The Effects of Environment-conscious Consumer Attitudes towards Eco-friendly Product and Artificial Leather Fashion Product Purchase Intentions

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Abstract: This research examines the environmental consciousness of fashion consumer attitudes towards eco-friendly products and artificial leather purchase intentions. The survey was conducted from March 11 to March 15 2012 and all respondents had at least once experience of purchasing fashion items made of artificial leather. A total of 426 subjects were used in the dataset; the statistical analysis methods were frequency analysis, factor analysis, reliability analysis and multiple analysis. The results are as follows. The study finds that environmental consciousness has three dimensions of public participation, resource conservation, and recycling. Public participation, recycling, and resource conservation influenced eco-friendly product attitudes. Eco-friendly product attitudes influenced artificial leather purchase intentions. The research results show that appropriate plans in fashion business such as usefulness of design and business value will need to be provided to fashion consumers. Detailed information on materials related to fashion products as the content of environment-friendly techniques and recycling methods will help consumers to evaluate environmental-friendly attitude products.

Key words: environmental consciousness, eco-friendly product attitudes, consumer environmental concern, artificial leather fashion purchase intentions

I. Introduction

Pollution, climate changes, and natural disasters have changed 21\textsuperscript{st} century consumption tendencies towards eco-friendly attitudes; subsequently, many companies have made significant efforts towards the development of eco-friendly products and marketing strategies in order to find new opportunities. Increased consumer interest in environmental problems has changed consumer consciousness, lifestyles and behavioral patterns(Park & Oh, 2005). Government and corporations seek to offer environmental solutions to the enforcement of environmental regulations. There are now stricter regulations and heightened consumer consciousness over the environment; subsequently, the importance of eco-friendly management of global corporations has increased.

Many countries have established eco-friendly development, manufacturing, and supply policies to meet the demands of global markets. For example, the OECD chose environmentally friendly government procurement policies through direct recommendation, and the US and Japan made it mandatory to purchase eco-friendly products and services through the Green Consumption Act(Korea Fashion Association, 2012).

Corporations wish to harness new economic growth trends based on the development of environmentally friendly fashion products and marketing methods for those products. Public awareness research on eco-friendly products by the Ministry of Environment and the Government Information Agency showed that 59.7% of Koreans are interested in such products and 73% of them wish to purchase them even if the price of these items is higher than regular prices. The results indicate that consumer eco-consciousness is increasing(Korea Development Institute, 2009).

The product preference which reflects consumer needs has grown with high-level sensibility as well as value consumption through product information. There is increased public interest in artificial leather fashion products as environmentally friendly and sustainable goods due to the desire to protect nature and animals. There are various kinds of fashion items included these market-tendencies as shown through constant product development and new merchandising strategies. Corporations and consumers are especially interested in artificial leather fashion products as shown through ongoing eco-consciousness studies.

This study examined how eco-friendly consciousness and fashion consumer attitudes influence purchase intentions as well as investigated moderating effects between consciousness and purchase intentions. We examine consumer purchasing patterns and provide information on the establishment of new marketing strategies and the development of artificial leather fashion items.

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2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Environment Conscious Attitude of Consumers

It is important for consumers to evolve lifestyle and behavioral patterns in order to resolve environmental problems; subsequently, an increased consumer eco-consciousness results in a more positive attitude towards eco-conscious activities (Lee, 2003). Eco-consciousness means that a consumer is more cognizant about environmental problems and follows a more environmentally friendly lifestyle that results in mitigated environmental problems in the purchase, use, or disposal of goods (Ahn & Park, 1998). This reduction in waste also entails reduced energy consumption to help preserve the natural environment. These behavioral patterns produce positive results in the preservation of nature through a lifestyle that is harmonized with nature and are considered behavior that improves the quality of life in consumers (Min & Rhee, 1999; Cha, 2000).

Eco-conscious behavior is an environmentally friendly consumption philosophy that recognizes the importance of the relationship between society and the environment as well as considers individual desires and the well-being of society as a whole. These behavioral patterns arise throughout the purchase of, use and disposal of goods (Park & Rhee, 1995). Recycling is found to be closely related to pro-social behavior such as altruism and social contribution (Hopper & Nielsen, 1991). A study by Park and Oh (2005) suggests that eco-conscious behavior is categorized as resource conservation, public awareness, environmental preservation and recycling consciousness with significant effects on apparel recycling attitude and behavior. Park and Rhee (1995) argued that eco-conscious behavior was positively affected by the influence of reference groups, environmental interest, consumer efficiency, public awareness, income level, consumer awareness, and exposure to environmental education.

Kim (1995) studies on eco-conscious consumer behavior and clothing purchasing type showed that there were purchase behavior differences between high eco-consciousness and low eco-consciousness groups and that the high eco-consciousness group was more active in recycling clothes. A study by Shin (1995) on recycling tendencies in the case of clothes disposal found that females recycled more clothing than males. Continuous research and study on eco-conscious behavior helps to understand consumer behavior and emphasizes it as the most important artificial leather fashion item purchasing behavior variable; therefore, previous studies searched for eco-conscious behavior, resource conservation, and recycling consciousness.

2.2. Attitude on Environmentally Friendly Products

An environmentally friendly product attitude occurs when consumers assume an environmentally friendly position in their individual and social lives. The ultimate purpose of purchasing is for consumers to satisfy their wants and needs. In this context, an environmentally friendly product attitude results in the purchase of environmentally friendly goods (Sung, 2005). It is also a belief that people maintain constructive thoughts towards environmental problems and preservation (Lee, 1999). The environmental attitude of consumers is a collective concept that embraces all consumer awareness towards environmental problems as expressed in terms such as environmental consciousness, environmental interest and environment preservation attitude (Won, 2003; Park, 2012).

Studies on attitudes towards environmentally friendly products have mainly focused on the characteristics of eco-friendly consumers (Lee et al., 2002; Park & Lee, 1995) and eco-friendly consumers are defined as those who conduct purchasing activities based on a consideration of the benefits provided to society and the environment. Consumers have significant interest in environmental problems and eco-friendly consumers have begun to emerge as a new consumer group in the market. Environmentally friendly consumers are sensitive towards and consider environmental effects when they purchase products; in addition, they alter purchasing and using patterns based upon environmental preservation (Hong et al., 2010). Advanced research on eco-friendly customer attitudes compares the differences of environmentally friendly consumers and non-environmentally friendly consumers based on population statistical variables and eco-friendly variables (Yun & Yang, 2009). Individual personality shows more environmental interest than the socioeconomic factors found in the research by Park and Suh (1998).

Individual personality emphasizes segmented customer character variables as well as demographic characteristics to show that they would positively and consciously participate in environment-oriented behavior, education, and practices towards the environment.

Research by Balderjahn (1988) shows that customers who have an increased interest and positive attitude towards the environment become personally active in their involvement energy conservation and eco-friendly purchasing. Jung (2009) also analyzed the purchasing activity of environmentally-friendly fashion that followed environmentally-friendly attitudes and segmented attitudes into an interest in environmental friendly attitudes, environmental activity participation level and the level of environmental friendly product consumption. Min and Rhee (1999) examined environmentally friendly consumption attitudes at the social-oriented level and individual-oriented level; they claimed that direct individual benefits are more influential than social concerns to promote the activity. He showed that there were more cases of consumer expression in their