

Party-wear Consumers' Information Sources and Clothing Evaluative Criteria

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Abstract *The volume of the party-wear market is gradually growing in the Korean fashion market. The study attempted to examine psychological clothing benefits as the criteria for market segmentation, and identify differences in information sources and clothing evaluative criteria in each segmented market. The summary of the key findings are as follows. Three segments were identified by psychological clothing benefits: pleasurable self-expressing group, fashion-seeking group, and indifferent group. The differences in search information sources between the classified groups were identified. The fashion-seeking group had a higher mean score on mass media. The pleasurable self-expressing group had higher scores on advice from friends, colleagues, or companions. The differences in evaluative criteria between the classified groups were also identified. Among the evaluative criteria, the splendid boldness and polished silhouette criteria showed a marginal difference between each group. This study can contribute as a cornerstone for future studies on party-wear and market strategies.*

Key words *party-wear consumers, psychological clothing benefits, information sources, clothing evaluative criteria*

Introduction

With the spread of the five-day workweek system, people have begun to attach greater importance to the utilization of leisure time, and the number of persons who enjoy various events or parties has increased. In particular, party cultures are rapidly spreading and positioning themselves as culture codes, mainly among young people. According to Min (2006), the westernization of people's lifestyles and material abundance have increased both the propensity to party and the themes of parties. The spread of party cultures also affects related occupations such as party planners and party organizers. It has led to expand on-line/offline party-wear markets and to develop wine markets, and the other party-related specialized businesses (Lee, 2005).

*This research was supported by a grant from the Seoul R&BD Program(10956)
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As party culture is expanding, party related industries including party wear markets are also expected to increase further. As clothing is an object with strong visibility and symbolism, the demand for party-wear can be regarded as an attractive niche market in the saturated domestic clothing market of Korea. The volume of the party-wear market is gradually growing in the Korean fashion market. Recently, domestic brands of women' wear sold in department stores usually have separate clothing lines designed specific to parties. Internet shopping malls such as Auction and GS e-store have a separate party-wear category (Fashionbiz, 2006). In Auction, one of the most popular Internet marketplaces in Korea, on average, 400–500 pieces of party-related items are sold every day. The share of dresses and accessories for parties comprise 35% of all party-related sales, with the percentage gradually increasing. In response, Auction has recently started on a separate party-wear category, which is growing approximately 40–100% each quarter (“Products related to party is boom in Auction”, 2006). In addition, the number of multi-shops that sell party-wear are increasing on Rodeo Street in Apgujeong-dong which is one of the most flourishing fashion districts in Korea (“Multi Shop on Rodeo Street in Apgujeong”, 2006).

From the discussion above, it is clear that party wear markets have emerged and are expanding in Korea. However, few studies have been conducted on the marketing of domestic party-wear market. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the party-wear consumers' clothing purchase behaviors to generate insightful implications for the domestic party-wear market that has a growth potential. In particular, the study examined psychological clothing benefit as the criteria for market segmentation. Benefit segmentation is useful to marketers and researchers because discovery of benefit sought by consumers suggests motivation for their purchase (Haley, 1968). Then, to identify profile of each segment and target specific market segments, we examined differences in information sources and clothing evaluative criteria, and other demographic characteristics of consumers. Evaluative criteria are one of the most influential elements when people make their buying decisions. Information sources may offer significant data for market strategies to marketers. This study can contribute as a cornerstone for future studies on party-wear and market strategies.

Literature Review

Party wear

A party is a gathering of people for the purposes of socializing, conversation, and recreation (Kim, 2004). Parties began in the form of groups who met to appreciate and discuss literary works based on the pleasure and sense of privilege of early high society, and people began to use the term “party” in diverse meanings such as dialogues and discussions, meetings, and social gatherings around the eighteenth century. Thus, since the eighteenth

century, parties have been utilized as a way to develop more intimate human relationships in people's daily lives (Kim, 2004).

