The Role of Aesthetic Experience in Fashion Brands' SNS Accounts: Focusing on the Interaction of Narrative Images and Product Placement

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A B S T R A C T

Compared to consumers' focus, in the past, on the functional aspect of fashion products, consumers recently tend to place more importance on their impressive and memorable experiences in purchasing process. As consumer's interest changes from functional aspects to individual experience in purchasing process, fashion brands try to convey the identity of the brand through creating favourable consumers' experiences. Therefore, this study explores the effect of individuals' aesthetic experiences with fashion brands' SNS accounts on their attitudes. More specifically, the study evaluates whether consumers enjoy the flow of fashion brands' SNS accounts and form purchase intentions through their aesthetic experiences and product placement. Through a survey, empirical testing was done to investigate the effect of the aesthetic experience on of flow and purchase intentions. The current study tests the interaction effect among perceived aesthetic experience, narrative images, and product placement employing 2×2×2 MANOVA. The findings herein reveal that the aesthetic experience affects flow and purchase intention, and that there is a statistically significant interaction effect between aesthetic experience, narrative images, and product placement.

Keywords: Aesthetic Experience, Fashion Brands, Social Network Service, Narrative Images, Product Placement

Ⅰ. Introduction

As the global fashion market has become increasingly competitive, in recent years, the products and services provided by fashion brands are becoming increasingly similar. Under such circumstances, consumers are now not only interested in fashion products but also seeking out unique consumer experiences (Yang and He, 2011). Many fashion brands have adopted social network service (SNS) platforms as an effective way to satisfy consumers' desire for these special consumer experiences (Shin et al., 2018).

In the fashion brand sector, social media seem to play a key role in a brand's success. Fashion brands such as Burberry, Chanel, and Polo interact with consumers via SNS, where they share fashion stories and trends by continuously uploading image-based content (Loureiro et al., 2019).

Consumers have usually focused on the functional traits of products and services—such as price comparison features—prior to making a purchase. However, consumers are now pursuing more specific consumer experiences that are memorable and can be easily shared with others (Martin and Morich, 2011). In particular, consumer experiences through SNS can provide unique emotions and perceptions of products and services in a different way from traditional marketing channels (Balasubramanian et al., 2005). SNS is a type of communication channel designed to provide both text and image contents and facilitate real-time interaction among buyers and other individuals (Shin and Hall, 2011). Consumers can have a unique experience by sharing their own experiences with others via SNS. Additionally, the development of innovative technologies like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) is enabling consumers to enjoy unique shopping experiences that are not possible via traditional marketing channels. It is important for fashion brands to create a brand story based on the identity of the brand, and to share it with consumers to create a unique culture of the brand, not just marketing to compete with the product. These processes are being actively carried out through SNS (Kim and Ko, 2010). This study considers the aesthetic experience as one of these unique consumer experiences offered through fashion brands' SNS accounts.

The aesthetic experience is defined as one of the results of the interaction between the perception of an object and an individual's cognitive information process (Locher et al., 2009). Individuals having an aesthetic experience are in a state of fascination with a particular object, they cognitively evaluate the aesthetic object, and they feel exceptional emotions as a result (Venkatesh et al., 2010). Thus, as a special state of mind, the aesthetic experience occurs via certain information processes (Marković, 2012; Sheng and Teo, 2012). For instance, works of art invoke spectators' aesthetic experiences by stimulating their embodied imagination. Similarly, fashion images via SNS can induce consumers' aesthetic experiences by aesthetically communicating fashion-related freshness and trendiness, through which consumers may feel a new kind of excitement and pleasure. Online and offline retail spaces that can satisfy both the need for commerciality and the need for artistry can encourage consumers to stay for longer periods of time and/or consume more products by stimulating their positive emotions and perceptions (Nuttavuthisit, 2014). On fashion brands' SNS accounts, aesthetic experiences allow consumers to become immersed in fashion objects, and their positive evaluation and satisfaction with brand experiences may lead to positive consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Consumers' positive emotional and cognitive responses, thus, are invoked by aesthetic experiences via information processing. If aesthetic experiences provide emotional pleasure and are cognitively worth memorizing, consumers may stay longer or spend more money in order to maintain this positive emotional and cognitive state (Pine and Gilbert, 1998). The aesthetic experience in the retail space evokes affective experience and strengthens customers' experiential processing route (Dennis et al., 2014). Prior research has demonstrated that shoppers spend more time and money when they have pleasant shopping experiences. The aesthetic experience, one of consumers' pleasant experiences, has also been shown

