-

sumption behavior.

Data Collection and Analysis

The subjects of this study were female students in their 20s, who were currently enrolled in universities in Seoul. Data regarding the subject's school, major (whether related to fashion or not), class, age, and these factors were used to extract a representative sample to be used in the study. Students from Kyung Hee University, Korea University, Sogang University, Kookmin University, Seoul National University, Seoul Women's University, Ewha Women's University, Hansung University, and Hanyang University participated in the research, and the ratio of fashion-related majors to non-related majors was 50:50. 25% of the subjects were first and second year students and 75% of the students were third and fourth year students. Survey responses were used to collect data, and a total of 150 surveys were collected and analyzed. None of the surveys were filled out inaccurately and SPSS 10.0 was used for data analysis.

Measuring Device

Items from the existing research (Lee, 2003) were supplemented and modified, and were used as a measuring device for objective clothing knowledge. It consisted of 30 items with the following breakdown: 5 items regarding knowledge regarding brands, 6 items regarding fashion and trends, 3 items regarding fabric, 3 items regarding terminology, 8 items regarding purchasing, and 2 items regarding methods to compensate for body type.

9 items were extracted by using background information from previous researches (e.g., Brucks, 1985) in order to measure subjective clothing knowledge, and the respondents were asked to answer using the 5-point Lickertis scale. It asked the subjects to rate themselves in categories such as having lots of purchasing experience, their ability to select clothes due to having lots of shopping experience, watching a lot of fashion-related advertisements, having more in-depth clothing knowledge compared to others, being an expert in clothes, and having knowledge of the characteristics of variety of clothing brands. Factor analysis was performed in order to find out if all of the factors were independent of each other, and it was concluded that all of them were independent factors. The validity of the result was confirmed. The internal consistency was measure with Cronbach's alpha, and its value came out to .941, so its reliability was also confirmed.

25 items related to an individual's creative clothing behavior from previous researches measuring shopping tendencies and clothing consumption behavior were selected in order to measure clothing consumption behavior. 5-point Lickertis scale was used for all the items. Factor analysis was done using the measured data in order to find the factors for clothing consumption behavior, and it resulted in a total of 6 factors, after eliminating one question for overlap.

The first factor was named "modification skills". The subjects had to rate items such as their ability to modify the design of the clothes to fit the individual better, ability to modify old, out-of-style clothes, ability to modify purchased clothes that the subject did not like, and the ability to do simple

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patchwork. This factor is an important criterion for getting the results for the subject's sense of innovation regarding clothes. This is a skill-set that requires the subject to have professional abilities. This factor had a very high eigenvalue of 5.45, which makes it the most important factor in determining clothing consumption behavior.

The second factor was named "brand dependency". It has 4 items such as having a highly preferred clothing brand, and the subject's tendency to wear one brand as an outfit. The purpose of this factor is to find out if the subjects wear diverse brands for their outfit instead of depending on one brand.

The third factor was named "emphasis on style". Subjects are asked to rate items such as wearing clothes that suit them instead of wearing what they would like to wear, purchasing clothes regardless of brand if they like the style, and putting more importance on style than brand recognition. Unlike the previous factor, the purpose of this factor is to find out if the subject prefers to enhance their individuality rather than follow the latest trend.

The fourth factor was named "coordination skills". It has 4 items such as coordinating clothes to enhance one's physical attributes, giving coordination tips to friends and family. The purpose of this factor is to find out if the subject puts more emphasis on his or her body type and image rather than blindly following the latest trend.

The fifth factor was named "affinity for clothes in possession", and it has items regarding the subject possessing piece of clothing for over a decade, and the person's reluctance to throwing away old clothes.

The last factor was named "pursuit of trend", and it has items such as whether the subject wears clothes in line with the latest trend, or the person's need to wear similar clothing as others. This factor is more sensitive to popular trends than individuality.

Research Findings and Discussions

The difference in clothing knowledge between students who study fashion-related majors and students who are in other majors

The difference in objective and subjective knowledge between majors and non-majors is shown in <fig. 1>. First of all, objective knowledge consisted of 30 questions, and each question was assigned 1 point, for a total of 30 points. The average score for fashion-related majors was 25.05 and the average for non-majors was 15.59. The knowledge level of the fashion-related majors was very high ($t=13.73$, $p<.001$). It should be noted that there was a huge discrepancy in score between the two groups in the following categories: style/trend, fabric, and terminology. These were considered to be the types of knowledge that required professional studies.

Using the 5-point Lickertis scale to measure subjective knowledge, which also shows the subject's confidence level, the fashion-related majors scored an average score of 3.86 and the non-majors scored 2.88 ($t=9.62$, $p<.001$). The fashion-related majors scored higher once again, and the numbers suggest that

the gap in the objective knowledge between the two groups is larger than the gap in the subjective knowledge. In other words, it can be suggested that the fashion-related majors' confidence level regarding their clothing knowledge is not up to par with their actual knowledge level.

Table 1.

