

## Color Assortment Decision Factors Considered by Women's Clothing Merchandisers in Korea & United States

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### Abstract

This research was designed to find decision factors through color assortment planning process by Korean women's clothing merchandisers and to look for if there exists difference with American women's clothing merchandisers. A merchandise assortment is a collection of various quantities of styles, colors, sizes, and prices of related merchandise, usually grouped under one classification within a department. The subjects were 20 women's clothing merchandisers who work for clothing retail stores from 5 to 22 years in US and Korea. The authoring process was done for qualitative data analysis. The decision factors of color assortment planning were identified with four stages; information search, qualitative evaluation, quantitative evaluation, and selection. There were differences of color assortment decision factors due to different business types, business sizes, fashion-ability, sourcing ways, and merchandise turnover. Noticeable color assortment decision factor differences caused by country difference were not found except considering the target market ethnicity and skin color in US market. Korea merchandisers seem to be more sensitive to present sales data usages and spot order availability in color assortments because of more local production use than American merchandisers.

**Key Words** : color assortment, decision factors, clothing merchandising

### I. Introduction

There were many researches related with overall merchandising processes of clothing products. On the other hand, there exist few researches of microscopic view to merchandising activities, for example assortment planning because most merchandisers do not want to tell about their work in details. Even though there is a detailed case study about merchandising process, it usually displays

one company's case and has a limit of generalization. Women's clothing merchandisers have a thirst for better techniques or tactics for assortment planning to reduce overstock and to reduce planning complexity caused by season-ability, fashion trend, and assortment variety. For forecasting consumer demand of color assortments, women's clothing retail buyers have difficulties in implementing the resulting data to actual production order because making quantitative order

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decisions from qualitative data (e.g., color trend book) requires complex analysis process. Women's clothing retail buyers have searched but could not find appropriate techniques or methods for color assortment planning to solve above complexities. To make more accurate color assortment plan, the process of color assortment-planning should be organized and checked with an organized format. This research was designed to find color assortment decision factors through assortment planning process done by South Korea women's clothing merchandisers first and then look for if there existed difference with US women's clothing merchandisers. The objectives of study is illustrated as follows: (a) to find color assortment decision factors through assortment planning process done by women's clothing retail merchandisers in South Korea and US. ; (b) to find the influence of buying and manufacturing involvement to color assortment decision factors; (c) to see the influence of business types to color assortment decision factors; (d) to see the influence of country difference of US and South Korea to color assortment decision factors.

## II. Literature Review

### 1. Merchandiser's Role

A retail merchandiser's job includes the following: (a) planning policies, (b) buying, (c) budgeting, (d) planning model stock, (e) contacting vendors, and (f) planning promotion<sup>1)</sup>. The most important part of a retail merchandiser's role in a retail company is satisfying company objectives by making accurate and timely decisions of merchandise plans, because decisions related to the acquisition of merchandise are critical to the profit potential of a retail company. Retail merchandisers forecast and select merchandise that customers want or

need (i.e., the right styles, size range, color assortment, fabrics) all at acceptable prices from vendors<sup>2)</sup>. In Korea, merchandisers' activities include analysis of fashion and market trend, merchandising concept development, planning assortment, production or delivery management, color assortment decision, fabrication, line adoption, pricing, line preview, and sourcing management.<sup>3)</sup> Fiorito and Fairhurst (1989) found that the most difficult job elements of a women's clothing retail buyer are (a) analyzing information for color perception, (b) estimating size, and (c) controlling inventory.<sup>4)</sup> They found that the decision-making process is the most frequently used mental process in job content of a clothing retail buyer.

### 2. Assortment Planning

A merchandise assortment is a collection of various quantities of styles, colors, sizes, and prices of related merchandise, usually grouped under one classification within a department<sup>5)</sup>. The assortment plan has different names: buying plan<sup>6)</sup>, product mix arrangement<sup>7)</sup>, model stock plan<sup>8)</sup>, and line planning<sup>9)</sup>. The words illustrate the factors of type, quantity, size, and price of merchandise that a retail buyer expects to purchase within a specific period of time.

