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## Suggestion of a Strategy for Fashion Customization Services -An Integrated Perspective of Narcissism and Brand Prestige-

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### Abstract

Many fashion brands provide sophisticated customization services with advanced technology. Previous studies have revealed that a high level of customization aided by technology positively influences purchase intention. However, since fashion products are society-approved symbols, brand prestige and consumer propensity are expected to affect purchase behavior of customized products. This study aims to identify the purchase decision mechanism of customized products by identifying the relationships among self-expression, brand prestige, narcissistic disposition, and purchase intention. An online survey was conducted on 220 Korean women in their 20s and 30s with customization experience. The results of the data analysis showed that the affluent customization area and narcissistic disposition positively affected purchase intention. Surprisingly, when brand prestige was high and narcissistic disposition was low, the more affluent the customization area, the higher the purchase intention. However, for higher narcissistic disposition, no significant relationship was found between the customization area and purchase intention. This study provides insights into discriminatory customization strategies based on consumer propensity and the brand prestige level when providing customization services in fashion brands.

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## 1. Introduction

Customization defined as a method companies use to meet customers' individual needs in response to mass production. Customization has attracted considerable attention in that it is a consumer-led personalization service in which consumers directly participate in the production process to satisfy their personal needs (Kim & Lee, 2020; Goldsmith & Freiden, 2004; Yang & Lee, 2017). Pine, Victor, and Boynton (1993) argued that mass customization is a flexible business model that meets individual demand and enhances responsiveness to goods and services in terms of cost-effectiveness (Lee, Kunz, Fiore, & Campbell, 2002). Dewan, Jing, and Seidmann (2000) asserted that companies that adopted customization early were able to sell more products at higher prices, but that both the manufacturing and service industries faced challenges in providing consumers with a variety of customization products without increasing costs. As a result, early adopters became pioneers in customization and increased business competition.

In the fashion industry, demand for individual tailor-made clothing decreased with increased price competition from mass-produced ready-made clothing due to mass production efficiency, mass product quality stabilization, and branding strategies that instigated social symbolism (Park, 2012). However, consumers who are tired of uniform ready-to-wear clothing and want to have their own products by participating in the production process are still increasing (Wixcey, 2019). As fashion brands have entered the stagnant growth stage, they have attempted to gain new competitiveness by creating loyal customers through co-creation that induces consumer participation in the product planning stage and reflects their personal ideas. Consumers' wants and companies' needs are interlocked. Customers want to directly participate in the product production process and companies want to strengthen their competitiveness. Thus, customization services have begun to attract attention in various industries (Lee et al., 2002; Wixcey, 2019). Companies anticipate that customization will be a

flexible and promising business model to satisfy individual needs by increasing consumers' responsiveness to goods and services (Lee et al., 2002).

Customization services for fashion have been provided in various ways such as customized sizes, colors, and material (Ashdown & Loker, 2010; Dillon & Reif, 2004; Lee et al., 2002; Park, 2012; Park & Lee, 2005). Especially, the sneakers sector is the most active market for customized services in the fashion industry with a thick mania base and customized products that are more popular than customized clothing. For example, global shoe companies such as Nike, Fila, Adidas, Converse, and Vans provide customization services for their shoes and hats.

Through the development of production technology combined with information communication technology (ICT), customized products are relatively easy to produce by modifying the original products to meet consumers' individual needs (Peng, Liu, & Heim, 2011; Foster & Heeks, 2013; Gandhi, Magar, & Roberts, 2014). Recent developments of various technologies such as ICT, 3D body scanners, 3D CAD, 3D printing, and production technology like smart factories have also enabled companies to offer high-quality customization services to customers (Kim & Lee, 2020).

Beyond the strategy of satisfying consumers' individualized needs through customization services and promoting brand loyalty (Heizer & Render, 2011), companies can quantitatively analyze consumers' accumulated data. Through the customization process, customers' tastes are recorded, making it easy to identify consumers' hidden needs. The data can then be used for basic analysis to efficiently plan, develop, and produce new mass-produced products to meet the needs of the masses. Therefore, interest and expectations for customization are expected to accelerate in the future.

Research on customization has been conducted in relation to the psychological mechanism for purchasing customized products (e.g., Franke & Schreier, 2010; Franke, Schreier, & Kaiser, 2010; Kim & Lee, 2020), the level of customization services such as sales-configurators and toolkits (e.g., Trentin, Perin, & Forza, 2014), and

consumers' perceptions of customized products (e.g., Fuchs, Schreier, & Van Osselaer, 2015; Moreau, Bonney, & Herd, 2011). However, research on customization is insufficient, particularly from a consumer propensity perspective. More research is especially needed on millennial and Z generations who want to express their own personality and taste and have a high desire for their own products. In addition, the high level of technology-aided customization allows consumers to express themselves more than ever before. However, research on consumers' consumption behavior based on these factors has been sparse. Fashion brands that provide customization services have also diversified from mass brands to luxury brands, yet research on the relationship between consumption behavior and customization products has not been robust enough based on consumer-perceived brand prestige.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the relationship between the level of technology-aid customization, narcissistic disposition (high vs. low), brand prestige (luxury vs. no-brand), and customization product consumption behavior. In detail, this study was conducted to reveal the effect of the size of the customization area and narcissism disposition on the purchase intention of the customization product, and to identify the interaction effect between narcissism disposition and the customization area on the purchase intention. In addition, we reveal the three-way interaction effect of brand authority in the relationship between customization area, narcissistic tendency, and purchase intention of customization products.