to shape purchase intentions in social commerce (Choi, 2019). In particular, aesthetic experiences that are more closely connected to the shopping environment can lead consumers to complete their immersion in the shopping process. Ultimately, aesthetic experiences throughout the shopping process impact consumers' behaviors, decision-making, and evaluation of services (Turley and Milliman, 2000).

As such, the importance of consumer's aesthetic experience is being emphasized in the field of business. However prior studies have focused only on empirical analysis of product design emphasizing visual images, and studies on aesthetic experience induced by SNS account based on image content are insufficient. Brakus et al. (2009) regarded the subjective and internal reactions of consumers induced by the brand as brand experience, and suggested the overall type of brand experience that consumers experience; the components of the brand experience are divided into sensory experience, affective sensory, behavioral experience, and intellectual experience, among which the brand's sensory experience. Experience is defined as the reaction of sensory organs experienced by consumers from brand stimuli. Brakus et al. argue that the brand's sensory experience is deeply related to the aesthetic response and can induce sensory pleasure. However, the sensory experience of the brand proposed by Brakus et al. (2009) has limitations in explaining the aesthetic response induced by the brand identity (Krishna et al., 2010). It is hard to clearly identify the process that affects consumer's purchase intention only with aesthetic experience according to the physiological sense of the human being. Therefore, in exploring the effect of the aesthetic experience in fashion brands' SNS environments, this study examines consumers' state of flow in fashion brands' SNS accounts spaces and their purchase intentions as influenced by their

SNS-based aesthetic experiences.

Moreover, listing only products on an SNS account cannot lead to good consumer reactions. It is important how to express and convey the story or message that the brand wants to deliver to the consumer. Several previous studies have suggested ways to optimize the combination of content components in SNS (e.g., Kwok and Yu, 2013; Needles and Thompson, 2013; Levy and Gvili, 2015; Mozas-Moral et al., 2016; Fox and Longart, 2016). However, most previous studies have conducted in-depth research on the elements and characteristics of contents in SNS, and there has been rarely doing research on practical use of contents elements such as photo and video. Therefore, it is needed to study that analyzes the utilization plan for content components in SNS through an experiment based on theory.

SNS content is formed by posts that can include text, photos, videos, and graphics, and audiovisual and visual content create the most visibility (Mozas-Moral et al., 2016). The visual content shows not only the company's public relations (PR) information, but also the designer's life and episodes (Kim and Ko, 2010). In other words, visual content components demonstrate narrative images. Therefore, this study suggests that the effect of the aesthetic experience on flow and purchase intention can be influenced via the interaction between narrative images and product placement. Narrative images refer to visual content that essentially and explicitly narrate a story (Pimenta and Poovaiah, 2010), while product placement is a promotional marketing practice wherein brands and products are inserted into and used contextually in media for commercial purposes (Williams et al., 2011).

The SNS environment provides a marketing channel that can promote fashion brands in real time, making it easy to deliver in-depth content using image or video. Since consumers can track the navigation

process on SNS, retailers are able to conduct product placement at the point(s) where consumer traffic is most concentrated (Coker and Altobello, 2018). Therefore, this study expects to find a significant interaction between consumers' aesthetic experiences, narrative images, and product placement in this SNS environment.

