

The Influence of Living Abroad Experience on Clothing Benefits Sought and Brand Attitude

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Abstract This study is to examine whether those who have experiences of living abroad are influenced by overseas culture in their seeking of clothing benefits and brand attitude, to analyze and summarize the differences from those who have no such experience, and to ultimately present marketing opportunities and directions based on the analysis. Based on respected previous studies, factors affecting clothing benefits sought were selected and sub-factors were developed. Then, a survey questionnaire was prepared based on the selected factors/sub-factors, along with questions to ask responders to evaluate their experiences of living abroad. Men and women aged from 18 to 39 participated in the survey. According to the survey result, one's experience of living abroad had influences on their self-expression, brand attitude, and domestic and overseas brand preference as s/he experienced cultural diversity and developed more flexible attitude. The brand attitude was also influenced by the country in which a responder lived, but not by the staying period.

Key words Living Abroad Experience, Clothing benefits sought, Brand attitude

Introduction

The advanced technologies of transportation and telecommunications have enabled people to travel around every block of the world, and made the globe ever smaller. That is why people around the world share the same culture and has become members of one global community. A Seoulite could remotely talk to a New Yorker to close a deal real time, or fly to Japan to eat the best Ramen, Japanese noodle, in Japan and fly back home within a day. As globalization has freed up exchanges between countries, an increasing number of people go to and from overseas(Lee & Choi, 2008). As the five-days-work/week system has settled down, people pay attention to travel and leisure and go on overseas travels ever more than before. In addition, many students desire to study abroad, particularly in English-speaking countries, to free themselves from the overly-competitive education system of Korea or to polish up their English so that they could be better prepared for the job market where English command is critical. The active use of the internet has fueled such attention and desires. As Korean consumers have developed strong interest in other countries, many overseas brands are actively penetrating into the Korean market. This

study is to examine differences, if any, between consumers who have experiences of living abroad and those who have not at a time when an increasing number of people lived or are living abroad.

Literary Review

Influence of Living Abroad Experience

Each country has its own culture and different economic, political and social conditions, and values different images or attitude. Fashion that exists under different circumstances of different countries differs according to different culture or trends, and people apply different criteria or pursue different benefits when purchasing clothes. Thus, each brand tends to develop clothing concepts, designs or functions in conformity with people of the country or of the same cultural zone.

Yu and Kim(2004) said clothes were personal and common tools to express oneself, society affected consumers' clothing selection behavior, and thus it was reasonable to believe that one's experience of living abroad influenced him/herself. They added that such experience invited changes in many ways from life in general to fashion style; changes would differ according to one's age at the time of the experience, staying period and purposes, gender and cultural differences; and the changes would be found in one's self-identity, value, openness to diversity and consumer role. Lee and Choi(2008) mentioned the influence of overseas cultural experience in their empirical study on adolescents.

Lim et al(2003) confirmed different cultures pursued different values, citing that clothing attitude and purchase behavior differ by culture, and despite cross-cultural phenomena, different socio-cultural environments brought about culture-specific clothing behavior, Lee and Choi(2008) insisted adolescents' cultural experiences through overseas staying had positive influences on their understanding of the culture, demonstrating that direct experiences in overseas culture affected one's thoughts and minds, and thus cultural experiences through overseas staying might change one's attitude and behavior.

As such, previous studies have mostly examined either differences in clothing-related behavior by culture, or variables through which one's living abroad experience brought about change, having failed to look into the differences in attitude or behavior between people who experienced overseas culture first-hand and those who did not, and thus it seems necessary to study the differences.

Clothing Benefits Sought

Benefits sought refer to the benefit or utility that consumers feel from consumption. Peter and Olson (1987) said that benefits sought were consumers' subjective needs and wants related to properties of specific products, and positive results or subjective rewards that consumers expected from the use of the products. Thus, when an individual purchases a specific product, s/he may consume and use the benefits that the product offers, rather than the features or properties of the products, and feel satisfaction from the benefits. However, benefits are not consistent all the time, and may differ by the circumstance and purpose of product use, or consumers' expertise and experiences(Im, 2012).