This study suggests that fashion brands should set the level of customization services based on the brand prestige of the company. The results reveal that consumers do not purchase customized products just because the brand has excellent technology-aided customization. Based on these results, fashion brands should consider all factors when establishing customization strategies including the technology, brand prestige, and their target consumers' propensity.

## II. Literature Review

### 1. Customization with advanced technology in the fashion industry

Customization refers to a complex process in which an entity incorporates the unique needs and desires of individual consumers into the product (Piller, Moeslein, & Stotko, 2004). The most significant reason corporations offer customization services is to convey value beyond a mass-produced product through personalized products that reflect the consumer's preferences and tastes (Gandhi et al., 2014; Kumar & Stecke, 2007). They also aim to promote consumer loyalty through interaction between the corporation and the consumer (Heizer & Render, 2011). Two important factors in the success of customization should be voluntary customer involvement and modularization of the manufacturing process. Because customization includes customer participation, personalization of the manufactured products can be relatively easy through a well-modulated process in manufacturing (Pine, Peppers, & Rogers, 1995; Shin, Jeon, Lee, & Kang, 2012). When the manufacturing process is modularized well, consumers' ideas that reflect their preferences and tastes can be easily incorporated into the product by replacing a part of the module.

Many fashion companies have tried to offer customization services for clothes and shoes, but these services have sometimes failed to achieve much success because they could not overcome the disadvantages such as design transformation limitations and longer delivery time compared to mass-produced products (Lee et al., 2002; Park & Lee, 2005).

In the early stage of customization, comparatively simple customization was most often employed for men's suits with relatively standardized designs. For example, the fashion brands provided simple personalization services such as producing standardized-sized clothes for each body type, adjusting the length to suit each consumer's body size, attaching the desired buttons, and engraving the name on the sleeve when they placed their

orders.

These simple customization services have developed into personalized clothing services with the development of various technologies. For example, Jojo Suit from Japan entered the market with the unprecedented business model of making and wearing customized clothes instead of fitting the body to ready-to-wear sizes. Jojo Suit asked consumers to videotape their exact size by wearing a black full-body tight “stocking” marked with white dots with a mobile phone app and then they produced customized clothes based on the exact measurements. When this service was launched in the market, there was an expectation that the era of custom-made clothes that fit each individual body would soon come, and mass production would fade out. However, the business model to produce and sell individual customized clothes experienced uncomfortable consumer participation, which eventually failed. The failure may have been due to delivery delays and inaccurate size measurements, but the lack of demand and expectations for customized sizes of clothing were likely factors in the failure. Some consumers chose clothes that looked good to others rather than clothes that fit them perfectly. It may be that size accuracy is not of great importance when choosing clothes, especially for oversized clothes. In addition, each consumer’s sense of comfort when wearing clothes that fit their size perfectly may be recognized differently because it is an individual’s subjective evaluation.

Despite early failures, more consumers have become interested in customized products that only they own and that represent their own meaning and personality, especially millennials and generation Z. Thus, fashion corporations have paid more attention to customization services that differentiate their mass-produced products. In addition, providing customization services has become more technically possible with the advancement of technologies such as ICT information and communication technology, CAD, 3D printing, and 3D body scanners (Kim & Lee, 2020).

Platforms that allow customization services such as Zazzle and Marple allow consumers to make their own

products by printing the images they want or create on their personalized clothes. It seems like a very simple service, but the process of printing different images for each garment is very complicated. To print on clothes, fabric should be cut first, then the cut-out fabric must be printed, and then it is sewn. Since sewing factories and printing factories are often located far away, printing different images for each garment not only increases the production cost but also increases the production lead time. However, the development of digital textile printing (DTP) technology has made it possible for each consumer to print the desired image on finished clothes. In other words, fashion companies produce mass-produced clothes, and then consumers can purchase customized clothes by printing images with consumers’ unique meaning on the mass-produced clothes, making them the only one in the world. Through this process, fashion companies provide customization services using DTP technology. As the image is printed on the finished product, the printing area is also diversified. It can be printed not only on a visible area such as the front or back side of garments, but also on relatively invisible areas such as sleeves, seamlines, and necklines. (Lee, Kang, & Kang, 2016; Yoo & Park, 2017). As the areas of design that consumers can customize are diversified, the degree of freedom of designs also increases, enabling a higher level of customization. In this study, the diversified design area was used as an element of the development of customization technology, and it was named the customization area.