In a questionnaire survey of 100 male and female office workers and university students by a specialized fashion magazine in Korea, 93% of the respondents answered that they regularly had events or parties to attend. Moreover, 71% of them answered that they had bought clothes for parties, indicating the reality of the party wear market (Fashionbiz, 2006). This is an exploratory study to review markets for clothing and accessories bought or considered for purchase specifically for parties. This study focused on formal parties held in the evening where clear dress codes exist and not on small meetings among friends or acquaintances or on club parties where no determined form of clothing exists. Situational variables are expected to have significant effect on purchase behavior. Park (1992) identified the conceptual framework of the wearing situation, communication situations, and purchasing situations. Especially, wearing situations were divided into four categories: formal-rigid situation, formal-flexible situation, informal-rigid situation, informal-flexible situation. According to Park (1992)'s categorization, party wear belongs to formal-rigid situation clothing.

In fact, because of the lack of existing studies on party wear, we conducted in-depth group interviews with five women with experience in parties in order to establish the concept of party wear. The subjects mentioned several places for purchasing party clothing, including department stores, online shopping malls, Dongdaemun bonded clothing shops, Cheongdam-dong designers' shops, and repair/custom made clothing shops located near Ehwa Woman's University/Itaewon. The respondents used diverse terms such as "one piece," "suit," "formal dress," "luxury one piece," and "party wear" to describe the clothing. Attributes associated with party wear had clear characteristics different from other clothes in terms of designs, colors, and silhouettes, such as "luxury" and "exposure." Based on these results, this study defines party wear as clothes that are separately bought or considered for purchasing for parties for which exposure and splendor are emphasized compared to general clothes.

Psychological clothing benefits sought by consumer

Benefits are needs or wants that consumers subjectively feel in relation to the attributes of certain products (Peter & Olson, 1987), and it has been said that consumers purchase products thinking from the viewpoint of positive outcomes obtained through purchasing rather than the physical attributes of products themselves (Levitt, 1960). Accordingly, marketing professionals gradually have come to perceive that consumers buy products for a collection of benefits, not for attributes. Studies on benefits that consumers ultimately want to obtain through purchasing have prepared useful bases for understanding consumers' purchasing

behaviors.

In a study by Shim and Bickle (1994), clothing benefits were divided into self-enhancement, social statuses/privileges, sexual appeals/femininity, fashion images, functionality/protection, role expressions, body form complementation, individuality expressions, and maturity/refined appearances. Peter and Olson (1987) divided the benefits into functional, psychological, and social categories. Functional benefits are direct and visible results obtained by using or consuming products, psychological benefits include more personal and invisible indirect results, and social benefits are social recognitions encompassed by the consumers' perception of others' responses to their using a certain product. Aaker (1991) divided the benefits into rational benefits, or those related to objective and physical attributes of products, and psychological benefits, or those that are important in the course of forming attitudes.

Park (1997) indicated that two dimensions of clothing benefits—symbolic/psychological and practical—existed, and Ryu (1997) indicated that two dimensions—functional and psychological—existed in female consumers in their twenties. Though Ryu mentioned the functional benefits of clothing, or those that can be directly obtained from clothing, she advised that consumers ultimately pursue values in the social/psychological dimension with regard to clothing purchases.

It is evident that researchers divide clothing benefits differently, but, generally, they divide them into functional benefits and psychological benefits. This is a consumer study about parties, which are a recent social trend and culture with a strong factor of pleasure. Therefore, we determine that psychological benefits are more involved in parties than functional benefits. This study attempts to classify consumers according to the dimension of psychological clothing benefits. Our first research question is to identify the segmentation of female party-wear consumers based on their psychological clothing benefits sought.

Information sources

Before buying products, consumers search for various kinds of information by which they can compare and evaluate similar products and eventually select one to purchase. An information search is a process of pursuing information to solve a perceived problem. When consumers search for information to help in decision-making, they obtain related information from diverse information sources (Ok, 2000).

Researchers have conducted diverse studies to elucidate the dimensions of information sources. Andreason (1967) divided the information sources that consumers turn to for certain needs into five types: non-human advertising sources such as advertisements in the mass media; non-human neutral sources such as technical reports about products; human advertising sources, for example, asking shop managers or salespersons for their opinions; hu-

man neutral sources, for example, remembering the brands used by friends or asking them for the opinions of friends, family members, or neighbors; and direct observations and experiences, such as depending on past experiences, testing products before buying, and reading information on packages. Kotler (1980) divided information sources into four types of media: personal information, commercial, public, and empirical. Based on these previous studies, this study defines the concept of information sources as consumers' active and intentional behaviors to obtain and utilize objective external information and subjective internal information possessed by the sources.