Previous studies divided benefits sought into two major dimensions: beauty and utility. However, as the market has been further segmented, they include status symbol and social status-seeking benefit (Kim & Hong, 2000). Choi and Koh (1995) examined female university students and divided benefits sought into brand value seeking, individual style seeking, trend seeking and utility seeking. The study of Lee and Rhee (2010) on unmarried women found five clothing benefits: conspicuous, pro-sentimental, economic, enjoyable and aesthetic values. Shim and Bickle (1992) reported that clothing benefits sought varied by shopping orientation, and Park (2012) said different dimensions of clothing benefits behavior had influences ambivalent consumption of fashion products.

As such, previous studies have mainly looked into consumers' pursuit for brand value, trend, economics, utility, individual style and aesthetic value, and study dimensions were differ by researchers. Considering that benefits sought are a critical consumer variable that affects clothing attitude, this study is to identify which utilities are more valued by consumers who have living abroad experiences.

Brand Attitude

Brand attitude refers to positive or negative assessment that consumers render about a certain brand (Franzen, 1999). Brand attitude is relatively stable and consistent, and thus has been used as a factor to understand and predict consumer behavior. When consumers develop positive attitude toward a brand, the brand could expect revenue increases and cost reduction, and even successful brand extension (Shahrokh, Sedghiani, & Ghasemi, 2012). This means when consumers are satisfied with a certain brand, they develop brand preference and eventually make a purchase decision accordingly, leading to an actual purchase. This is the primary reason why companies have made significant efforts to encourage consumers to have positive brand attitude. Moore (1993) created brand relations criteria to study brand-consumer relations on 93 brands of five European countries (the U.K., France, Italy, Germany and Spain). The study verified that the brand-consumer relations were culturally affected. Roth (1995) also found in his study on the global brand image strategies of 60 areas in 10 countries that culture and socioeconomics influenced brand attitude. Accordingly, differences between global brand and local brand may be differently perceived by consumers' exposure to overseas cultural experiences. This study is to recognize the importance of brand attitude, and to understand the influence of overseas cultural experiences and sought-after benefits on brand attitude.

Study Methodology and Procedure

Research Question

Research questions were made as below.

One, verify whether benefits sought differ by one's living abroad experience.

Two, verify whether attitude toward fashion brands differ by one's living abroad experience.

Three, verify the influences of gender, staying period and area, and clothing involvement on the attitude

toward fashion brands, regarding those who lived abroad.

Study Subjects and Data Collection

Study subjects were 210 men and women aged 18-39 and living in Seoul and Gyeonggi-do, and data collection was based on the random sampling method. As the previous study of Yu & Kim(2004) focused on the fact that younger people are more likely to adapt themselves to different cultures and selectively adopt them, this study decided people in their 20s as the main subjects. A total of 214 survey questionnaires were distributed, and 210 were analyzed, excluding 4 incomplete questionnaires.

As for the demographics, the average age was 24 years old, with 192 in their 20s(91.4%), 16 in their 30s(7.6%) and 2 teens(1%). Among them, 137(65.2%) were women and 73(34.8%) were men. 172 (82.7%) were college students or graduates, and most of them were students(73.8%). The majority(61.2%) of them resides in Seoul. 62(29.7%) of them spend less than 100,000 KRW on clothing every month, 70(33.5%) spend 100,000 to 300,000 KRW, 35(16.7%) spend 300,000 to 500,000 KRW, 15(7.2%) spend 500,000 to 700,000 KRW, 12(5.7%) spend 700,000 to 900,000 KRW, and 15(7.2%) spend 900,000 KRW or more.

As for responders experience of living abroad, 153(72.9%) of them had such experiences. As for the staying duration, 53(34.6%) answered 15 days to 6 months, 43(28.1%) less than 15 days, 28(18.3%) 2 years or longer, 15(9.8%) 6 months to 1 year, and 14(9.2%) 1 year to 2 years. 92(60.5%) said they lived abroad during their college years, 18(11.8%) high-school years, 16(10.5%) after graduating from college, 12(7.9%) elementary-school years, 11(7.2%) middle-school years, and 3(2%) pre-school years. As for the purpose of staying abroad, travel topped the list with 76 responders(50.3%), followed by language training(28 responders, 18.5%), study abroad(19, 12.6%), other purposes(12, 7.9%), visiting relatives(8, 5.3%), volunteer activities(7, 4.6%), and business(1, 0.7%). In terms of the country, the United States was the most frequently visited with 50 responders(32%), followed by Japan & Singapore(32 responders, 21.1%), China & Asia(31, 20.4%), Europe(29, 19.1%) and Australia(10, 6.6%). The U.S. seemed the most popular as many went abroad for the purpose of language training or study, while Japan and China were visited frequently on vacation as they are located near Korea.