## 2. Self-expressive customization products

In modern society, people seek and purchase products that can distinguish them from the public (Kim & Kwon, 2017). When the product reflects their own desires, consumers have a connection with the product. (Belk, 1988). Customized and personalized products that reflect one’s tastes and preferences allow consumers to consciously or unconsciously express themselves so they can differentiate themselves from others (Grant, Straker,

Muller, & Wrigley, 2013). Consequently, consumers who own a customized product become aware of the extended self in the product (Kaiser, Schreier, & Janiszewski, 2017). As customization involves consumers' own labor in the process of adding their unique taste to the product, the consumers are more willing to pay a higher price than they would for mass products (Fuchs et al., 2015; Norton, Mochon, & Ariely, 2012). In addition, consumer satisfaction has been found to be higher when consumers combine several design elements themselves rather than simply manipulating the colors of part of the design or changing buttons, for example (Eun & Lee, 2006; Kamali & Loker, 2002; Yoo & Park, 2017). Consumers perceive that they have created something new by designing the item themselves and customizing the products (Kim & Lee, 2020). They also recognize that the customized products are their own creations since they are created based on their own choices without interference or control from others. The creators (consumers) gain experience integrating the object (customized product) created through their own creative process into their extended self (Belk & Coon, 1993; Schreier, 2006).

While participating in product production as a creator, purchase intention for the customized product increases through their internal awareness of self-expression, autonomy, and sense of achievement (Frank, Keinz, & Steger, 2009; Frank, et al., 2010; Trentin et al., 2014; Kim & Lee, 2020). Given that consumers can incorporate their own ideas in the design, the customization area becomes richer, and the creators will perceive that the area expresses themselves making it more affluent (i.e., more visible). As the degree of design freedom increases, consumers will perceive a high level of customization and manipulation. It can be assumed that with affluent customization areas, there are fewer limitations in expressing themselves as creators. In addition, as the level of customization and manipulation increases, consumer satisfaction and purchase intention increases, and the affluent customization area can positively influence purchase intention. Therefore, the following hypothesis was derived.

H1. The more affluent the customization area is, the higher the purchase intention of the customization product.

### 3. Narcissistic disposition and customized product

Narcissism explains personal tendencies and is defined as having a very positive self-concept about oneself as an exaggerated perception of self-worth (Brown & Zeigler-Hill, 2004; Cisek et al., 2014). Early psychoanalysis studies regarded narcissism as a pathological phenomenon, but today, it is viewed as a normal process to maintain self-representation. The characteristics of narcissists are self-absorption, vanity, grandiose expressionism, egotistical, self-aggrandizing, dominant, and those who are immersed in themselves and recognize themselves as superior to others with high self-esteem (Cisek, Sedikides, Hart, Godwin, Benson, & Liversedge, 2014; Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004).

The consumption behavior of people with a high narcissistic disposition has been found to be ostentatious: they prefer material products such as luxury brand name clothes, cars, and watches so they can express themselves excessively (Sedikides et al., 2011). Gregg and Sedikides (2010) asserted that this type of consumption behavior is because people with a higher narcissistic disposition focus on their inner selves rather than others, so the level of self-esteem constantly fluctuates compared to those with lower narcissistic disposition. Consequently, they want to escape from a state of low self-esteem and maintain a high level by possessing expensive watches, cars, and luxury fashion brand products with socially authorized symbols (Gregg & Sedikides, 2010). They also have a strong desire to show themselves off to others and distinguish themselves from others (Buss & Chiodo, 1991). They emphasize their appearance with luxury goods or products from boutique designer brands so they can express themselves as fashionable with high social status (Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, & Hart, 2007).

The higher the narcissistic disposition, the more amplified the motivation for self-expression to express

their positive selves (Choi, Lee, & Jang, 2013). Customized products are typically defined as self-expressive products that manifest oneself. Consumers believe that customized products represent themselves because they have participated in some of the designs of the products. As a result, consumers become more attached to customized products than to ordinary consumer goods. Kaiser et al. (2017) found that the use of self-expressive customization products that allows a long time to participate in a given task improves performance because carrying a customized product improves the user's confidence while doing a task.

People with a higher narcissistic disposition will be more willing to use customized products to perform their tasks to show off to others because they have a strong desire to flaunt their products in front of others, and they want others to admire them (Cisek et al., 2014). In addition, customized products that reflect one's tastes are consumed as a way to make themselves conspicuous in public (Grant et al., 2013). People with a higher narcissistic disposition tend to regard themselves as educated and cultured with sophisticated taste. Thus, customized products may be valuable as a signal to convey their sophisticated taste to others. Thus, it is expected that people with a high narcissistic disposition want to purchase customized products to meet their need to flaunt the products to others. From this perspective, the following hypothesis was derived.

H2. A narcissistic disposition will have a positive effect on the purchase intention of customized products.