We set the second research question, do the party-wear segmentations show differences in their use of information sources when purchasing party wear?

Clothing evaluative criteria

Companies can utilize specific attributes of products or services as positioning in the market to differentiate their products from other companies'. These specific attributes can be used to appeal to consumers in marketing strategies (Lee & Ahn, 1994). Evaluation of products is at the core of the processes involved in consumers' decision-making for purchasing. Understanding the evaluative criteria used by consumers when buying clothing products can provide information that is very useful for product planning (Lee, 1997).

Kim (1988) said that although consumers attached importance to aesthetic criteria for all clothing products, they attached importance to economic efficiency after aesthetical properties for products even if they were less concerned about economic efficiency. Kim also said that they attached greater importance to quality and practicality for products about which they were highly concerned. Kim (1998) further differentiated essential attributes and non-essential attributes. Kim also suggested essential attributes as a multidimensional concept reflecting expressive functions and instrumental functions. Expressive functions include aesthetic properties, fashion, and status symbolism, and instrumental functions, practicality, economic efficiency, fitness, and manageability. Following this guide, in this study, the attributes of party-wear perceived by consumers was extracted by in-depth group interviews. These attributes will be grouped together centering on the attributes of clothing products such as "aesthetic properties" and "practical properties" These two representative attributes frequently appeared in previous studies on clothing and are assumed to form core dimensions of clothing attributes. Based on the study by Park (1992) that showed that clothing purchase behaviors vary with situational variables and consumer variables, this study expects that evaluation of clothing will differ in situations where party-wear is the appropriate attire, as distinguished from situations where people wear general clothing. Therefore we set our third research question like this, do the party-wear consumers show differences in clothing evaluative criteria when purchasing party wear?

Methods

Data collection and analysis

Twenty students participated in a preliminary survey specializing in. The results of this survey confirmed the validity of the questions, and the survey content was corrected based on the results to complement the questionnaire. The main survey was conducted by a professional market research company. In order to reduce variations in samples, the subjects were limited to female consumers in their 20~30s residing in Seoul. The final 500 questionnaires were used for analyses. The factor analysis, Cronbach α , K-means cluster, χ^2 analysis, ANOVA, and Duncan's multiple range test were conducted for data analyses by SPSS 12.0, and confirmatory factor analysis was conducted by AMOS 5.0.

Measurements

Statements about the psychological clothing benefits sought by consumers were adapted from previous studies (e.g., Ahn et al., 2000; Kim, 1995; Koh & Hong, 1995; Hwang, 2003). Eight external information sources (mass media, shop display, etc.) and one internal information source (purchasing experience) were adapted from previous studies (Park & Lee, 2005). Respondents were asked 15 questions about the clothing evaluative criteria, which were derived from the focus-group interview. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale. Demographics included education, age, residential area, marital status, clothing expenditure, party experience, and regular party attendance.

Results

Psychological clothing benefits sought by party-wear consumer

To identify dimensions of clothing benefit, principle component factor analysis with Varimax rotation was performed on the statements. Four factors were extracted. The total percent of variance accounted for by these four factors was 76.45% (Table 1). The reliability of the scale, Cronbach's alpha coefficient, for each factor ranged from .70-.88, which imply appropriate. According to the confirmatory factor analysis results, the overall goodness-of-fit was satisfactory, with $\chi^2 = 114.296(p = .001)$, CFI = .975, GFI = .961, NFI = .963, and RMSEA = .063. We identified four major benefits sought in party-wear, sexual attractiveness, fashion, pleasure, self-expression.