The difference in objective and subjective knowledge between majors and non-majors

Factor	Fashion-related Majors (*n*=75)		Non-majors (*n*=75)		*t*-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Average Objective Knowledge Score	25.05	(3.22)	15.59	(5.03)	13.73***
Average Subject Knowledge Score	3.86	(0.49)	2.88	(0.74)	9.62***

***p<.001

The difference in clothing consumption behavior between fashion-related majors and non-majors is shown in <fig. 2>. The results show that all the fashion-related majors attained high scores in "modification skills", "coordination skills", and "emphasis on style".

When comparing the two groups, the factors that showed the biggest discrepancies were "modification skills" (*t*=6.4, *p*<.001) and "coordination skills" (*t*=6.1, *p*<.001). These variables are closely related to clothing consumption behavior, and from this result, it can be seen that fashion-related majors have a more creative clothing usage behavior.

Table 2.

The difference in clothing consumption behavior between fashion-related majors and non-majors

Factor	Fashion-related Majors (*n*=75)		Non-majors (*n*=75)		*t*-value
	mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Remodeling ability	3.07	.74	2.33	.68	6.4***
Coordination	3.70	.53	3.14	.61	6.1***
Brand reliance	3.20	.64	3.12	.79	.67
Owned clothing for attachment	3.15	.84	3.04	.86	.80
Style emphasizes	3.98	.56	3.65	.58	3.6**
Synchronism	2.72	.59	2.52	.56	2.1*

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

Regression analysis was used in order to find out which factors (source variable) in creative clothing consumption influenced knowledge (result variable). The result of the analysis <fig. 3> shows that the most influential variables for objective knowledge were "modification skills", "coordination skills", and "emphasis on style". "Brand consciousness" was mentioned in addition to "modification skills" and "coordination skills" as influential variables for subjective knowledge. From these finding, we can conclude that "modification skills" and "coordination skills" are indispensable variables in relation to creative clothing usage behavior.

Table 3.
Influences that variables of creative consumption behavior have on objective and subjective knowledge

Outcome variables	Objective knowledge		Subjective Knowledge	
Cause variable	beta	*t*-value	beta	*t*-value
Reform	.42	6.26***	.50	11.43***
Coordination	.40	6.16***	.65	14.69***
Brand reliance	.09	1.37	.19	4.25***
Owned clothing attitude	-.05	-.74	.07	1.58
Style emphasizes	.14	2.06*	-.01	-.12
Synchronism / personality	-.05	-.74	-.04	-.90
F value	14.05***		61.315***	
R^2	.37		.72	

p<.001

Conclusion and Proposal

The study started with the basic question of whether students who were in fashion-related fields actually had higher level of knowledge regarding clothes and whether they had the desire to find out the results, and it branched out to finding out the difference in clothing consumption behavior between fashion-related majors and non-majors. In other words, the research focused on the fashion-related majors in order to see how much their diverse clothing knowledge impacted their clothing usage behavior, and it also did comparative analysis using the clothing knowledge levels of the two groups and their clothing consumption behavior to show that there is a close relationship between the two variables. Clothing knowledge was divided into objective knowledge and subjective knowledge, and surveys were used as measurement device.

The results of the study show that fashion-related majors have a higher level of clothing knowledge compared to non-majors, and the gap in knowledge level is actually larger in analysis of the objective knowledge surveys. This evidence leads to the conclusion that the confidence level of students in fashion-related majors in regards to their clothing knowledge is low compared to their actual knowledge. Fashion-related majors who had high clothing knowledge put more emphasis on two variables, "modification skills" and "coordination skills". They put more importance on style than brand, but they do have tendency to follow trend as well. Overall, fashion-related majors had higher scores for all the variables, which shows that they are more creative in their clothing usage behavior. Out of the various clothing consumptions variables, "modification skills" and "coordination skills" influenced subjective and objective knowledge the most. This means that fashion-related majors are able to modify their clothes and have a higher sense of coordination compared to non-majors.

When looking at the results from the perspective of fashion marketing, companies should identify the behavioral characteristics of trend setting consumers groups with high levels of clothing knowledge and take their characteristics and knowledge into consideration to develop high quality products that match their style preference. Also, a consumer's "clothing-related experience", which is a variable in sub-

jective knowledge, is developed mainly through advertisements and being exposed to displays in stores while shopping, so companies' marketing strategy should be visually-oriented.

In this study, the amount of items that could be tested for objective knowledge outnumbered the items for the subjective knowledge, which unfortunately, prevented a more in-depth study of the relationship between knowledge and clothing usage behavior. It would be a good idea for the next research to do a comparative analysis between fashion-related majors and non-majors who show creative clothing usage behavior. Also, the variables for subjective knowledge should be dissected more in order to have a more in-depth analysis that could measure and analyze groups of individuals who do not have professional knowledge, yet have lots of clothing-related experiences, a natural sense of style, or high confidence level, so that their clothing usage behavior could be evaluated as well.

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