If consumers have a high narcissistic disposition, the tendency to express themselves will be stronger. In addition, the meaning of the affluent customization area will increase their opportunities to express themselves. Therefore, a narcissistic disposition will moderate the relationship between the customization area and purchase intention of the customized product. From this perspective, the following hypothesis was derived.

H3. When the narcissistic disposition is higher, the more affluent the customization area, and the higher the purchase intention of the customization product.

#### **4. Consumer purchase behavior of customized products based on the customization area, narcissistic disposition, and brand prestige**

Brand prestige refers to the high status of a brand and is closely related to the following five values: perceived conspicuous value, perceived unique value based on scarcity, perceived social value, perceived hedonic value, and perceived high quality (Baek, Kim, & Yu, 2010; Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003; Truong, McColl, & Kitchen, 2009). When these five values are highly recognized in a brand, the brand prestige is high. In general, consumers perceive that the prestige of luxury brands is high (Dubois & Czellar, 2002; Grossman & Shapiro, 1988). The values representing brand prestige are also closely related to the dimensions of the value of luxury goods including high quality, ostentatious value, scarcity value, social value, hedonic value, tradition, and heritage (Dubois & Czellar, 2002; Christodoulides, Michaelidou, & Li, 2009; Vigneron & Johnson, 2004).

People with a high narcissistic disposition have a positive image of themselves and evaluate themselves as favorable. Narcissism affects consumption behavior, which is generally a propensity to consume luxury goods with material symbolism in society (Cunningham-Kim & Darke, 2011). A typical consumption characteristic of consumers with high narcissistic disposition is that they purchase products with high ostentation (Buss & Chiodo, 1991; Cisek et al., 2014). Narcissists selectively adopt brands to improve the impression others have of them, and they display their extraordinary individuality that differs from others (Cisek et al., 2014). Rather than focusing on the practical value when choosing a product, the symbolic value formed in society (e.g., ostentatious, fashionable) is an important factor (Cisek et al., 2014; Sedikides et al., 2007). Narcissists confirm their higher value through admiration from others rather than through bonded relationships that have been formed over an extended period or social approval such as respect and reputation (Cisek et al., 2014). Thus, scarce, unique, proprietary, and customizable products are sought and consumed (Cisek et al., 2014). Approved prestige brands

in society like luxury brands are adopted to make up for their own shortcomings and to ensure their value (Chang & Arkin, 2002).

In general, the high level of design manipulation for customizing has a positive effect on purchase intention and willingness to pay a higher price. Surprisingly, an inverted U-shape is revealed in the relationship between a high level of customization manipulation of luxury brands with prestige and purchase intention (Moreau, Prandelli, Schreier, & Hieke, 2020) due to the consumer's consumption tendency to wear a uniquely designed product as the brand prestige is higher. For luxury goods, simple design participation (e.g., engraving one's initials)—to the extent that it does not interfere with the unique design—enhances engagement and solidarity with the brand. The personalized product becomes an extension of the self, and the attachment to the product becomes greater (Moreau et al., 2020). However, since luxury brand designers with high brand prestige have much better design skills, consumers may believe that an original design of a luxury brand product in the design process may lose the value of the product.

People with a high narcissistic disposition want to show their superiority to others, so they want to buy products with high brand prestige to prove their own high prestige to others. If the customization area of products with high brand prestige is large, the brand value of high prestige may be destroyed through the consumer's non-professional customization. In contrast, based on the results of previous studies, ordinary consumers who choose to customize products want to purchase products that can be manipulated with a high level of customization. Thus, it is expected that brand prestige can affect the relationship between the customization area, narcissistic disposition, and purchase intention of customized products. From this perspective, the following hypothesis is derived.

H4. Brand prestige will moderate the relationship among the customization area, narcissistic disposition, and purchase intention of customized products.

### III. Materials & Methods

In this study, an online survey was conducted to identify how the influence of the customization area on purchase intention varies based on consumers' narcissistic disposition and brand prestige. The online survey was conducted through a professional survey company targeting female consumers who had experience purchasing customized products. Inclusion criteria also included women in their 20s and 30s living in metropolitan areas in South Korea. The survey group was divided into two brand-type products (luxury brand product vs. no brand product). We only surveyed female consumers since women are typically more interested in fashion and brands than men, tend to purchase more fashion products, and are highly involved in fashion (Cho & Workman, 2011; O' Cass, 2004). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two products before completing the survey.

The participants were first introduced to customizable products and descriptions of customization. They then responded to questions about the customization area, narcissistic disposition, brand prestige, purchase intention, and demographic characteristics. The photo stimuli used in this study were selected through expert verification of three experts by referring to product photos of brands with high recognition and performance. Products with high brand authority were selected as Gucci, and products with low brand authority were selected as non-brand products. Consumers assigned to either scenario were asked to select the part they would like to customize out of 11 areas, such as the front, sleeves, and back panel, and answer questions about the customization area. The customization area was measured with one item, "How much do you think the customization area is enough to express yourself?" (1: area scarcity -7: area richness). Nine items related to narcissistic disposition were adapted from Hendin and Cheek (1997), Hyun, Kim, and Hwang (2021), and Jang and Park (2020). Five items related to brand prestige were adapted from Baek et al. (2010), and three items related to purchase intention were adapted from Kim

and Lee (2020) (Table 2). In addition, demographic characteristics were collected from the participants, and participants responded to all items on a 7-point Likert scale.