Twelve questions about changes after living abroad were developed based on the 7-point Likert scale. Regarding the questions, "I felt cultural differences during my stay abroad" scored the highest with the average of 5.47, followed by "respect for my own style," "changes in the amount of clothing expenses," and "feeling cultural differences after coming back home." Among the 12 questions, 8 items related to change scored over 4.00(moderate) on average, telling that responders' experiences of staying abroad brought about big changes. In addition, "I became to accept wider diversity in style," "I try to wear according to the time, place and occasion," and "I value the overall balance of the style" also scored over 4.00 on average, demonstrating that their clothing styles had been affected and changed by their experience of staying abroad.

Measures and Data Analysis

The survey questionnaire of this study was comprised of questions about clothing benefits sought, brand attitude and experiences of staying overseas. Backed by previous studies, 36 questions about clothing benefits sought were developed based on 7-point Likert scale. Questions about brand attitude consisted of preferred brands and their opinions, and changes in their attitude toward preferred brands after having stayed abroad. Also, included were 4 questions about overseas living experiences and demographic questions. The SPSS for Windows 12.0 was utilized for data analysis, based on factor analysis, correlation analysis and ANOVA, *t*-test.

Study Results and Discussions

Clothing Benefit Factors

To identify factors of clothing benefits sought, 28 questions were developed and factor analysis was conducted on them. The analysis identified 24 question about 6 factors were identified (Table 1), eliminating 4 items. The six factors were social recognition/pleasure, prestige, practicality, early adoption, individuality and attractiveness.

Table 1.
Factor Analysis on the Clothing Benefits Sought

Factors	Items	Factor loadings
Social recognition and pleasure (Eigenvalue= 7.073)	Clothes are important as they give people different looks and feels.	.809
	I enjoy styling myself.	.725
	I think I wear clothes according to time, place and occasion.	.696
	I care what other people think about my fashion style.	.626
	When purchasing a clothing item, I consider how to match with other fashion items that I have.	.612
	To express myself, I think my fashion style is important.	.584
Prestige (3.777)	Even when I don't need to by anything, I like to look around clothing stores.	.578
	I tend to buy several cheap items, rather than one expensive item.	-.700
	I prefer outlets or discount stores to department stores.	-.655
	I think brand products provide the value as much as their prices.	.637
	As for similar quality or design items, I tend to buy well-known brand items.	.634
Practicality (2.175)	I carefully select brands since my clothing style presents my image.	.585
	I tend to carefully look at the sewing and seams when purchasing clothing items.	.695
	When purchasing clothes, I consider whether they can be worn in different seasons.	.693
	I tend to buy easy-to-manage items.	.668
Early adoption (1.669)	I tend to buy easy-to-wear items.	.635
	I tend to adopt latest trends prior to others.	.691
	I have an experience of saving money to buy a rare item.	.631
Individuality (1.205)	I consider trends when purchasing clothes.	.624
	I value a unique style.	.778
	I believe that bold styles are good to express myself.	.617

	People's judgment doesn't bother me.	.608
Attractiveness (1.026)	If attractive, I can wear revealing styles.	.703
	I like clothing styles that emphasize my body line.	.700

Influence of Living Abroad Experience on Clothing Benefits

To identify the correlations between one's experience of living abroad and factors of benefits sought, factor score differences regarding clothing benefit factors were between those with such experiences and those without (Table 2). The analysis found a significant difference only in the individuality factor ($t=-3.07$, $p<.001$). As the factor scores near 1, responders are interpreted as more individuality-oriented. Thus those who have experienced living abroad value the individuality factor more than those who had no such experience. This shows that when people stay abroad, they encounter more diverse styles. In addition, it seems while many people were staying in the U.S. or Europe, they become used to the social practice to embrace diverse styles and to respect individual uniqueness.