Frings (1994) suggested that the clothing buying planning process, in terms of analyzing sales histories and developing a merchandising plan, had two aspects: an analytical aspect and a creative aspect. The creative side is the ability to understand qualitative aspects of product like color preference of customers to choose merchandise with terrific sell-through. The analytical side is the ability to evaluate merchandise and judge whether the selected products and the quantity of the products are suitable for their target customer. These activities were sorted into two aspects of

assortment planning: unit plans and dollar plans<sup>10)</sup>. The unit plan requires the analytical ability and refers most often to qualitative decisions or types of merchandise bought. A dollar plan is the quantitative result of the assortment planning or volume of merchandise bought and requires creative ability from clothing retail buyers. Kang and Kincade(2004) interviewed US women's clothing buyers to develop assortment planning process model, and the assortment planning process was determined at abstract level as follows: (a) recognize problem, (b) search for information, (c) evaluate qualitative value of product, (d) evaluate quantitative value of product, (e) plan product selection, and (f) plan sales<sup>11)</sup>.

### 3. Color Assortment Planning

Frings (1994) indicated that color forecasters in clothing companies often rely on color information provided by color and design services, trade associations, or fiber companies. Stark and Johnson-Carroll (1994) investigated clothing manufacturer's most important information sources on color selection: (a) tradition, (b) last season's sales, (c) age of consumer market, (d) street fashion, (e) clothing collection shows, (f) product function, (g) geographical area of market, (h) fashion magazines, and (i) trade publications.<sup>12)</sup>

Fiorito (1990) described that color was one of the most important predictors of clothing retail buyers' evaluation criteria.<sup>13)</sup> According to Stark and Johnson-Carroll (1994), "Choice of colors is a major decision for those in the sewn products industry. The selection of colors, while not scientific, certainly is not completely intuitive for designers and manufacturers." Within the product line, each group is usually formulated around a color plan consisting of as few as two colors or as many as 100 colors. Clothing retail buyers usually select some trend colors and combine them with

their own color choices (*e.g.*, never-out-colors: black, white). Retail buyers also select colors that manufacturers provide for individual garments based on the retail buyers' store circumstance. In a study of retail buyers' color choices, researchers found that most clothing manufacturers perceived only six months as life-cycle of trend colors and use that amount of lead time to initiate colors (Stark & Johnson-Carroll, 1994).

After selection of a color line, retail buyers have to decide quantities or importance for each color. For quantitative forecasting of color demand for the product, retail buyers may use last season's sale and a color counting process (*i.e.*, counting a certain color frequency among color information sources). Empirical research regarding quantitative color forecasting techniques or methods is not available. The color quantitative evaluation is assumed to be more relevant to forecasting of sales for unit control. At the early stage of the sales forecasting, most clothing retail buyers develop a total sales forecast in a merchandise plan and layout the amount of inventory required to generate that amount of sales.

There could be differences of business decision making processes between Korea fashion retailing and US retailing with many reasons. Korea fashion people pinpoint that the major difference is caused by a consignment sales system in Korea retailing. Most of fashion apparel manufacturers have to be retailer also because department stores and discount stores don't have a buying and merchandising system<sup>14)</sup>. Recently major retail stores become having private brands and buying system for store differentiation.

