



South Korean female apparel market segments based on store attributes

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Abstract

This research explores the aspect of the interface between store and shopper. The following variables were investigated as functions of apparel shopping orientations: (a) store attributes, (b) apparel purchase influences, (c) personal characteristics, and (d) life-style characteristics. A multidimensional approach was used on a sample of 273 female consumers in four urban South Korean markets to test relevant hypotheses. By cluster analysis of store attributes, three shopper groups were identified. Further, results showed these groups to be unique in purchase decision-making characteristics. Implications for penetrating the South Korean apparel market and suggestions for further research are discussed. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

As retail concepts and markets become saturated in most industrialized economies, retailers are venturing beyond their home base for new growth opportunities as a means of increasing revenues (Alexander, 1997; Particelli, 1990). Since the early 1990s, government deregulation and general lowering of barriers to doing business have in large part sparked the globalization trends sweeping across the continents (National Retail Federation, 1998; Sternquist, 1998). Yet, expansion into international operations can be fraught with significant risks.

One area of challenge relevant to international expansion is market orientation. Developing appropriate shopping formats to meet the needs of local consumers is paramount to success in foreign markets as in domestic operations (Alexander, 1997; Sternquist, 1998). Most retailers now undertake extensive market research before entering a new country (Martin, 1997). On the consumer side, merchandise selection and presentation, store layout, and customer service levels are areas that need to be adapted to individual markets (National Retail Federation, 1998). In this context, truly universal fashion-oriented products are few and far between (DeLong et al., 1998).

Apparel marketers of the next millennium must develop a comprehensive and integrated marketing program that can establish a viable position within the competitive global environment (Dickerson, 1995). The most successful apparel retailers will embrace marketing strategy that can customize the merchandise mix at each store location to meet different levels of demand. The cornerstone in establishing such a position is the efficacy of the segmentation process (National Retail Federation, 1998). That is, segments must be selected that are not only profitable, but are based on characteristics that are comprehensive, well understood, and stable (Alexander, 1997; Sternquist, 1998).

It is not uncommon for apparel designed in one culture to be marketed and used across cultures (DeLong et al., 1998). A defining characteristic of South Korean culture for the past 30 years has been rapid and pervasive change. This change has been called modernization, sometimes westernization (Jacobs, 1985). Modernization has brought the pursuit of a western ideal to many areas of life in South Korea, one of which is dress (Park et al., 1993).

Worldwide, economic development has increased demand for Western Hemisphere products. With some exceptions in more rural areas, South Korean women wear Western-style apparel for everyday wear (Geum and DeLong, 1992). Along with a strong preference for Western-style apparel (DeLong et al., 1998) and

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as the world's 14th largest economy, South Korea offers potential opportunities to fashion-oriented textile and apparel manufacturers and retailers considering entering into or expanding international ventures (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 1997).

This study explores the aspect of the interface between store and shopper with South Korean female apparel shoppers. The following variables were investigated as functions of shopping orientations: (a) store attributes, (b) apparel purchase criteria (i.e., preference of store type for apparel purchases, money expenditure on apparel products, apparel purchase influences), (c) personal characteristics (i.e., marital status, family income, family size, city of residence, education, and age), and (d) life-style characteristics.

2. Conceptual development

Numerous articles have been directed toward identifying shopping behaviors. Researchers have suggested that shopping is a multidimensional economic, social, and psychological phenomenon that involves the nature of the product, degree of perceived risk inherent in the product class, searching among the offerings of several retailers, level of knowledge or amount of information about alternatives, information acquisition and problem solving, and function of location, product assortment, and store image (Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1992a). Based on these studies, it has been concluded that shopping can be organized for study in terms of determinants and effects. One approach is to describe consumers based on the presence or absence of specific orientations toward shopping (Engel et al., 1995).

In South Korea, the importance of market segmentation has been addressed by marketers and researchers (Hafstrom et al., 1992; Morris and Hallaq, 1994; Walsh, 1996), yet most studies have focused on general life-style patterns (Cho, 1995; Sohn, 1997) and specific apparel items (Cho, 1994; DeLong et al., 1998; Kim, 1995; Lee and Burns, 1993) as opposed to comprehensive apparel-oriented shopping factors. Thus, additional in-depth consumer research is fertile ground to assist in developing more detailed localized strategies for defining and reaching key South Korean female apparel market segments.

2.1. Shopping orientations

Research studies have addressed a melange of shopping orientations or typologies (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Bellenger et al., 1977; Moschis, 1976; Stephenson and Willett, 1969; Stone, 1954). As a result, a number of consumer retail store choice models have been advanced to explain the patronage process within the economic environment (Bellenger and Moschis, 1982;

Dawson et al., 1990; Laaksonen, 1993; Mason et al., 1983; Spiggle and Sewall, 1987). In these models, the dependent variable, store choice, is modeled as a function of the importance and perception of store attributes, store attitudes, general shopping patterns, buyer demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, situational influences, and retailer/marketing strategies. A common element among these models is that store choice is explained by the saliency attached to each store attribute (Arnold et al., 1996). In the multi-attribute store choice process model proposed by Darden (1980), shopping orientations are viewed as key constructs in store patronage and hypothesized to determine in large measure the salient store attributes, which, in turn, impact patronage behavior of the consumer.

Shopping orientations were first conceptualized by Stone (1954). Consumers were classified into four types of shoppers: economic, personalizing, ethical, and apathetic. Stephenson and Willett (1969) developed a four-way shopper typology for six product categories. Consumers were classified into store-loyal, compulsive and recreational, convenience, and price-bargain shoppers based on shopping processes. Darden and Reynolds (1971) expanded the typologies by identifying life-style profiles. Shopping orientations were further examined in relation to product usage, consumer information usage, in-home and out shopping, life-style and self-concept, store patronage, and socialization effects of work experiences (Darden and Howell, 1987; Lumpkin et al., 1986; Moschis, 1976). Additionally, some researchers focused on profiling characteristics of a particular shopper style rather than grouping consumers (Bellenger and Korgaonkar, 1980; Bellenger et al., 1977; Korgaonkar, 1981). The consensus is that to maximize consumer satisfaction and retail sales, retailers must understand consumers' shopping orientations that are unique in shopping attributes and patronage behavior (Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1993).

The effect of store attributes on consumer decision-making has spawned interest in the area of apparel shopping. Previous investigations reveal that apparel shopping is a multidimensional construct (Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1992b). Shopping orientation has been demonstrated to be a predictor to segment consumers into different consumer groups based on critic shopping style (Shim and Kotsiopoulos, 1992a). Apparel shopping behavior has been related to the consumer's evaluation of store attributes, preference for a specific retail outlet, and selection of the general retail format (Shim and Drake, 1990).

2.2. South Korean market

A large percentage (72.1%) of the South Korean population live in urban areas. Therefore, the market for most consumer products is concentrated in six major cities (Settle-Murphy, 1994). Approximately one-fourth (9,639,

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