The survey was conducted with 220 women in their 20s and 30s living in metropolitan cities in South Korea. After excluding insincere responses, 217 responses were used for analysis. Respondents were divided into two groups: 109 respondents for a luxury brand and 108 for no brand name. For the collected data, factor analysis, regression analysis, reliability analysis, chi-square analysis, two-way ANOVA, and three-way ANOVA were performed using SPSS 23.0. As a result of the chi-square analysis to confirm the characteristics and differences between the respondents according to the two questionnaire groups, there were no differences between the groups with respect to the respondents' gender, age, marital status, educational background, and average monthly household income. As for the age of the respondents, 108 (49.8%) were in their 20s and 109 (50.2%) were in their 30s. In terms of their marital

status, 158 (72.8%) were single and 59 (27.2%) were married. Detailed demographic characteristics are shown in Table 1.

#### IV. Results

Prior to hypothesis testing, the reliability of the measurement items presented in this study were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha values. The results of the reliability analysis showed that the Cronbach's alpha values of the variables (i.e., narcissistic disposition, brand prestige, and purchase intention) were all higher than 0.7, indicating high reliability (Table 2).

##### 1. The effects of the customization area and narcissistic disposition on purchase intention

To verify H1, a regression analysis was performed with the customization area as the independent variable and purchase intention as the dependent variable (Table 3).

The results showed that the customization area had a

**Table 1.** Sample description

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age			Education		
20s	108	49.8	Less than High school	10	6.0
30s	109	50.2	College student	30	13.8
Marital status			College degree	149	68.7
Single	158	72.8	Master's/Doctoral degree	25	11.5
Married	59	27.2	Monthly household income (Unit: 10,000 won)		
Occupation			Less than 200	20	9.2
Office work	112	51.6	More than 200-Less than 400	96	44.2
Management/Professional	34	15.7	More than 400-Less than 600	41	18.9
Student	29	13.4	More than 600-Less than 800	28	12.9
Service/Sales	17	7.8	More than 800-Less than 1,000	20	9.2
Housewife	11	5.1	More than 1,000	12	5.6
Functional	7	3.2			
Etc.	7	3.2			



**Table 2.** Results of exploratory factor analysis

Construct items	Standardized factor loading	Eigen value	Explained variance (%)	Cronbach's $\alpha$
<i>Narcissistic disposition</i>				
I like to be the center of people's attention.	0.732	6.913	40.66	.894
I think I am a special person.	0.679			
I want to be recognized as an authority by others.	0.732			
If there is an opportunity, it's good to boast about myself.	0.754			
I always know what I'm doing.	0.567			
Everyone likes to listen to my story	0.630			
People always seem to recognize my authority.	0.766			
I will become an extraordinary person in the future.	0.762			
I am more capable than others.	0.809			
<i>Brand prestige</i>				
This brand will have high brand authority.	0.875	2.922	17.19	.915
This brand will be in a high position among fashion brands.	0.899			
The brand will be socially recognized.	0.884			
Buying or using this branded product will make me feel proud.	0.786			
If I buy or use this brand's products, I think other people will think of me positively.	0.637			
<i>Purchase intention</i>				
I would buy this customized product if economic conditions permit.	0.851	1.534	9.02	.897
I am willing to purchase this customized product.	0.896			
When I buy a sweater in the future, I will consider customization service.	0.784			

**Table 3.** Regression analysis on purchase intention with customization area

Independent variable	B	Standard error	$\beta$	t	Prob.
Constant	4.455	.340		13.115	.000
Customization area	.184	.071	.258	2.600	.011

significant effect on purchase intention ( $t=2.600$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In other words, purchase intention increased as the customization area was perceived as affluently revealing the consumer, thus supporting H1.

To confirm H2, regression analysis was performed with narcissistic disposition as the independent variable and purchase intention as the dependent variable (Table 4). The results of the analysis showed that narcissistic

disposition had a significant effect on purchase intention ( $t=5.693$ ,  $p<.001$ ), thus supporting H2. This result indicated that the higher the narcissistic disposition, the higher the purchase intention for the customized product.

A two-way ANOVA was conducted with the customization area ( $Rich_{\text{custom}}$ ,  $Poor_{\text{custom}}$ ) and narcissistic disposition ( $High_{\text{Nar}}$ ,  $Low_{\text{Nar}}$ ) as the independent variables and purchase intention as the dependent variable to verify H3 (Table 5). The analysis showed that narcissistic disposition ( $F=26.509$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and customization area ( $F=4.274$ ,  $p<.05$ ) had a significant effect on purchase intention, respectively. However, the interaction effect of narcissistic disposition and the customization area on purchase intention was not significant ( $F=0.027$ ,  $p=.870$ ). The results indicate that the perception of the affluent customization area increased purchase intention, but the degree of influence did not differ based on the degree of narcissistic disposition. Thus, H3 was rejected. For consumers with a high narcissistic disposition, it was expected that the more the customization area is affluent, the higher the purchase intention. However, both consumers with a high narcissistic disposition and

consumers with a low narcissistic disposition showed higher purchase intention when the customization area was affluent, so the interaction effect was not significant.