### III. Methodology

#### 1. Research Subjects

To select the sample for the interviews, this study used a judgment sampling technique that was a non-probability sampling technique. In the judgment sample, a researcher selects the sample based upon judgment criteria. The judgment sampling criteria was selected as follows: (a) product type, (b) company type, (c) company size and location, (d) subject's responsibility in assortment planning, and (e) subject's job experience. Regarding product type, Women's dresses were considered as a fashion-sensitive item regarding design, color, and fabric. Regarding company type, The company type for which subjects work was selected as the company selling women's wear. The first contacted merchandisers was worked in Seoul Korea and Kentucky, Maryland, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia in East side of US. The interview volunteers' companies were placed in Seoul Korea, and Pennsylvania, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Virginia in US. The job experience criteria determined more than three years working experience in women's wear merchandising. Interviewees has working experience from three years to twenty-two years. Interviewees were 10 women's clothing merchandisers in South Korea and 10 women's clothing buyers in US who work for department stores and specialty stores. The company size of interviewees varied from small local companies with annual gross sales of 2.0 million dollars to big national companies with gross sales of 501.0 million dollars. The fashion-ability was identified by interviewees and varied from high, medium, and low. Three interviewees, 2 American and 1 Korean were male merchandisers. The US merchandisers' signed the Informed

Consent for Institutional Review Board. Each subject was interviewed for 80 minutes in his/her office.

#### 2. Data Collection

This study used same exploratory research methodology used by Kang and Kincade(2004) in their research for developing an assortment planning process model for clothing retail buyers. Kang and Kincade (2004) adopted a qualitative research methodology framework used by several researchers in developing theory for the textile and clothing literature (Regan, Kincade, and Sheldon, 1998; Scheller & Kunz, 1998)<sup>15</sup>. Before interviewing merchandisers, a conceptual color assortment-planning model was developed by secondary data analysis collected from text books, journal articles, and trade publications. An interview scenario was developed to guide interview direction based on the conceptual model. The interview scenario validated by pilot interview and Q-sorting technique using activity cards controlled the direction and consistency of the interview. The activity card contains a name of activity in the center box and blank lines for order identification of a functional activity. Interviewees asked for ordering the activity card to illustrate their assortment planning processes. After ordering the cards, interviewees were asked to describe decision factors of the each activity. Interview records were transcribed as text, and activity cards were clustered to show practically used assortment planning process.

#### 3. Data Analysis

The authoring process for qualitative data analysis of this research was as follows: (a) transcribe data to a text without any conversion; (b) categorize data with research variables; (c)

de-contextualize data; (d) code and count data; and (e) re-contextualize data with research variables. The research variables are color assortment decision factors through assortment planning process stages, information search, qualitative evaluation, quantitative evaluation, color selection. The decision factors were identified as inputs through the stages and categorized by manufacturing or buying involvements. The business types were identified with label varieties in store, merchandising concepts, fashion-ability, and business size.

The transcription of each interview was summarized into a table tagged by research variables, functional activities of the assortment planning process and decision factors of each functional activity. The functional activities of the assortment planning process categorized with four abstract stages; information search, qualitative evaluation, quantitative evaluation, and color selection. The summary of the interview transcript was sent to each interviewee to obtain approval of the interview content. After getting approval of the transcript from interviewees, this researcher began combining the transcriptions for recontextualization. Two graduate students, who are majored fashion merchandising in college, validated the authoring process. The recontextualization results of Korean merchandiser interview data were translated into English, and an English expert validated the translation. The results of two countries were compared through functional activities of the color assortment planning process.

## IV. Results

### 1. Decision Factors through Color Assortment Planning Process

Color assortment decision factors were identified

with four abstract stages; information search, qualitative evaluation, quantitative evaluation, and selection (see Table 2).

#### 1) Information search

The decision factors of color information search were as follows:(a) target market taste, (b) customer request, (c) color sales history, (d) color forecasting services, (e) weather forecast, (f) publication & TV, (g) fashion show, (h) better market trend, (i) competitor color selection, (j) street trend, (k) information organization-system availability, (l) vendor's color selection, (m) repeated colors by vendors in market, (n) target market ethnicity and skin colors, (o) regional distinction, (p) POS data regarding colors, (q) pre-test run results, (r) merchandiser's own experience, (s) sales people or colleagues opinion, (t) fabric trade show, and (u) converter opinion.