Table 2.

Differences in the Clothing Benefits Sought According to One's Experience of Living Abroad

Clothing benefit factors	With experience of living abroad ($n=151$)	Without experience of living abroad ($n=56$)	<i>t</i> -value
Social recognition and pleasure	-.06	.17	-1.49
Prestige	-.05	.14	-1.24
Practicality	-.04	.12	-1.02
Early adoption	.08	-.21	1.86
Individuality	-.11	.31	-3.07*
Attractiveness	.03	-.08	.65

Living Abroad Experience and Brand Attitude

To examine whether one's experience of living abroad affects his/her domestic or overseas brand preference, cross tabulation and Chi-square analysis were conducted (Table 3). The analyses found that those with such experiences demonstrated significantly stronger preferences for overseas brands to domestic brands ($Chi-square=4.113$, $df=1$, $p<.05$). This may be attributable to the fact that they are better aware of overseas brands and able to compare prices, styles and images of domestic and overseas brands.

Table 3.
Relationship between One's Experience of Living Abroad and Brand Preference

	With experience of living abroad (n=72)	Without experience of living abroad (n=31)
preferences for overseas brands	46 (50.3)	26 (21.7)
preferences for domestic brands	26 (21.7)	5 (9.3)

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However, one's experience of living abroad had no significant relations with his/her interest in the origin of a brand. That is, overseas experiences seem to have little influence on one's interest in the origin of a certain brand.

According to the survey about brand attitude change after having lived abroad based on the 5-point Likert scale questions, average scores regarding overseas casual brands, overseas sport casual brands and overseas luxury brands turned out relatively high. Meanwhile, except toward domestic luxury brands, attitude toward domestic brands was not much changed.

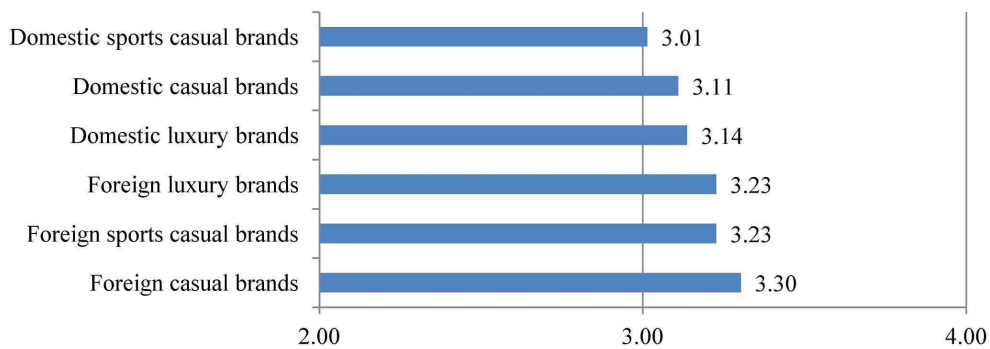


Figure 1.
The Degree of Brand Attitude Change after having lived Abroad(5-point Likert scale)

To examine brand attitude change after having lived abroad, ANOVA was conducted. The analysis did not find any significant change toward domestic brands, but significant changes toward three overseas brand groups. Overall, those who lived in Japan, the U.S. or Europe demonstrated significant attitude change toward overseas luxury brands, overseas casual brands and overseas sports casual brands. As for the overseas luxury brands, one's experience of living abroad many have positive influences on his/her perception about the brands. As for the foreign casual brands, those who stayed in Japan and the United States scored much higher than other groups, telling that they may have been influenced by Japanese and Americans who wear casuals most frequently. A similar result was found in the overseas sport casual brands. Thus, the highly-activated sport casual market of Japan and the U.S. may have influenced the

responders.