## 2. The moderating effect of brand prestige

Verification of Hypotheses 1 and 2 indicated that the customization area and narcissistic disposition had a significant effect on purchase intention, but the interaction effect of the two variables in H3 was not significant. However, Hypothesis 4 predicted that this interaction effect would depend on brand prestige. Thus, we also tested Hypothesis 4.

A 3-way ANOVA analysis was performed with the customization area, narcissistic disposition, and brand prestige as independent variables and purchase intention as the dependent variable. The results are shown in (Table 6). The main effects of the customization area ( $F=8.782$ ,  $p<.05$ ), narcissistic disposition ( $F=7.721$ ,  $p<.001$ ), and brand prestige ( $F=32.871$ ,  $p<.001$ ) were all significant. In addition, the three-way interaction effect of the three variables was verified ( $F=5.117$ ,  $p<.05$ ). That

**Table 4.** Regression analysis on purchase intention with narcissistic disposition

Independent variable	B	Standard error	$\beta$	t	Prob.
Constant	2.858	.341		8.375	.000
Narcissistic disposition	.439	.077	.362	5.693	.000

**Table 5.** 2-way ANOVA on purchase intention

Independent variable	Type III SS	Df	F	Prob.
Constant	4472.300	1	3984.804	.000
Customization area	4.797	1	4.274	.040
Narcissistic disposition	29.752	1	26.509	.000
Customization area × Narcissistic disposition	.030	1	.027	.870

**Table 6.** 3-way ANOVA on purchase intention

Independent variable	Type III SS	Df	F	Prob.
Constant	3841.360	1	3984.804	.000
Customization area (A)	8.619	1	8.782	.040
Narcissistic disposition (B)	7.577	1	7.721	.000
Brand prestige (C)	32.259	1	32.871	.000
A × B	1.794	1	1.828	.178
A × C	4.698	1	4.787	.030
B × C	1.193	1	1.216	.271
A × B × C	5.022	1	5.117	.025

**Table 7.** Simple interaction effect of narcissistic disposition and customization area on purchase intention (High brand prestige)

Independent variable	Type III SS	Df	F	Prob.
Constant	1947.519	1	1812.918	.000
Customization area (A)	10.718	1	9.978	.040
Narcissistic disposition (B)	1.063	1	.989	.322
A × B	5.207	1	4.847	.030

is, as the brand prestige was high and low, the interaction effect of narcissistic disposition and customization area was different, thus supporting H4.

To examine the results of the three-way interaction in detail, we checked the simple interaction results for the high and low brand prestige groups. We found that when the brand prestige was high, the interaction effect of narcissistic disposition and the customization area was significant ( $F=4.847$ ,  $p<.05$ ) (Table 7, Figure 1 – Panel A). In other words, when consumers perceived that brand prestige was high, the affluent the customization area, the higher the purchase intention. In addition, the increase in purchase intention was larger when the consumer's narcissistic disposition was low ( $M_{low\ nar/high\ custom}=4.53$ ,  $M_{low\ nar/low\ custom}= 5.88$ ) than when the narcissistic disposition was high ( $M_{high\ nar/high\ custom}=5.33$ ,

$M_{high\ nar/low\ custom}= 5.57$ ). However, when the brand prestige was low, there was no interaction effect in narcissistic disposition and the customization area ( $F=0.558$ ,  $p=.457$ ) (Table 8, Figure 1 – Panel B). That is, when the brand prestige was low, there was no difference in the influence of the customization area on purchase intention based on a high narcissistic disposition ( $M_{high\ nar/high\ custom}=4.60$ ,  $M_{high\ nar/low\ custom}= 4.86$ ) and low narcissistic disposition ( $M_{low\ nar/high\ custom}=4.14$ ,  $M_{low\ nar/low\ custom}= 4.12$ ).