Ⅱ. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

2.1. Aesthetic Experience, Flow and Purchase Intention

The term "aesthetic" refers to the visual form of an artifact and to the sensory experiences related to its texture, harmony, order, and beauty (Venkatesh and Meamber, 2008). Aesthetic experience differs from the phenomenon of aesthetic preference, which involves liking a specific object or the appraisal of beauty. Aesthetic experiences occur through the interaction of object-driven and cognitively-driven processes (Locher et al., 2009). The aesthetic experience emerges out of the dynamic interaction between the perception of specific categories of an object and the cognitive information process, through which individuals add their own meanings to an object based on their own judgments and appraisal of said object (Venkatesh et al., 2010). Focusing on the interaction between two components of object and cognition, the aesthetic experience can be defined as "a psychological process in which the attention is focused on the object while all other objects, events, and everyday concerns are suppressed" (Cupchik and Winston, 1996, p. 64). Thus, the aesthetic experience can be recognized as a special state of mind that is fundamentally different from the everyday experi-

ence (Marković, 2011). For example, the appraisal of beauty has been categorized under the area of everyday normal experiences with an object, while the aesthetic experience is perceived as an activation of higher levels of pleasure. Beauty should transcend from a beautiful object to an object of beauty with aesthetic values such as aesthetic fascination with grotesque, morbid or other kinds of deformation (Eco, 2007).

Fashion, particularly as it determines what is admired in terms of clothing styles, is an integral part of the visual sign system (Venkatesh et al., 2010). The aesthetic experience of fashion can vary greatly—and even be in conflict—from person to person. This aesthetic experience is also affected by culture, reference group, and individual tastes (McCracken, 2005). Given the proliferation of SNS platforms, fashion brands' individual aesthetic notions can be actively shared in real time; hence, individuals' aesthetic experiences can be modified and developed via social interplaying with other people. Specifically, in SNS spaces, interactions with other unknown people play an important role in shaping individuals' aesthetic experiences. These experiences, in turn, are processed based on the aesthetic information process (Chatterjee, 2003; Leder et al., 2004; Nadal et al., 2008). The most comprehensive aesthetic information processing model proposed by Leder et al. (2004) consists of five stages: *perceptual analysis, implicit memory integration, explicit classification, cognitive mastering,* and *evaluation*. Once an initial impression of a fashion brand via SNS is acquired through observation (*perceptual analysis*), its familiarity or prototype is processed (*implicit memory integration*). In the third stage, the explicit characteristics of a fashion brand's form, functionality, and style are processed (*explicit classification*). Then, individuals cognitively perceive fashion brand-specific aspects and interpret them

in their own ways (*cognitive mastering*). Lastly, individuals evaluate how successfully the fashion brand is understood (*evaluation*). This aesthetic processing model emphasizes the feedback relationship between individual perception, cognition, and emotion. In the SNS environment, this feedback relationship within the processing of aesthetic experience is reinforced by connectedness and unity with other people (Piedmont, 1999). Thus, the aesthetic experience is not limited to the visual domain, but it is rather a more intense experience of the explicit, emotional, and symbolic qualities of an object (Sheng and Teo, 2012).

The aesthetic experience has an effect on consumers' preferences, influencing their flow experience and increasing their purchase intentions. As defined by Csikszentmihalyi (1975), flow refers to an optimal mental state or a feeling of mental immersion. Recently, flow has been regarded as a way to define the nature of compelling online experiences. Novak et al. (2000) defined flow in online contexts as a cognitive state experienced during navigation. Csikszentmihalyi (1975) originally proposed six dimensions of flow consisting of concentration, emergence of action and awareness, perceived control, transcendence of self, transformation of time, and autotelic experience. Compared to Csikszentmihalyi, Trevino and Webster (1992) defined the concept of flow in online environments as follows: "Flow represents the extent to which (a) the individual perceives a sense of control over the interaction with the technology, (b) the individual perceives that his or her attention is focused on the interaction, (c) the individual's curiosity is aroused during the interaction, and (d) the individual finds the interaction intrinsically interesting" (Moon et al., 2014, p. 349). When having an aesthetic experience while navigating fashion brands' SNS accounts, individuals become immersed in a high level of concentration and attention on those particular fashion brands (Teasdale et al., 1999). In fashion brands' SNS accounts, individuals' aesthetic experiences can detach them from everyday life and lead them to lose their immediate sense of time and space (Marković, 2011). If individuals have aesthetic experiences while exploring fashion brands' SNS accounts, they are more likely to become fully engaged in the activity and feel a sense of flow. Therefore, the present study suggests the following hypothesis on aesthetic experience and flow:

H1: *Consumers' perceived aesthetic experiences will positively affect flow.*

The aesthetic experience also refers to an individual's holistic experience involving perceptual, cognitive, and emotional responses to an object; thus, it can provoke the irrational side of consumer behaviors such as purchase intention (Sheng and Teo, 2012). Creating a high degree of aesthetic experience can lead to positive outcomes; for example, consumers with favorable aesthetic experiences while navigating fashion brands' SNS accounts may purchase the brands' products and recommend those brands to friends and other potential consumers. Previous research has provided similar evidence that consumers' enjoyable experiences impact their purchase intentions. For instance, Boyer and Hult (2006) confirmed the relationship between consumer experience and purchase intentions through an empirical study. They administered a survey to 2100 consumers and demonstrated that consumers' behavioral intentions differ based on their levels of experience. Hedonic consumption influenced by favorable experiences, such as the aesthetic experience, particularly leads to extremely strong commitment and purchase intentions (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Similarly, Wu

(2017) suggested that the consumer's aesthetic response to a product stems from novelty, complexity, typicality, and unity of product design. The higher the novelty, the moderate level of complexity, the level of typicality, and the more unity of the product design is secured, the consumer may have a highest level of aesthetic experience, which in turn increases positive consumer behavior. If two products are similar in function and price, consumers prefer aesthetic appeal to get pleasure. Thus, as the overall product evaluation is based on aesthetic appeal as well as its actual function, the aesthetic appeal of the product will be a positive brand evaluation and affect consumer's ability to distinguish quality, followed by their consumer behavior such as purchase intention. Therefore, this study's hypothesis on aesthetic experience and purchase intention is as follows:

H2: Consumers' perceived aesthetic experiences will positively affect purchase intentions.

2.2. Interaction of Aesthetic Experience and Narrative Image

The concept of narrative means a temporal semantic structure that provides different kinds of information (Chatman, 1980). According to Richardson (2000), story can be defined as a chronic sequence of events in a particular time and order, while narrative is the representation of a story and therefore has an expressive function. A narrative adds affective and connotative meanings to the information provided by the story (Chatman, 1980) and represents a story that the individual mentally interprets based on his or her knowledge or attention (Fishbein and Yzer, 2003). Building on these definitions, a narrative image can be recognized as a visual that essentially and explicitly narrates a story (Pimenta and Poovaiah,

2010). Narrative images featuring various symbolic meanings can contribute to consumers' clearer understanding of an implied story (Marković, 2011). Consumers interpret brand stories through narrative images in communication media and transform them into a memorable experience (Kim et al., 2016). Visual and image-sharing SNS platforms—including Instagram, Snapchat, and Pinterest—effectively attract consumer attention and thereby increase consumer traffic and engagement (Rein, 2016). For this reason, companies often sponsor SNS platforms; for example, Snapchat has been sponsored by Burberry, the Instagram campaign "Build your GLA" was promoted by Mercedes-Benz, and the Instagram campaign "#TravelForReal" was backed by the Lowe Hotel (Huang et al., 2018).

Based on the transportation-imagery model of imagery processing (Green, 2008; Green and Brock, 2002), consumers mentally process visual messages when the messages presented work as narratives. In turn, consumers become immersed in those narratives on social networks (Kozinets et al., 2010). The transportation-imagery model posits that SNS messages including photos and video content are likely to facilitate narrative transportation; from there, persuasion occurs to the extent to which consumers are immersed in an object (Huang et al., 2018). In the fashion industry, fashion imagery including photos and videos can produce narrative transportation for consumers. Fashion brands attempt to transport consumers by connecting specific fashion images and narratives with consumers' fashion experiences (Schmitt, 1999). Narrative images in fashion offer a viable avenue to consumer persuasion through heightened emotion, motivation, and reduced negative cognitive responses to the intended narratives (Escalas, 2007).