Table 1.
Factors of psychological clothing benefit sought

factors	Items	factor loadings	Eigen value	Percent of Variance (cumulative)	Alpha coefficient
sexual attractiveness sought	I rather buy clothes that can express my femininity.	.825	2.331	21.194 (21.194)	.882
	I wear clothes to give good impressions to the other sex.	.803			
	I try to be dressed to attract the other sex's eyes..	.702			
fashion sought	I wear clothes differentiated from others.	.798	2.256	20.512 (41.706)	.795
	I often review fashion advertisements and displays of shops in order to know recent popular fashion styles.	.710			
	Wearing the latest style is important to me.	.685			
pleasure sought	My dresses always affect my feeling.	.790	2.235	20.317 (62.023)	.810
	I become nervous when my clothes are not good.	.750			
	I change my clothes consciously or intentionally in order to make me feel good.	.744			
self-expression sought	I think I can enhance my social status by wearing clothes well.	.892	1.587	14.428 (76.451)	.703
	I think others attach importance to my clothes when they evaluate me.	.700			

total percent of variance: 76.45%

Next, K-means cluster analysis was performed to group the respondents into segments based on these factor scores. The three-cluster solution was accepted based on the number of cases in each group and the meaningful interpretation of each cluster. We identified three groups and named as: pleasurable self-expressing, fashion seeking, and indifferent. Of the three segments, the fashion seeking segment was the largest, consisting of 232 respondents (46.4% of the total). As compared to the other two segments, this one yielded highest scores on the fashion sought factor of the psychological clothing benefits sought. Respondents in the pleasurable self-expressing segment ($n = 121$, 24.2% of the total) had a higher factor score than the other two segments on the sexual attractiveness sought fashion, pleasure sought, and self-expression sought factor. The indifferent segment ($n = 147$, 29.4% of the total) yielded the lowest scores for all factors.

To determine whether the three groups differed with respect to demographics, we analyzed chi-square statistics. The three groups were significantly different in monthly clothing expenditures and party experience. In terms of clothing expenditures, the pleasurable self-expressing group included more people who spend more than 400,000 won, while the indif-

ferent group represented more people who spend less than 200,000 won ($\chi^2 = 18.705$, $df = 10$, $p < .05$). The pleurably self-expressing group tended to have experience in participating in parties and attending parties regularly ($\chi^2 = 9.962$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$; $\chi^2 = 10.342$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$). There was little difference between the groups in terms of education ($p < .1$).

Information sources by the benefit segmentation

Overall, there were significant differences across the groups in terms of the information sources used, except for family or relatives (Table 2). As compared to other groups, the fashion-seeking group had a higher mean score on mass media. The pleurably self-expressing group had higher scores on advice from friends, colleagues, or companions. Compared to the indifference group, the pleurably self-expressing and fashion-seeking groups had higher scores on entertainers or celebrities, shop displays, and the internet. Alternatively, the indifferent group had lower scores on all information sources.

Table 2.
Differences in information sources

Information sources	pleurably self-expressing group n = 121	fashion seeking group n = 232	indifferent group n = 147	F
purchasing experience	4.851 ^a AB ^b	4.978 A	4.605 B	4.117*
advice of family or relative	4.768	4.810	4.489	2.801
entertainers or celebrates	4.958 A	<u>5.047</u> A	4.224 B	19.778***
shop display	5.388 A	<u>5.392</u> A	4.687 B	21.967***
friends or colleagues	<u>5.347</u> A	5.025 B	4.748 C	8.391***
mass media(television, magazine, newspaper)	4.958 B	<u>5.284</u> A	4.564 C	15.430***
Internet	5.231 A	<u>5.271</u> A	4.673 B	11.162***
advice of companion	<u>5.528</u> A	5.267 B	5.006 C	7.252***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

a: mean score (Likert scale, 1-7), An underline mean score indicates the highest scores among the group
b: different characters denote significant differences in means values at $p < .05$.

Clothing evaluative criteria by the benefit segmentation

To identify dimensions of clothing evaluative criteria, principle component factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the statements. We extracted three factors, splendid boldness, polished silhouette, and practicality. The total percent of variance accounted for by these three factors was 68.71%. To test the reliability of the scale, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. We obtained alphas ranging .74-.82, which were appropriate for further analyses.