All interviewees mentioned that target market taste is the most important factor for color assortment decision. Regarding customer's request, two merchandisers (No 11, 15) who sell fashionable and expensive clothing consider customer request in their assortment. Other merchandisers mentioned that they are very careful to accept or to reorder customer request (including well selling colors) because of fast color demand changes and fabric sourcing problem. Regarding sales analysis, two interviewees said that adopting new colors was difficult due to a lack of sales history (No 6, 8). To pinpoint suggested colors from a publication, most interviewees identified images that strongly explicated the colors, and could be used as a reference for color concept. One interviewee gave a specific example of the process of transferring an image to a color concept:

*"Color forecasting service provides a report regarding color concepts for company wide. The*

<Table 1> Subjects' Company Profile

Co. No.	Country	Business type	Label Variety	Annual Sales(US \$)	Distribution	Fashion Sensibility	MD Turnover	Plan beginning
1	US	Department	Over 10	Over 301M	National	High	5	3 months
2	US	Specialty	Over 10	Under 5M	NY & NJ	High	12	1 months
3	US	Department	Over 10	Over 500M	National	Low	5	6 months
4	US	Specialty+ Manufacturing	Single	Over 301M	National	Medium	6	6 months
5	US	Specialty	Over 10	Under 5M	NY	Medium	above 24	1 months
6	US	Department	Over 10	Over 301M	National	Low	6	6 months
7	US	Specialty	Over 10	Under 2M	Virginia	Low	4	3 months
8	US	Department	Over 10	Over 401M	National	High	6	3 months
9	US	Specialty +Manufacturing	Single	Over 20M	National	Medium	5	6 months
10	US	Specialty	Over 10	Under 5M	New York	Medium	above 24	1 months
11	Korea	Specialty	Single	Over 100M	National	Very High	4	3 months
12	Korea	Specialty	Single	Over 200M	National	High	4	3 months
13	Korea	Department+ Manufacturing	Single	Over 400M	National	High	4	3 months
14	Korea	Department Private Import	Single	Over 20M	National	Low	4	3 months
15	Korea	Department Private Import	Over 10	Over 30M	Seoul	Very High	4	3 months
16	Korea	Specialty +Manufacturing	Single	Over 650M	National	High	12	3 months
17	Korea	Specialty +Manufacturing	Single	Over 400M	National	High	above 24	3 months
18	Korea	Specialty +Manufacturing	Single	Over 500M	National	Medium	4	3 months
19	Korea	Specialty +Manufacturing	Single	Over 400M	National	Low	4	6 months
20	Korea	Specialty +Manufacturing	Single	Over 400M	National	High	28	3 months

&lt;Table 2&gt; Color Assortment Decision Factors

	Information Search	Qualitative Evaluation	Quantitative Evaluation	Color Selection
Buying & Manufacturing Common Related Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Target market taste</li> <li>• Customer's request</li> <li>• Color sales history</li> <li>• Color forecasting services</li> <li>• Weather forecast</li> <li>• Publication &amp; TV</li> <li>• Fashion show</li> <li>• Better market trend</li> <li>• Competitor's color selection</li> <li>• Street trend</li> <li>• Subjective target market taste judgement</li> <li>• Information organization-system availability</li> <li>• Vendor's color selection</li> <li>• Repeated colors by vendors in market</li> <li>• Target market ethnicity and skin color(US uniqueness)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information search output</li> <li>• Color match with style</li> <li>• Target market characteristics</li> <li>• Seasonality</li> <li>• Color concept and palette</li> <li>• Fashion-ability of the product</li> <li>• Sales potential of the item</li> <li>• Fabric color quality</li> <li>• Vendor's offering colors</li> <li>• Dependence level to vendors</li> <li>• Pre-package</li> <li>• Pre-test run results</li> <li>• Time gap between plan and sales</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information search output</li> <li>• Seasonality</li> <li>• Selling situation</li> <li>• Quick Response availability</li> <li>• Merchandise turnover</li> <li>• Color qualitative evaluation outputs</li> <li>• Style quantitative evaluation output</li> <li>• Sales history</li> <li>• Fashion-ability and product life cycle</li> <li>• Pre-test run results</li> <li>• Agreement with vendors</li> <li>• Weather change</li> <li>• Minimum order quantity</li> <li>• Sales goal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Color qualitative evaluation results</li> <li>• Color quantitative evaluation results</li> <li>• Depth and width of assortment</li> <li>• Style selection</li> <li>• Merchandisers' opinion</li> <li>• Availability of fabric</li> </ul>
Buying Related Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional distinction</li> <li>• POS data regarding colors</li> <li>• Pre-test run results</li> <li>• Merchandiser's own experience</li> <li>• Sales people or colleagues opinion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Store identity</li> <li>• Label variety</li> <li>• Sales people opinion</li> <li>• Customer's opinion</li> <li>• Number of stores</li> <li>• Store display</li> <li>• Buyer's taste</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-to-buy dollars</li> <li>• Remained stock level</li> <li>• Numbers of styles</li> <li>• Pre-package</li> </ul>	
Manufacturing Related Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fabric Trade show</li> <li>• Converters' opinions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designer taste</li> <li>• Brand identity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fabric Inventory</li> <li>• Minimum Cut</li> </ul>	