Hypothesis 3 was not supported because the interaction between the customization area and narcissistic disposition on purchase intention was not significant. However, the results confirmed that the interaction effect on purchase intention was different for the high and low brand prestige groups. In particular,

when the brand prestige was perceived as high, the interaction effect of the customization area and narcissistic disposition was verified. The more affluent the customization area, the higher the purchase intention, and this influence was greater when the narcissistic disposition was low than when the narcissistic disposition was high. For consumers with a high narcissistic disposition, there was no difference in purchase intention based on the customization area. It may be that consumers with a high narcissistic disposition want to purchase products with high brand prestige because they value the symbolic value (Cisek et al., 2011). However, since they are also trying to increase their own value by using the prestige of a socially recognized brand (Chang

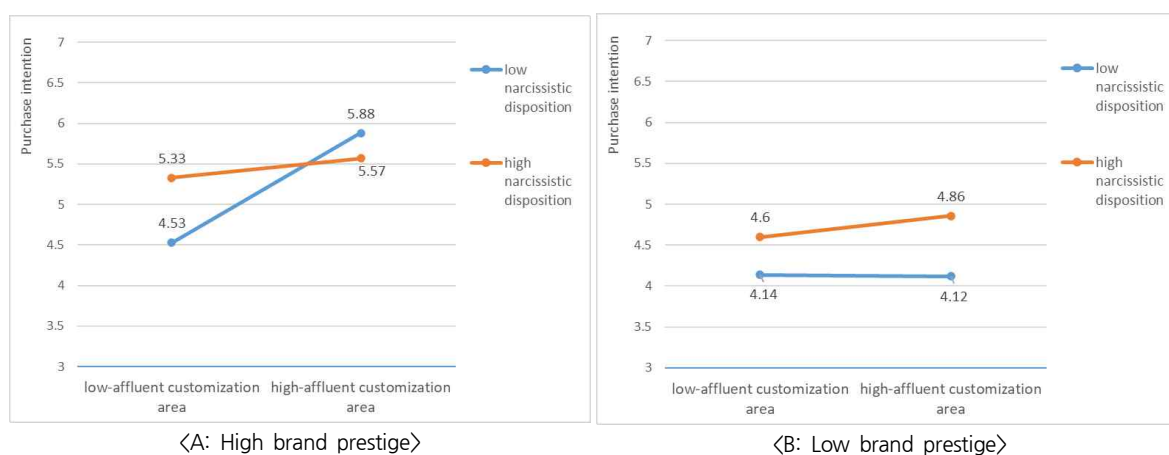
& Arkin, 2002), an affluent customization area that can damage the unique design of a high-end brand may not significantly increase purchase intention. On the other hand, when the brand prestige was perceived as low, the interaction effect of a narcissistic disposition and customization area was not significant.

## V. Discussion

Companies have paid increasing attention to how to provide products or services that satisfy the needs of individual customers. In particular, as mass customization becomes increasingly important for consumer (Gandhi et al., 2014), many fashion companies are using mass

**Table 8.** Simple interaction effect of narcissistic disposition and customization area on purchase intention (Low brand prestige)

Independent variable	Type III SS	Df	F	Prob.
Constant	1595.567	1	2174.570	.000
Customization area (A)	.365	1	.405	.526
Narcissistic disposition (B)	9.140	1	10.143	.002
A × B	.503	1	.558	.457



**Figure 1.** Interaction effects of narcissistic disposition and customization area on purchase intention by brand prestige

customization as a strategy to meet consumers' future needs. Driven by this trend, consumer demand has increased for various mass customization services. Thus, fashion companies are providing services that allow consumers to customize their products to the desired shape and size. In this study, we expected that this customization area would affect consumers' responses and purchase intention. This response was also expected to be affected by consumer orientation such as their narcissistic disposition or the brand characteristics. Because highly narcissistic consumers tend to seek and consume rare, unique, exclusive, and customizable products (Cisek et al., 2014), customized products could be used to attract attention so others will admire the wearer through their expression of taste (Grant et al., 2013; Cisek et al., 2014). In addition, consumers could use brand prestige to increase their own value (Chang & Arkin, 2002). However, few previous studies have examined the relationship between these factors. Therefore, this study explored how the influence of the customization area on purchase intention varies based on consumers' narcissistic disposition and on brand prestige. The main results of this study are as follows.

First, the results showed that both the customization area and narcissistic disposition had a significant effect on purchase intention for customized products. The more the customization area was perceived as affluent and the stronger the narcissistic tendency, the higher the purchase intention for the customized product. Second, the interaction effect was not significant for narcissistic disposition and the customization area on purchase intention. In other words, the more affluent the customization area, the higher the purchase intention, but there was no difference in influence based on whether the narcissistic disposition was high or low. Third, the three-way interaction was significant for the three variables of the customization area, narcissistic disposition, and brand prestige on purchase intention, confirming that the interaction effect of the customization area and narcissistic disposition on purchase intention differs based on brand prestige.

## 1. Theoretical Implications

This study has the following important academic significance. First, existing studies on customization have mainly investigated how customization services or products affect consumers' purchase journey (e.g., purchase motives, perception of customized products). This study has academic significance in that it expands existing studies by examining the relationship between customization-aided technology and consumption behavior. We verified these relationships by revealing two moderating variables: brand prestige and narcissistic disposition. The results showed that the perception of the customization area has a significant effect on consumers' purchase intention of customized goods. Given the increased consumer interest in customization, the results of this study can provide a basis for future research on fashion product customization.

