

From Possession to Relationship -An Investigation of the Consumer-driven Anthropomorphism of Fashion Goods-

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Abstract

This qualitative study delves into consumers' meanings, perceptions, and behaviors toward the anthropomorphism of fashion goods based on personal experiences. Previous studies focused on consumer responses to the marketer-driven anthropomorphism of products, messages, and brands; however, the present study examines consumers' spontaneous anthropomorphism focusing on personal meanings as a possessor and meanings in their social relationships. A qualitative methodology is adopted that involves in-depth interviews with eleven males and females in their 20s and 30s. Participants stated that were engaged in the anthropomorphic practice of fashion goods on a daily basis. Data analysis was based on grounded theory. Findings on consumer-driven anthropomorphism are discussed at personal and interpersonal levels. At the personal level, anthropomorphic objects are their companions that are often called "baby." Interestingly, anthropomorphism reduces the stigmas of materialism from the participants' side. At the interpersonal level, anthropomorphic practice is a ritual of sharing a common interest and assuring intimacy. Implications and suggestions for future research are also discussed.

Key words: Anthropomorphism, Consumer-driven anthropomorphism, Anthropomorphism of fashion goods, Qualitative, Consumer behavior

I. Introduction

Anthropomorphic practices can be easily observed in the daily life of young Korean consumers. Some people name their cars and converse with a GPS navigation system while driving. Others respond to a rice cooker when it beeps and says, "Cooking is complete;" and some say "Good job" to a robot vacuum while it is operating. In terms of fashion goods, we often hear "Take this new baby" from a salesperson showing new arrivals at a clothing store. Consumers express affection toward their

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belongings by calling shoes and bags as their "babies." For these people, anthropomorphism is deeply embedded in their daily lives; people form a social relationship with inanimate objects as they do with friends and lovers.

Fashion goods include commodities consumed for appearance management and grooming, in which style holds the primary importance, such as clothes, bags, and shoes. Literature on fashion goods associates these products with symbolic or visual metaphors for one's identity (Davis, 1992; Murray, 2002; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Although many studies suggest that commodities, such as clothes or shoes, serve as individuals' extension of themselves, this study pays attention to fa-

shion goods being consumers' companions and what building relationships with fashion goods means.

Anthropomorphism in previous studies (e.g., the Michelin Man) is a marketer-driven practice. Marketer-driven anthropomorphism is the intentional attribution of human traits to nonhuman objects or mascots for marketing purposes that is different from consumers anthropomorphizing objects. Although several studies have verified the effects of anthropomorphism, limited literature focuses on consumer-driven anthropomorphism (Kim & McGill, 2011). The present study examines consumer-driven anthropomorphism that features voluntary and individual interactions with consumption objects. To the best of our knowledge, this type of interaction has not been comprehensively studied. Therefore, this research extends the understanding of the consumer-driven anthropomorphism of fashion goods.

This study aims to analyze personal interpretations of the voluntary anthropomorphism of fashion goods. In Korea, mass media portrays anthropomorphism as a fashionable practice as celebrities sometimes anthropomorphize their possessions in reality television shows or fictional characters in dramas. Finding young Korean women calling their new clothes or bags as their "new babies" is common. This study qualitatively examines the consumer culture concerning the anthropomorphism of fashion goods in Korea. This research differs from previous studies in that the objects of anthropomorphism here are confined to fashion goods, and anthropomorphism is applied to more specific goods than an overall relationship with brands. The research significance lies in the conceptualization of the consumer-driven anthropomorphism of fashion goods from a socio-cultural perspective and an expansion of literature on consumer-consumption object relationship. The findings are expected to expand the understanding of the "person-object" and "person-object-other" relationships focusing on the anthropomorphic practice of fashion goods. The study also illustrates that unlike marketer-driven anthropomorphism, consumer-driven anthropomorphism is a personalized and individualized practice. Moreover, consumer-driven anthropomorphism, which people practice with their special obj-

ects, holds meanings at the personal and social levels of one's daily life.