Table 3.
Factors of clothing evaluative criteria

factors	Items	factor loadings	Eigen value	Percent of Variance (cumulative)	Alpha coefficient
splendid boldness	There should be some exposure.	.832	2.733	27.325 (27.325)	.824
	There should be significant exposure.	.797			
	Colors should be luxury.	.784			
	Materials/the quality of materials should be shiny or glossy.	.741			
polished silhouette	Lines(silhouettes) are more important than the fashion.	.818	2.155	21.555 (48.880)	.771
	Silhouettes/lines are considered more importantly than anything else.	.791			
	Materials/the quality of materials should be fine.	.702			
practicality	Prices should be cheap.	.829	1.983	19.827 (68.707)	.741
	Designs should be changeable(applicable).	.779			
	A/S such as storage and repairs should be provided well.	.740			

total percent of variance: 68.71%

We analyzed mean differences of clothing evaluative criteria among the three benefit segmentations. Splendid boldness and polished silhouette each showed a marginal difference among the groups but practicality did not. Party wear consumers highly regarded the practicality, though there was no significant difference among the groups. The fashion-seeking group attached more importance to splendid boldness and polished silhouette, while the pleasurable self-expressing group sought polished silhouette. The indifferent segment yielded the lowest scores for splendid boldness and polished silhouette.

Table 4.
Differences in clothing evaluative criteria

criteria	pleasurably self-expressing group n = 121	fashion seeking group n = 232	indifferent group n = 147	F
splendid boldness	4.0475 ^a AB ^b	4.2608 A	3.8418 B	7.818***
polished silhouette	5.4931 A	5.4095 A	5.1156 B	7.138***
practicality	5.2700	5.3621	5.3197	.400

*** $p < .001$

a: mean score(factor), An underline mean score indicates the highest scores among the group

b: different characters denote significant differences in means values at $p < .05$

Conclusion

Parties, an important communication facilitator in the twenty-first century, have recently received greater attention and become part of the unique and trendy culture of the young generation in Korea. With the prevalence of party events across cultures, various marketing communication activities have focused on the party scene, and the growth of the party culture has turned party-wear into a charming niche market. The purpose of this study was to segment the party-wear market based on the psychological benefit sought by party-wear consumers and to investigate the differences among groups in terms of the information sources and clothing evaluative criteria. The following is a summary of the results.

First, the psychological clothing benefits sought consisted of four factors: sexual attractiveness, fashion, pleasure, and self expression. This study classified the respondents into three groups by benefits: pleasurably self expressing group, fashion seeking group, and indifferent group. Second, overall, the pleasurably self expressing and fashion seeking groups intensively utilized information sources as compared to the indifferent group. Specifically, the pleasurably self-expressing group tended to use advice from friends, colleagues, or companions, while the fashion-seeking group tended to use the mass media. Third, clothing evaluative criteria were classified as splendid boldness, polished silhouette, and practicality. The splendid boldness and polished silhouette criteria showed a marginal difference between each group, but not practicality.

As mentioned above, consumer groups were classified on the basis of psychological clothing benefits sought by consumers, and the differences in search information sources and evaluative criteria between the classified groups were identified. Therefore, the variable of psychological clothing benefits can be used as a criterion for the segmentation of party-wear markets and is suitable for grasping groups' needs and purchasing behaviors in order to create marketing activities targeted at certain groups.

The results of the empirical study suggest the following implications for marketing strategies to clothing businesses that are considering extending into the party-wear market. The pleasurable self-expressing group is considered to be closely related with parties and active in purchasing party-wear. This group showed higher expenses for clothing as compared to other groups, had experience in terms of attending parties, and had parties in which to participate periodically. Therefore, it is considered a target group for party-wear markets, and establishing marketing strategies targeting them will be advantageous. The group was found to frequently utilize social information source such as friends and companions when buying party-wear. Instead of advertising on mass media by paying high expense, making party participants spread a good word-of-mouth seems to be more effective as a promotion channel. In addition, if marketers plan to target the pleasurable self-expressing consumers, they might utilize the information sources such as shop displays and the internet. Through grasping the evaluative criteria used when buying party wear, businesses can develop products that reflect consumers' needs and can effectively penetrate targeted markets. Among evaluative criteria, marketers had better consider polished silhouette such as fine materials and silhouettes. Since the practicality was also important for target consumers, it is advisable for marketers to consider A/S and repairs etc.

This study has two major limitations: it focused on a specific party situation, and it was only conducted on women in their twenties residing in Seoul, as they were judged to have many opportunities to attend parties. This study, however, examined the clothing purchase behaviors of current party participants and potential party participants, it may contribute to the practitioners by providing basic knowledge for party-wear businesses.

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