*report contains pictures and color cards with explanations. Based on buyer's judgment of applicability of the color concept into their items, like our dresses, we select a color concept and use color cards for the concept. "*

Korea merchandisers(No 18, 16, 14) mentioned that recently weather forecast is getting more important because unpredictable weather changes. Street trend was only considered by merchandisers who have fast product turnover system(No 2, 5, 10, 17). Some merchandisers(No 2, 6, 9, 11, 15, 17) said that they can not be free from their subjective judgments coming from past experience, and certainly buyer's own experience is subliminal but important decision factor. Related to gathering opinion, three interviewees(No 6, 9, 18) mentioned that color forecasting service report or vendor opinion was not always applicable or acceptable. Sales people opinions were considered as very important information sources, and every merchandiser often visits stores to get their opinions. To gather information from vendors, interviewees viewed catalogs, visited the showroom to see actual fabric colors, observed image difference by color tone and hue, and pinpointed repeated colors among vendor collections. Target market ethnicity and skin colors were considered important color decision factors for American merchandisers(No, 3, 6, 9) because their target customers come from various ethnicities. In other way, Korean merchandisers(No 11, 12, 15), who import clothing from other countries, sometimes face difficulties to find Korean favorite colors from their vendors. For merchandisers who manufacture products by themselves(No 13, 15, 17, 18, 19), fabric availability and fabric trade show is one of the most important decision factors for color information search.

## 2) Qualitative evaluation

Summarized decision factors for color qualitative evaluation were as follows: (a) color information search output, (b) color match with style, (c) target market characteristics, (d) seasonality, (e) color concept and palette, (f) fashion-ability of the product, (g) sales potential of the item, (h) fabric color quality, (i) vendor's offering colors (j)dependence level to vendors, (k) pre-package, (l) pre test run results, (m) time gap between plan and sales, (n)store or brand identity (o) label variety, (p) sales people opinion, (q) customer opinion, (r) number of stores, (s) store display, and (t) buyer or designer tastes.

The important factors affecting identification of the color palette were target customer characteristics, seasonality, and a merchandising color concept. Considering vendor's color offers was a necessary activity to check availability of colors in color palette and to transfer color palette into practical-use assortments. If interviewees had too many difficulties in finding colors from vendors, the interviewees redefined the color palette based on color availability. Six interviewees(No 2, 5, 7, 10, 11, 15) mentioned the limit of choices when colors were pre-packed by manufacturers.

Most interviewees mentioned that colors should be seen as a part of the style. An interviewee said.

*" If a style is fashionable, I prefer basic colors for the style; if the style is basic, I prefer trendy colors more."*

A merchandiser(No 11) does in the opposite way, she chose for trendy color for trendy style, because her customers like to be recognized by other people.