II. Literature Review

1. Concept and Objects of Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism refers to the projection of human attributes onto nonhuman or imagined objects or the assumption that they possess human characteristics, emotions, and mental abilities (Epley et al., 2007; Gray et al., 2007). Although anthropomorphism resembles personification, anthropomorphism denotes the condition of message receivers. Anthropomorphism describes imagined or observable behavior patterns that represent agents' mental or physical characteristics (Epley et al., 2007; Waytz et al., 2010). Thus, audience or consumers build or experience a relationship with anthropomorphic objects. Anthropomorphism also enables the projection of human emotional states, behavioral characteristics, or forms onto objects, not onto actual or imaginary humans (Leyens et al., 2003). Meanwhile, personification refers to a metaphorical expression in which inanimate objects are assigned to human attributes. Therefore, these objects are represented as humans with emotions (Ricoeur, 1978/1981). Such attributes may include intelligence and existential attributes, including faith, desire, intention, goals, plans, psychological qualities, power, and will (Turner, 1987). Personification relates to people's cognitive biases that allow them to impart human characteristics toward objects (Leem, 2008).

Researchers on consumer culture have examined the meanings that consumers assign to special possessions and have illuminated diverse aspects and processes of consumer relationships with those objects: extended self, authenticity, collection, and identity construction (Arnould & Price, 2000; Belk, 1988, 1995; Beverland & Farrelly, 2010; Schau, 2000). Consumers construct, enlarge, and ascertain a sense of self through owning goods. Therefore, thinking of themselves without their possessions is impossible (Belk, 1988). Similarly, they use consumption objects and experiences to construct

their individuality and group identity (Arnould & Price, 2000) or to express themselves (Schau, 2000). Moreover, consumers develop personal meanings through collecting (Belk, 1995) and using cues from consumption objects to grant authenticity toward those objects (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010). Other studies on consumer relationships focus on consumers' relationship with brands. Early research has uncovered the typology of the person-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998), and this typology has led to the instigation of research on self-brand connection (Tan et al., 2018).

Drawing on the concept of para-social relationship, brand love is similar to interpersonal love (Fetscherin, 2014). Research on brand attachment, brand love, and brand personality draws on the concept of the anthropomorphism of a brand focusing on the consumer-brand relationship (M. Kim, 2014). The special emotional bond between consumer and brand is associated with love (Batra et al., 2012). A series of consumer actions, such as perceiving brand personality, building brand relationship, and forming brand attachment, result from interactions based on anthropomorphism (Chen et al., 2017). Studies on brand relationship have focused on the role of a brand as a consumer's partner (Blackstone, 1993), rather than as a symbol from which the consumer's personality or personal image is projected (Aaker, 1997). A brand with which a consumer builds a relationship with is conceived as an abstract concept. However, relationship-building takes place through the consumption of a brand's products that a consumer possesses (Puzakova et al., 2009). Aaker (1996) defined a brand as the products a consumer owns. Drawing upon this definition, the current study investigates a type of brand relationship, especially the relationship between a consumer and his or her favorite possessions.

2. Motives and Effects of Anthropomorphism

Literature presents three types of motivations of anthropomorphism. First, people may further understand their world by applying what is familiar to them. Human beings conceive that all entities are similar to them. Thus, they tend to transfer attributes that they are fam-

iliar with and that they are internally aware of to all objects (Hume, 1956). People attempt to understand similar objects by using the knowledge they already possess (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007), which is a cognitive process of using acquired knowledge to evaluate something (Higgins, 1996). The anthropomorphism of consumer goods is a natural cognitive process through which consumption experiences and knowledge are integrated.

Second, anthropomorphism fulfills the effectance motivation by understanding, controlling, and predicting the actions of nonhuman objects (Epley et al., 2007). An effectance motivation exists for humans to interact with nonhuman objects in uncertain situations (Epley et al., 2007). Effectance motivation refers to a desire to predict and control one's objects and environment (Epley et al., 2008). When people find something difficult to predict or control, they likely make objects into anthropomorphic to turn them into human beings that are easy to understand, predict and control (Epley et al., 2008). People feel less uncertainty and more security toward anthropomorphic objects than those who are not. This sense of security reduces psychological distance and stimulates positive attitude. Anthropomorphism decreases the fear of an uncertain situation and facilitates the prediction of the behaviors of nonhuman objects. Negative conditions, such as uncertainty, may be mitigated by such perceptual strategies.