Second, this study identified psychological mechanisms related to narcissism and brand prestige in fashion customization product consumption. The results provide theoretical insights on consumers' narcissistic disposition and customization. Previous studies on narcissism have shown that consumers with high narcissistic disposition choose more prestige products (Cunningham-Kim & Darke, 2011) and prefer to consume and display trendy brand products publicly rather than privately (Pilch & Gornik-Durose, 2011). Therefore, in this study, higher narcissistic consumers were expected to express egocentric images through the customization area. The analysis results indicated that although the influence of the customization area on purchase intention did not change based on the degree of narcissistic disposition, we found interesting results when the relationship with brand prestige was also considered. Consumers with a higher narcissistic disposition had higher purchase intention when the customization area was affluent regardless of the brand prestige, but consumers with a low narcissistic disposition showed a considerable difference in the influence of the customization area on purchase intention based on brand prestige. In particular, consumers with low narcissistic disposition had a higher purchase

intention when the brand prestige was high and the customization area was affluent.

Third, studies on narcissism have mainly been conducted in relation to consumption of trendy or symbolic products such as luxury goods and designer products (Sedikides et al., 2007), but this study has expanded the academic field to fashion-related experiential products. Consumer interest in experiential products and material goods has increased. Thus, the results of this study are significant in that they provide evidence that can be used for future research related to customization.

## 2. Managerial Implications

This study has the following practical significance. First, fashion customization has emerged as a hot topic, and the fashion industry, fashion companies, and brands are using customization as a part of their business model to satisfy consumers' needs. The results of this study confirmed that purchase intention for customized products varies based on the brand prestige, narcissistic disposition, and customization areas. These results suggest that fashion companies need to devise a customization method that reflects various consumers' needs by deeply understanding consumers' characteristics and desires. Companies can drive more consumer purchasing behaviors and decisions if they meet the needs of diverse consumer groups through segmented services. Second, the results of this study showed that for brands with high brand prestige (e.g., luxury brands), the impact of the customization area on purchase intention varies based on the narcissistic disposition of the consumer. Consumers with a high narcissistic disposition had greater purchase intention for products from fashion brands with high brand prestige (Gregg & Sedikides, 2010; Cisek et al., 2014), but the customization area did not affect the purchase intention. However, when the narcissistic disposition of consumers was low, the more affluent the customization area, the higher the purchase intention. This result supports the results of Kaiser et al. (2017) indicating that using customized products promoted

confidence and participants did a better job performing the task. Our results also showed a considerable difference in consumers' purchase intention or consumer propensity for luxury brands based on the customization area compared to general brands. Thus, it is necessary to set up customization services more precisely and provide services so consumers can combine design elements in various and convenient ways. Fashion companies need to recognize that consumers have different expectations of the customization when they consider customized products based on their self-expression tendency such as narcissistic disposition. This result implies that companies should recommend customized products based on consumers' propensity. Third, a fashion company will need to establish a marketing strategy so consumers can participate in the company's customization service on their own. Companies are gradually introducing customization services, but it is only activated when consumers elect to participate in the service. Customized products can be regarded as both material and experiential products because consumers can have a unique experience designing each type of product. Consumer engagement and experience can ultimately strengthen the relationship between brands and consumers, so experiential marketing needs to be strengthened. Fourth, from the perspective that customization is the future of consumer goods (Gandhi et al., 2014), fashion companies need to establish a customization services system. Customization services need to be convenient so consumers can easily access the service through various platforms. In addition, as the number of consumers wanting customized services increases, a supply chain that is capable of small-volume production and immediate production will become more necessary. Thus, practitioners need to think carefully about the direction of supply chain management, inventory management, and planning.

## 3. limitation

There are several limitations and suggestions for future studies. First, since this study was conducted on women,

the results are limited in explaining the consumption patterns of both men and women. The study was conducted on women not only because women are typically more interested in brands than men and participate in fashion purchases more than men (Cho & Workman, 2011; O' Cass, 2004), but also because the products used as stimuli were women's products. Future research should consider both men's and women's customization consumption and purchase intention. Second, in this study, the stimulus for customization was knitwear, which does not represent all customized products. Since there are many fashion product categories (e.g., shoes, bags), it would be meaningful to conduct a follow-up study on consumer behavior related to customization of other items. Third, the respondents were asked to customize the photo stimuli presented in the questionnaire. Since respondents may not be used to customizing the brands and designs presented in this study, it will be meaningful to look at consumer responses when customizing their preferred brands and designs in the future. Fourth, in this study, narcissism was described as a single dimension, but it has also been used in research as a multidimensional construct (Ackerman, Witt, Donnellan, & Trzesniewski, 2011). Therefore, future research should examine narcissism as a multidimensional concept to provide deeper insights. Fifth, H3 predicted that the more affluent the customization area, the higher the purchase intention for the customized product when narcissistic disposition is high. However, the hypothesis was rejected. When narcissism was high, the purchase intention increased as the customization area increased, but it was not significantly higher than the low narcissism group. These results may be characteristic of women their 20s and 30s who participated in the survey. Therefore, it would be meaningful to verify the differences based on narcissism with other generations.

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