Regarding sales potential of style, every interviewee considered more color variations for a high sales potential style and only one or two colors for uncertain situation. For merchandisers having manufacturing system(No 4, 9, 16, 17, 18,

19), checking fabric quality and fabric availability was the first step for color qualitative evaluation. Two merchandisers (No 16, 20) of big company said that they consider their color palettes first and then ask fabric companies to dye their colors. It is possible because the company has a worldwide market and can give big orders to fabric vendors. Therefore, they don't have many problems with fabric colors matching with their color concept.

As with style qualitative evaluation, every interviewee gathered opinions related to color assortment from managers, sales people, and customers. Interviewees from small companies (No 2, 5, 17) bought and displayed a small amount of certain colors in the beginning of the season and got the test-run results and feedback from customers and sales people. Interviewees said that they couldn't be objective in this evaluation process because buyer or designer taste can affect color evaluation whether it's on purpose or not.

An interviewee (No 12) mentioned that she depended on trend analyst and designer opinions more than her own opinion. She said.

*"Even though I didn't like the colors when I see them on showroom. After three months when I see them on my store, I feel satisfied with the colors of displayed and coordinated products on my store. It happens many times."*

### 3) Quantitative evaluation

The decision factors of color quantitative evaluation were as follows: (a) information search output, (b) seasonality, (c) selling situation, (d) quick response availability, (e) merchandise turnover, (f) color qualitative evaluation output, (g) style quantitative evaluation output, (h) sales history, (i) fashion-ability of style and product life cycle, (j) pre test run results, (k) agreement with vendors, (l) weather change, (m) minimum order

quantity, (n) open-to-buy dollars, (o) sales goal, (p) remained stock level, (q) numbers of styles, (r) pre-package, (s) fabric inventory, and (t) minimum cut.

After deciding open-to-buy dollars for each style, the percentage of each color could be analyzed from top-down or bottom-up. Top-down means evaluating color percentages in whole assortment before deciding color variance of each style. Bottom-up means evaluating color quantity for each style before evaluating color quantity for the whole assortment. Interviewees analyzed the overall percentage of colors in the palette, but the color variance of each style was determined by vendor's pre-package. Most interviewees except local specialty store merchandisers (No 2, 5, 7, 10, 15) decided color variance for each style and then balanced the whole color assortment so as not to emphasize one color too much. Local store merchandisers usually bought one to three pieces for a style from various vendors and had difficulty of organizing various colors into their color palettes. The quantity of each color was balanced and organized after negotiating the color pre-package with vendors. As in analyzing percentage of basic style, sales history and remaining stock level were important inputs for analyzing the percentage of basic color; other required inputs were open-to-buy dollar plan, style quantitative evaluation output, and color information search output. For predicting color variance in a style, most interviewees (No 2, 3, 9, 14, 16, 18) tracked sales by time frame and considered weather changes.

### 4) Color selection

The decision factors of color selection were as follows: (a) color qualitative and quantitative evaluation results (b) depth and width of assortment, (c) style selection, (d) merchandiser

opinion, and (e) availability of fabric. To determine color selection, interviewees visualized selected colors with selected styles, and balanced selection with open-to-buy dollars.

## 2. Influence of Buying and Manufacturing Involvement

A color assortment planning process is different between buying and manufacturing. Merchandisers, who have manufacturing system (No. 9, 16, 17, 20), have more flexibility in color assortment plans and utilize more spot orders for improving sales. Buying related decision factors were involved with store circumstances like store region, POS system, selling label or style variety, store size, sales people opinion, and remained stock level. Manufacturing related decision factors were affected by fabric sourcing, minimum cut, and converter or designer opinion (see Table 2).