Third, anthropomorphism replicates social relationships. People have an inherent need for having social relationships with others (Cacioppo et al., 2006). Sociality motivation indicates a desire to be socially connected, and certain people likely anthropomorphize objects to fulfill this desire when they feel lonely or feel that their need for the sense of belonging is unmet (Epley et al., 2007). Consumption offers a para-social relationship, which is another type of non-instrumental value (e.g., intimacy or attachment). Through anthropomorphizing consumption objects, people build and maintain a relationship with nonhuman objects as if they have such a relationship with other human beings. Aggarwal and McGill (2007) noted that people who desire further relationships tend to fill their lives with relationships with

objects.

Anthropomorphism is applied in diverse fields of arts and culture, particularly in literature (e.g., novels and poems), visual media (e.g., films and advertisements), and animated movies (Kim & McGill, 2011; Puzakova et al., 2009). Thus far, research on anthropomorphism has focused on brand anthropomorphism (Aaker, 1997; Aaker et al., 2004; Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & McGill, 2012; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001; Puzakova et al., 2009), which reflects the growing importance of anthropomorphism as a brand marketing strategy. Anthropomorphic objects in recent marketing literature have increased. The effects of anthropomorphism have been verified in the studies of anthropomorphic objects, such as automobiles (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Chandler & Schwarz, 2010), cellular phones (Landwehr et al., 2011), gambling machines and messages (Kim & McGill, 2011), animals (Boya et al., 2015; Butterfield et al., 2012), and perfume bottles (van den Hende & Mugge, 2014). These studies illustrate that anthropomorphism is effective in forming favorable perceptions of consumption objects. Previous research indicated that consumers perceive anthropomorphic objects as active beings that have free will, as anthropomorphic brands give an impression that products think and act like how people do. When fashion brands are infused with humane characteristics, consumers regard them as live creatures that are capable of social communications (Chandler & Schwarz, 2010). For this reason, brand anthropomorphism is effective for enhancing consumers' perception of brand credibility. Epley and Waytz (2010) revealed that consumers trust anthropomorphized cars more than inanimate cars and show less willingness to replace anthropomorphized cars for new cars.

Anthropomorphism enables consumers to begin forming relationships with their possessions. Therefore, these consumption experiences become emotionally enhanced (Chandler & Schwarz, 2010). Para-social interactions with anthropomorphic products become pleasurable, and filling products with clues that can be anthropomorphized generates positive emotions in consumers (Wang et al., 2007). Even when clues for anthropomorphism are nonexistent, certain consumers spon-

taneously experience social emotions, such as love (Schultz et al., 1989) and trust (Aaker et al., 2004), when they interact with objects. Over time, the connection between special products and consumers grows, and consumers form an attachment similar to what they can experience in interpersonal relationships (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). The consumption experience of anthropomorphism transforms the relationship with special possessions from ownership to relationship. Moreover, the characteristics associated with the anthropomorphic objects are experienced as if in an interpersonal relationship (Chandler & Schwarz, 2010). Although literature suggests that anthropomorphism can be a useful marketing tool, it does not have an all-round capability. Research shows that delivering a message through anthropomorphism can be an effective strategy when consumers feel close to an object, but delivering a message without anthropomorphism can be effective if they feel distant to the object (Y.-J. Kim, 2014). Anthropomorphism is related to diverse emotions and positively or negatively affects consumer behaviors. Despite the availability of many studies that demonstrate a positive impact of brand anthropomorphism on the relationship between consumers and a brand and consumers' attitude toward products (Chandler & Schwarz, 2010; Epley & Waytz, 2010), brand anthropomorphism does not always likely exert a positive impact (Epley et al., 2007). Adverse effects exist depending on different variables.