Motivated consumers with a high degree of aes-

thetic experience will favorably process and evaluate fashion brands' arguments and claims in those brands' persuasion attempts. Thus, brands' persuasion efforts using narrative images can change or enhance consumer attitudes and behaviors (Green and Brock, 2002). Considering the positive effect of each of aesthetic experience and narrative image on consumer attitude and behaviors, it is expected that the interaction of these two factors stimulates consumers' flow experience and purchase intention. McKenna et al. (2017) conducted exploratory research on the effect of visual narrative contents of websites on readers' reaction. They showed that if a reader has aesthetic experience in contents with a visualized image, it appeals to the reader's visual sense, resulting in engagement or flow.

In addition, having a stronger aesthetic experience while engaging with a brand can be intensified through the interpretation of deeper symbolic meanings in narrative images, which can become a predictor of positive outcomes for fashion brands (Phillips and Mcquarrie, 2010). For example, the fashion film on SNS, which refers to a form of moving image to display fashionable clothing, conveys the fashion brand image sensationally and symbolically using text as well as visual, auditory, and virtual elements (Rees-Roberts, 2018). These fashion films are used as a means to stimulate purchase intention of potential consumers and maintain customer loyalty. In the process of holistically evaluating fashion brands' SNS accounts, a consumer may reach a higher level of aesthetic experience and understand the implicit symbolic meanings of the fashion images; thus, the consumer will be more immersed in the activity, activating a state of flow. Furthermore, the interaction between aesthetic experience and narrative images is expected to positively affect consumers' purchase intentions. Therefore, the following hypoth-

eses are proposed:

H3: *In perceiving high levels of narrative image in SNS of fashion brand, the association between aesthetic experience and flow is stronger than in perceiving low levels of narrative image.*

H4: *In perceiving high levels of narrative image in SNS of fashion brand, the association between aesthetic experience and purchase intention is stronger than in perceiving low levels of narrative image.*

2.3. Interaction of Aesthetic Experience and Product Placement

Product placement (PPL) is defined as a promotional marketing practice wherein brands and products are inserted into and used contextually in media for commercial purposes (Williams et al., 2011). Product placement in media provides exposure to potential target consumers and advertises brands to be consumed in natural settings (Stephen and Coote, 2005). Similar to the belief of advertising, product placement is believed to increase consumer interest, intent to purchase, and change behavior. With the recent fragmentation and proliferation of media, product placement has become an effective way to reach potential consumers and to replenish the declining efficacy of traditional advertising. Brennan and Babin (2004) showed the effectiveness of product placement with regard to recognition, recall, and customer attitudes. Product placement is originally defined as the inclusion of trademarked merchandise and brand-name product in the media. In a motion picture as a product placement, for example, filmmakers may include direct depictions of real products. On the other hand, a brand can be appeared in the media via an indirect product placement by showing

the meticulous production process rather than directly presenting a product. Delivering information through images or videos and enabling direct interaction with customers, SNS such as Instagram and Facebook is regarded as an optimized platform for the fashion area (Woo and Kim, 2019). In the SNS, a product placement, which directly represents a product as well as indirectly depicts various brand-related contents, is available. Therefore, companies attempt to provide product and brand information in an engaging product placement format including storytelling, images, and video via SNS.