## 3. Influence of Business Types

Related with business size, small retail companies (No 2, 5, 7, 11, 13) have limits of selecting colors because of pre-packaging or must-buy colors from vendors. The label varieties in store affect the color assortments. More label varieties cause wider color selection and less unified concept. Small companies accepted vendor opinion, sales people opinion, and customer opinion more often. Big companies simply followed their color palettes to decide the color assortment because they can get what they want from vendors anytime.

Related with fashion-ability of products, The merchandisers, who plan for basic products (No. 4, 9, 18, 19), usually have an ongoing original color selection. They plan for the original colors first than trend colors next. Fashionable women's clothing manufacturing merchandisers (No 3, 16,

17, 20), who pursue small quantity with many varieties, select colors before style selection because of fabric sourcing matters and color availability limitedness. On the contrary, Basic clothing merchandisers (No. 4, 18, 19) select styles before colors and have regular fabric production lines for on going original colors.

## 4. Country Difference

The buying planning system was different in Korea and US. In US, department store buyers take a part in purchasing a single category in a product line and plan the assortments in the category. The merchandiser (i.e., representative buyer) coordinates the whole categories in the product line. On the contrary, in Korea, department buyers are charged with a single label and have to manage the whole product categories under the label. Even though the business systems of two countries were different, noticeable color assortment decision factor differences caused by country difference were not found except considering the target market ethnicity and skin colors.

In US, customer ethnicity and geographic area were considered important factors to determine color concept and assortments. An American interviewee (No 8) from a big company explained that if more accurate geographical information would make it easier to adopt an assortment plan to various customer needs as differentiated by store location. He said that it is very difficult to allocate proper colors for each region because customer ethnicities are geographically different, and color taste is different by the skin color. Regarding country characteristics, Three merchandisers in Korea (No 11, 12), who import products from Europe, said that imports buyer must consider skin color difference.

*" Even though a Korean woman has a white skin, tone of skin color is quite different from a blond*

*woman. I have brought black, ivory, white, gray colors for sales. If I bring mint, light green, purple colors, the possibility of sales may decrease."*

Korea merchandisers seem to be more sensitive to present sales data usages and spot order availability in color assortments because Korean merchandisers utilized more local fast production system than American merchandisers did. Korean merchandisers(No, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20) always had about 20 to 30 percent of spot order budgets and utilize it through selling periods. Only two American merchandisers(No 2, 5) who worked for a speciality store in New York City, said that he can do spot orders because the vendors are closed to the store.

## V. Conclusion & Discussion

Color decision factors were identified with assortment planning process. There were differences of color assortment decision factors due to different business types, business sizes, fashion-ability, buying and manufacturing Involvement, merchandise turnover, and country difference. Merchandisers, who have manufacturing system have more flexibility in color assortment plans. From this results, It is understandable why SPA merchandising is more effective for fast fashion. Fabric sourcing has been overlooked in merchandising education but a very important factor on a color assortment plan in real world, especially for fashion sensitive brands who heavily depend on imported fabric. The difference caused by above aspects should be considered in product assortment education, and flexible strategies for varied business types should be educated for successful assortment planning.

Regards system, all interviewees mentioned that they did not use an established system for a color

assortment decision. An established assortment planning system might reduce many constraints to make color assortment decisions. In my opinion, an identical color assortment planning system suitable for all companies is unnecessary. The system should be customized to business type, nevertheless students have to learn the differences and ability to find an effective strategy for each situation for better color assortment education.

This research found that pre-package was a serious constraint of effective assortment planning to retail stores and fabric availability was a important consideration to manufacturing merchandising. For the future, research related effective pre-package or fabric sourcing strategy will be helpful for merchandisers. The reliability of the model-developing process and research methodology was obtained by adoption of a established research framework. However, the generalize-ability of this research could be limited due to a small sample size. The value of this study is the first try of illustrating various merchandiser's voices about color assortment planning. There is a hope that more merchandisers can accept this kind of research with an open mind. This research can be used as a basement for understanding color assortment planning and developing future quantitative researches. The results of this research can be used for ground concepts developing for color assortment related researches, a color plan checklist, and an education guideboard.

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