III. Methods

In-depth interviews were conducted for over a month after IRB approval. One of the researchers conducted face-to-face and one-on-one interviews at a setting where participants felt comfortable, such as school laboratories or cafes. Purposive sampling was adopted to find people who are engaged in the anthropomorphism of fashion goods. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling with the criteria that they should consider themselves highly involved in style and fashion and practice anthropomorphism with fashion goods in their daily life. The age of the 11 participants ranged from 28 to 36 years old. Finding people who fit the pro-

file from this age range was easy. Most participants described themselves as heavy consumers of fashion goods. Four of the participants were in their 20s, whereas seven were in their 30s. Three of the participants were male. <Table 1> presents demographic information, including age, gender, and occupation.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted. Open-ended questions were asked regarding the anthropomorphic consumption objects among their possessions, including the motives and meanings behind the lived experiences of anthropomorphism. During the interviews, the purpose and process of this study, including technical terms, such as “anthropomorphism of fashion goods,” were explained to the participants. The participants were asked which of their fashion goods were anthropomorphized, how, and why. Before the interviews, the researcher also explained a common phenomenon in Korean society, where a famous handbag brand is called a “baby” by a celebrity, thereby inducing the participants to spontaneously talk about their experience of the anthropomorphism of fashion goods. After the researcher discussed the subject of the study, the participants were allowed to lead the conversation because spontaneously told stories are reliable in a qualitative study (Spradley, 1979). Interviews lasted for 60-90 minutes. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and were transcribed ver-

batim within 24 hours. Those who were interviewed early were contacted again through phone calls or e-mail when the researcher missed to ask certain questions or had new questions obtained from preliminary analysis.

Data analysis was based on grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which is an inductive research method that aims to generate or discover theories beyond merely describing empirical data. The research began without clear hypotheses, and the researcher systematically developed a theory through theoretical sampling, continuous comparison, memos, and coding (del Mar Pàmies et al., 2016). The data were analyzed and conceptualized through open, axial, and selective coding. A theory was constructed in the process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, through open coding, new analytic concepts about the fashion anthropomorphic phenomenon appearing in the data were formed. During this process, diverse concepts about the fashion anthropomorphic phenomenon, such as friends or lovers, emerged from the process of subdividing sentences and paragraphs by reading several times and underlining or using memos. Through axial coding, the relationship among different concepts derived from the prior stage was established. The central phenomenon of anthropomorphism, the causal situation surrounding it, the actions of participants as responses to this phenomenon,

Table 1. Demographic profiles of participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Occupation	Anthropomorphic objects
P1	Male	29	Graduate student	Shoes
P2	Male	31	Banker	Shoes, watches
P3	Male	33	Doctor	Shoes, clothing
P4	Female	28	Newscaster	Shoes, bags
P5	Female	28	Manager	Shoes, clothing, bags
P6	Female	29	Manager	Shoes, bags
P7	Female	32	Fashion designer	Clothing
P8	Female	32	Designer	Shoes, bags
P9	Female	34	Teacher	Bags, cosmetics
P10	Female	36	Fashion merchandiser	Shoes, bags
P11	Female	30	Graduate student	Bags

and the results were identified. Through selective coding, categories were aligned and connected, whereas unimportant attributes were excluded. Interviews were conducted in Korean, which is the mother tongue of the participants. The quotations were translated into English by a Korean-English bilingual researcher. Another bilingual person back-translated the quotations from English to Korean to check the consistency of the translation of the original excerpts.

IV. Findings

As a result of the analysis, the meanings of consumer-driven anthropomorphism are conceptualized in two different levels: the anthropomorphism of fashion goods at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels. First, the anthropomorphism of fashion goods is an assurance of attachment people have for the objects at the intrapersonal level. An anthropomorphic object is not only one of the belongings but a companion and a comforter for an owner. Second, regarding the relationship with others, the anthropomorphism of fashion goods serves as a way to share people's interests and thus improves intimacy.