Table 4.
Countries of living abroad and changes in attitudes toward brands

	America (n=47)	Europe (n=30)	Japan (n=30)	China & Other Asian countries (n=30)	Australia (n=10)	F-value
Domestic luxury brands	3.06	3.10	3.27	3.13	3.20	.62
Domestic casual brands	3.06	3.10	3.07	3.13	3.40	1.01
Domestic sports casual brands	2.98	3.07	2.97	3.00	3.20	.78
Foreign luxury brands	3.32	3.24	3.47	2.97	2.80	2.61*
Foreign casual brands	3.49	3.07	3.50	3.07	3.20	2.71*
Foreign sports casual brands	3.32	3.17	3.47	3.00	2.90	2.75*

* $p < .05$

To test whether brand attitude change differs by gender, t-test was conducted. The test did not find any significant difference in foreign brands, but did find significant differences in domestic luxury brands ($t=3.11$, $p < .01$) and domestic casual brands ($t=2.15$, $p < .05$). The two brand groups show that male consumers went through greater changes during their stay abroad (Table 5).

Table 5.
Changes in Brand Attitude according to Gender

	Male (n=46)	Female (n=100)	t-value
Domestic luxury brands	3.35	3.04	3.11**
Domestic casual brands	3.24	3.05	2.15*
Domestic sports casual brands	3.11	2.97	1.85
Foreign luxury brands	3.13	3.27	-1.03
Foreign casual brands	3.20	3.35	-1.15
Foreign sports casual brands	3.28	3.20	0.67

Conclusion

This study is designed to identify whether there is any difference between those who have experiences of living abroad and those who do not, regarding their clothing benefits sought and brand attitude, so that it can focus on the influence of one's experience of living abroad on the fashion market. Based on the survey of men and women aged 18-39 and living in Seoul and Gyeonggi-do, findings of this study are as below.

First, factor analysis on the clothing involvement and clothing benefits sought identified six factors: social recognition/pleasure, prestige, practicality, early adoption, individuality and attractiveness.

Second, those who have experiences of living abroad value individuality as a clothing benefit fac-

tor, prefer overseas brands and pay attention to the origin of brands more than the other group. This may be attributable to the fact that they encountered more diversified cultures and developed flexible attitude during their staying abroad, and have developed positive attitude toward overseas brands that satisfied their unmet desires.

Third, according to the analysis on the brand attitude change of those who have experiences of living abroad, women displayed more negative change in their attitude toward domestic brands and more positive change toward non-brand items than their male counterpart. The staying duration also influenced their attitude change toward non-brand items. A group with staying duration from 6 months to 1 year demonstrated the greatest change, followed by those less than 15 days, and those from 1 to 2 years. Countries had little impact on their attitude toward domestic brands, but significant impact toward foreign brands. Concerning attitude toward overseas luxury, casual and sport casual brands, those who stayed in Japan and Singapore showed the greatest positive change, followed by those having stayed in the U.S., and Europe. However, no significant difference was found in the relations between clothing involvement and brand attitude change after having lived abroad.

Fourth, regarding questions about overseas brands sold in Korea, over a half demonstrated negative opinions, like “too expensive,” and “not diverse enough.” There were other opinions, like “better than domestic brands,” “good at brand image strategy,” and “too exotic.”

Based on the results stated above, this study summarized marketing implications to target consumers who have lived abroad. Most overseas brands have penetrated into the Korean market based on the high-end, high-price strategy so that they can compensate the high customs and position themselves as luxury brands. However, such strategy has pushed up the prices much higher than the original prices, and thus invited criticism from most consumers. In addition, although many overseas brands have been launched in the domestic market, consumers still demand further diversity. Thus, when preparing to launch an overseas brand, it is desirable to launch mid/low-end brands with different countries of origin; and when launching a domestic brand, it may be a good strategy to diversify items so that a consumer can complete, so called, “total coordination” within a brand, a significant benefit that overseas brands offer.

In addition, it may also be necessary to develop easy but unique designs and pricing strategies by focusing on the clothing benefits sought and brand attitude of those who have lived abroad.

This study bears limitations as follows. As 60% of the responders who had experiences of living abroad actually stayed overseas less than 6 months on vacation, the influence of overseas culture was not evident. Among those who lived abroad over 2 years, 80% of them stayed overseas during their middle-school years or younger years. As they have stayed in Korea for a long time since they came back and been accustomed to the domestic culture, no change was found in their attitude toward fashion brands. It cannot be overlooked that their attitude change, if any, may be attributable to their life cycle, i.e. the transition from adolescent to adulthood, rather than their experiences of living abroad. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies limit the subjects by certain criteria, and define the target group for marketing so that they can precisely understand their clothing behavior and develop marketing strategies accordingly.

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