1. Meanings of Anthropomorphic Practice to Consumers

1) Assurance of Attachment to a Possession

Participants voluntarily anthropomorphized their possessions, and anthropomorphism is a ritual of assuring their special attachments to such possessions. Strong attachment emerged as the most common emotion the participants have for anthropomorphic objects. Pleasant emotions signified the positive relationship that participants build with the objects (Schultz et al., 1989). Participants anthropomorphized only the products to which they formed an attachment with. Product attachment is the emotional bond that consumers form using a product (Schifferstein & Zwartkruis-Pelgrim, 2008). Anthropomorphic products are usually associated with special experiences, such as memorable stories, being purchased in a special place, having required unusual

effort or sacrifice to purchase, or when buyers are reluctant about the purchase.

"The pair is one of the hard-to-find Nike items. It was a limited-edition Nike [Air] Force in collaboration with Givenchy. I felt very good after purchasing the shoes. I passed a few stops on the subway while I opened the box and examined them. I talk to this baby [the shoes] every morning and evening. "Thank you for being with me." I also ask if they are in any discomfort. I feel full just by looking at them." (P3, male, 33)

As literature suggests, attachment to products is formed when products are superior in their functional performance (Mugge et al., 2010), as shown in P3's statement.

Anthropomorphism is a way of making a distinction among their possessions. Not every possession is anthropomorphized. Participants anthropomorphize only those objects to which they are deeply attached to.

"You know the poem by Kim Chun-su, "The Flower?"", "When I called its name, it came to me and became the flower." Likewise, there are shoes that correspond to the flowers and those that do not. Some are babies I cherish much, and the others are just shoes. I keep the babies in my room separately [and I keep the other shoes outside]. I keep them like treasures. When I put them on, I walk very carefully. I cannot treat them carelessly." (P1, male, 29)

Although these fashion-forward participants own numerous fashion goods, they form a relationship only with objects of sentimental value. Participants stated that such special objects remind them of certain experiences, which reinforce their affection toward the products. Anthropomorphizing is a way of expressing and assuring their attachment to the objects that are associated with pleasurable experiences. Anthropomorphizing objects is a way of expressing their affection and is an evidence of the special relationship they formed with these objects.

Expressing this attachment, most participants shared the stories of naming the goods. The participants explained that the attachment becomes strong when they name objects. The names tend to reflect objects' color

or shape, and others names are sometimes related with others whom they share the memories or stories with.

"I have a special affection for my sneakers. I gave a name to the pair. It [The name] is something like White-black, Cement, and All Star. They usually reflect their color or materials. Such names are pretty common among [sneaker] maniacs, although I do not know who named them. I also name my other sneakers." (P3, male, 33)

"Naming something that I casually wear is unusual for me. Rather than cherishing my sleepwear, I wear it at home. I gave it a name while talking with my wife. My wife named it 'Koko' [Ko is an onomatopoeia for sound sleep in Korean], and it became the name of my sleepwear. When I look for Koko, my wife finds it and brings it to me, which is funny." (P2, male, 31)

The participants assure their attachment toward a certain product by giving it a unique name, which indicates the formation of a new relationship with that special possession. Participants stated that giving a name to a product makes them feel happy and invested in the relationship, thereby strengthening the relationship.

2) Loving Companion

Participants consider their anthropomorphized fashion goods as loving companions. They often use the expression of "going with" those products to a special place instead of "wearing" or "carrying" them there. They also stated that they are psychologically dependent on the items and consider these anthropomorphic objects family members, companions, or close friends.

"I bought a pair of shoes with the money I earned from a part-time job. I cherish them not because it is expensive but because it reminds me of my experiences. I worked really hard to purchase the shoes. Time flashes through my mind when I look at the shoes. They console me and give a sense of achievement. They are like my family or friend who recognizes my hard work. Wrapping these shoes makes me feel warm and reassured. I occasionally ask them if they are uncomfortable and check them. Sometimes, I put them out and spend all night without putting them back [in the closet]. I feel very comfortable and sleep soundly. They are friends and companions I can depend on." (P1, male, 29)

"Television [dramas] and movies describe them in such a [anthropomorphic] way and many call [fashion goods] "baby" in social net-

work service (SNS). Many salespeople say, "Bring the new babies." As my friends anthropomorphize shoes or bags, I tend to call a pair of shoes or a bag a 'baby' and say "bring him or her." As people around me call their possessions by name, I started to do the same. I purchased a bag and uploaded it on SNS with the hashtag "#Let's go home with your big sister." I have never felt strange seeing others anthropomorphizing. I think [anthropomorphism] is a natural phenomenon." (P4, female, 28)

The participants not only consider their bags and shoes accessories that complete their looks but also as companions or friends that interact with them. The notion of this type of companionship suggests that this parasocial relationship with special possessions is reciprocal, similar to interpersonal relationships. Not only do consumers care for their possessions but also recognize the caregiving role of these particular possessions. They believe such possessions deliver happiness to their owners by being their companions. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which reported that by anthropomorphizing special possessions, people form relationships with them, and that these possessions then become friends, family members, or partners (Shen et al., 2014).

3) Comforter for Materialistic Consumption

The findings present that consumer-driven anthropomorphic practice assuage negative emotions, such as guilt or regret in consumption. Consumers feel negative emotions when they engage in hedonic consumption, such as purchasing fashion goods instead of practical goods either at the pre- or post- purchase stage (Kivetz & Simonson, 2002). Thus, they want to avoid these negative emotions. Hur et al. (2015) defined anthropomorphizing as a temptation (e.g., tasty but unhealthy cookies) that creates the existence of products, indicating a diffusion of responsibility, thereby reducing the control of and a sense of responsibility for one's behaviors. The researchers interpret that the anthropomorphism of hedonic fashion goods reduces perceived control and responsibility, hence the guilt of materialistic practice. Data suggest that participants were able to avoid feelings of guilt or regret by anthropomorphizing

their purchases. We interpret that consumers' materialistic consumption is justified when possessions are granted with existential meanings; anthropomorphic practice appears to lessen the material aspect of possessions and instead emphasizes the companionship of possessions.

"When I want my boyfriend to buy me a bag but feel embarrassed to ask, I say "I want to take this baby home." I do not want to look materialistic. Anthropomorphism of goods attenuates such an impression. I do not want to be a "Doenjang girl [refers to a girl who enjoys extravagance and is extremely vain]" who tries to receive presents. It is not that I want to own any object, but I want to take "the" baby." (P4, female, 28)

"I have a friend who was preparing for her wedding. In an online chat room, even close friends are careful about talking about pricy wedding watch brands. No one wants to brag. Rather than mentioning pricy brand names, one does an anthropomorphism of them (e.g., "Rolegi" [Rolex watch]). Toning down the intensity of expression is preferred." (P8, female, 32)

Interestingly, participants believed that consumption of fashion goods is justified or is at least less embarrassing when they anthropomorphize items. Most anthropomorphic objects mentioned in the interviews are expensive or rare items, such as limited edition products. Although these fashion-conscious participants do not splurge on luxury goods every day, they feel guilty about special and hedonic purchases. Anthropomorphism provides self-justification and mitigates participants' sense of guilt.

2. Meanings of Anthropomorphic Relations in Interpersonal Relationship

1) Sharing an Interest

Although consumer-driven anthropomorphism is believed to be an individual practice that consists of naming and talking to an object, data suggest the usefulness of this practice in interpersonal relationships. Anthropomorphism is communicated while people converse about fashion goods. This tendency is common among female participants with high involvement in fashion.

They usually call their special possessions "babies" and claim that they have "brought" them, not "bought." When such participants interact with others who are similarly interested in fashion, anthropomorphic conversation becomes a way of sharing a common interest.

"Nike sneakers are traded in online communities. The phrases "they've been adopted" and "for adoption" are always used. By using such expressions, many people feel a sense of belonging to these communities. Everybody understands that the people who sell them feel like they are sending the sneakers for adoption. On occasion, one sends a product with a note asking to take good care of him/her well. When I see someone wearing popular sneakers on the street, I scan every item he or she is wearing. By looking at his or her style, I can tell if the person is a member of the online community or a [Nike] collector. The way he or she wears sneakers shows how well he or she treats "the baby." Looking at such sneakers, I feel good, thinking "You met a good master."" (P1, male, 29)

Participants stated that their use of anthropomorphism depends on whom they are talking to. As seen from the excerpt, anthropomorphic conversations take place with close friends and community members sharing a special interest in fashion. Participants do not anthropomorphize when they converse with strangers or with those who have no interest in fashion. Anthropomorphic conversation is frequent among fashion-forward consumers or members of a particular fashion community.

Gender difference in anthropomorphic practice was also observed. Male participants rarely use actual anthropomorphic expressions in face-to-face conversations with other male friends. However, they do not hesitate anthropomorphizing on SNS.

"I started anthropomorphizing products for the first time when I bought a Nike product through a [online] community of [Nike] collectors. Men do not usually use such expressions [anthropomorphizing verbs]. I saw a post saying, "Anyone who wants to take this baby?" and I commented "I will adopt him." "Adopting or taking him" are common expressions. Largely, shoes are anthropomorphized. I also named my car Whin-dung-I [meaning something white] because of its color. I started anthropomorphizing when I went snowboarding when

I was little. My snowboard's name was "Sbongi." I loved it. I seem to give names to important things." (P2, male, 31)

In Korea, women are socialized as relationship oriented. Consumer-driven anthropomorphism, which is a relationship-oriented practice, can be considered feminine. Social stigma may be attached to the practice of anthropomorphism. Thus, male participants engage in anthropomorphic practice only with people who share the same passion for the goods.

2) Enhancing Intimacy

Participants stated that they are engaged in anthropomorphic practice when they get along with close friends or romantic partners. Anthropomorphism helps enhance interpersonal relationships. Participants explained that anthropomorphic conversations work like jargons or secret codes among peers. They stated that such conversations increase intimacy.

"I sometimes anthropomorphize to flirt with my boyfriend. I have a red clutch that my boyfriend bought for me. Instead of saying, "Honey, I got the bag you bought for me today," I say "Honey, I brought Little Reddy today." It sounds cuter. My boyfriend then responds with "Little Reddy looks good on you." It is true that guys usually do not talk using anthropomorphism, but I think my boyfriend talks to me like that because I am his girlfriend. Using anthropomorphism is similar to giving each other a pet name that only the two of us know." (P4, female, 28)

"I anthropomorphize products when talking with my mom or best friends. I have a chinchilla vest, and mom and I named it Boksil [meaning something furry]. When we pick it up from the cleaner, I ask my mom, "Did you bring our Boksil?" Apart from that name, my mom and I have created several nicknames together. Only the two of us know what we are talking about, and having that sort of conversation is fun. I like anthropomorphizing because it makes me feel like we are friends. It feels like we are closer." (P6, female, 29)

When people share feelings, thoughts, beliefs and attitudes with conversational partners, such experiences contribute to the construction of relational bonds, which are valuable resources (Staske, 1999). Through the application of anthropomorphism during a conver-

sation with close friends or romantic partners, the conversation becomes a secretive interaction that only members understand, thereby creating intimacy. As in the youth culture where slang is used as a means to maintain the confidentiality or strengthen the sense of belonging in a group (Jeon, 2012), this finding suggests that anthropomorphism can serve as a medium to enhance the intimacy in interpersonal relationships.

V. Discussion and Conclusions

Although the phenomenon is widespread among Korean consumers, research on consumer-driven anthropomorphism is limited. Previous studies focused on consumer responses to the marketer-driven anthropomorphism of products, messages, and brands. By contrast, the present study examines spontaneous anthropomorphism on the basis of consumers' lived experiences focusing on personal interpretations as a possessor and meanings in their social relationships. The findings on consumer-driven anthropomorphism are conceptualized at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels.

At the intrapersonal level, consumers' anthropomorphism practice involves only the goods for which they have deep affection with, whereas marketer-driven anthropomorphism is uniformly applied to marketed products. The findings illustrate that anthropomorphic objects are typically named or called "baby" and become their owners' companions, which are carried and stored with special care and are spoken to. Consumer-driven anthropomorphism thus begins with purchase and use, whereas marketer-driven anthropomorphism occurs before acquisition. In the case of marketer-driven anthropomorphism, once consumers are exposed to an anthropomorphic marketing campaign and purchase a product, anthropomorphism no longer exists. However, consumer-driven anthropomorphism begins when a consumer encounters a special product at a store or when a product becomes one's favorite possession. In addition, anthropomorphism lasts in an interpersonal relationship. On the contrary, marketer-driven anthropomorphism helps reduce uncertainty toward a new product or brand. Consumer-driven anthropomorphism is

a special way of personalizing products by building companionship with consumption objects. Compared with discussions on possessions as extended self (Belk, 1988), consumer-driven anthropomorphism uncovers the nature of possessions as great companions in consumers' life.

At the interpersonal level, consumers' creative use of anthropomorphism is quite interesting. Findings that anthropomorphic conversation is useful in interpersonal relationships contradict the literature suggesting that anthropomorphism replaces social relationships (Cacioppo & Hawkey, 2009). Only close friends, romantic partners or family members can understand conversations that include the names of anthropomorphic objects. Therefore, consumer-driven anthropomorphic practice facilitates the sharing of a common interest and assuring intimacy. The findings of the present study based on consumers' experiences and personal meanings contribute to the literature on anthropomorphism. Contrary to marketer-driven anthropomorphism, consumers' spontaneous anthropomorphism is examined in the context of interpersonal relationship, which illustrates the transformative nature of anthropomorphism in consumption.

Interestingly, the study reveals that anthropomorphism reduces stigmas of materialism. When purchasing products of a strong hedonic nature (e.g., fashion goods), consumers search for justifications to remove negative emotions, such as guilt, and to acquire the approval of others (Kivetz & Simonson, 2002; Okada, 2005). As many participants mentioned, anthropomorphic objects are often expensive and hedonic in nature. This study suggests that consumers reduce their guilt by obtaining valuable relationships through paying premium price. Further research on diverse negative emotions and anthropomorphism of luxury goods with high symbolism and conspicuous consumption can be meaningful.

The following are the practical implications for marketers or retailers. By understanding the consumption of anthropomorphic fashion goods, the marketing communication of fashion brands can be strategically developed. As anthropomorphic fashion goods personally have special meanings and symbolic values, presenting a narrative of the special companionship between their

products or brands with their target consumers can effectively resonate with the target market. In addition, the psychology of justifying materialistic orientation can be effective when cognitive dissonance follows the purchase. A marketing campaign showing the anthropomorphism of fashion goods may reduce such dissonance supporting their decisions. Researchers believe that the enhancement of the relationship through sharing stories on one's anthropomorphic possessions can be frequent in relationship-oriented Eastern cultures. In Eastern cultures, relationships significantly affect social lives and market transactions (Sun et al., 2014). Customers in collectivist cultures are engaged in each other's daily lives attempting to increase their knowledge about other people, which in turn increases the tendency to practice anthropomorphism (Ghuman et al., 2015). Therefore, relationship enhancement is expected to be effective in a collectivist society. A scene in *Sex and the City*, a famous American television drama series, showed the female protagonist Carrie called a pair of Christian Louboutin shoes "Oh, my lover." The authors initiate this research thinking that the anthropomorphism of fashion goods is not unique to Korea but is common among consumers with high involvement in fashion goods across the world, making it an intriguing research topic. Although this study focuses on Korean consumers, future research can expand the scope to other cultural spheres, including other Eastern countries. Through cross-cultural research, the anthropomorphic practice of fashion goods in Eastern and Western cultures can be compared, thereby broadening the understanding of the anthropomorphism of fashion goods.

Although gender difference is observed in this study, the anthropomorphism of male consumers is insufficiently investigated. The limitations of this study are that the number of participants is small, and they are mostly female. Drawing from these limitations, future research must extend the scope of this study in terms of the gender and age of consumers.

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