However, it is difficult to elicit a positive response from consumers simply by presenting the product on SNS account. Generally, the product information that consumers obtain via SNS can be processed through two modes of thinking—heuristic and systematic. The heuristic-systematic model (HSM) proposed by Chaiken (1980) is based on dual-process theory, which illustrates how information processing behavior can produce decision-making outcomes. According to this model, individuals process product information heuristically as well as systematically. From the heuristic view, individuals focus on the role of simple rules rather than detailed information processing. In contrast, the systematic view stresses detailed processing of messages and cognition. Zhu and Chang (2015) have argued that a non-content feedback cue on an individual's internal state regarding a particular information source is heuristically processed and directly affects his or her decisions. Information quality factors, however, are content cues and thus processed systematically. In the context of fashion brands' SNS accounts employing product placement, the non-content cues of positive emotion arise from feedback regarding consumers' internal states toward those fashion brands. In accordance with the heuristic mode of thinking, consumers also

systematically process product information by increasing their attention to detailed product quality factors—such as usefulness—and updating their existing knowledge (Campbell and Keller, 2003).

Prior research on consumer attitudes and behaviors toward product placement has revealed positive perceptions of this practice (De Gregorio and Sung, 2010). Product placement in SNS enhances consumers' information processing and increases the persuasive factor of such a practice. Interacting with products and online communities positively affects consumers' favorable attitudes toward the fashion brands being presented via SNS (Zhu and Chang, 2015). Consumers' evaluations of fashion brands are congruent with their emotions; thus, consumers' positive emotions influence their attention and interest in brands' products, leading to a state of flow and affecting consumers' purchase intentions (Campbell and Keller, 2003; Williams et al., 2011). Thus, product placement via SNS can produce desired changes in flow and purchase intentions, leading to positive evaluations of particular brands (Williams et al., 2011). The present study posits that dual-process information processing is expected to have a stronger influence on consumer attitudes and behaviors when combined with the effects of the aesthetic experience. In the initial stages of the aesthetic experience—i.e., perceptual analysis and implicit memory integration—product placement will help consumers process information heuristically. Product placement offers consumers a chance to observe information visually and to process its familiarity. Hence, product placement may improve consumers' ability to process information more systematically during the stages of perceptual analysis and implicit memory integration, making positive brand evaluation possible. Thus, individual consumers can process information regarding product style and features presented via product

placement and interpret that information in their own ways. Through the strategies of interactive aesthetic experience and product placement, consumers can holistically process information regarding fashion brands in SNS environments.

Moreover, in the case of fashion products, it is important to induce aesthetic experience by emphasizing the visual elements of the product. A direct product placement using images, videos, or VR (virtual reality) in the SNS enhances the aesthetic experience of consumers and induces positive consumer responses (Woo and Kim, 2019). Consumers experience flow by feeling telepresence as if they were seeing actual product images through the visualized direct product placement in the SNS (Steuer, 1992). This telepresence that leads consumers' flow is influenced by sensory properties of the media (Lee, 2018). The sensory attribute is an element related to a consumer's audio-visual sense (Mahfouz and Philaretou, 2008) and is related to aesthetic factors such as vivid screens or app design. Therefore, flow experience of consumers can be enhanced when sensory attributes interact with direct product placement that make them real. Based on prior research, this study proposes the following hypotheses about the interaction effect between the aesthetic experience and product placement on flow and purchase intention:

H5: *The association among aesthetic experience, flow, and purchase intention is influenced by product placement in the following manner:*

H5.1: *In perceiving direct product placement in SNS of fashion brand, the association between aesthetic experience and flow is stronger than in perceiving indirect product placement.*

H5.2: *In perceiving direct product placement in SNS of*

fashion brand, the association between aesthetic experience and purchase intention is stronger than in perceiving indirect product placement.

Previous studies have explored, respectively, the effects of the aesthetic experience, narrative images, and product placement on consumers. These studies have found that consumers' flow states and purchase intentions are significantly more positive when consumers perceive a high degree of aesthetic experience, when they understand what particular narrative images intend to convey, and when product placement is provided. However, the present study proposes the existence of an integrated interaction effect between these three factors on flow and purchase intention. During consumers' aesthetic experiences via fashion brands' SNS accounts, the degree of consumers' flow states and purchase intentions is likely to increase positively if consumers are provided with in-depth product information with narrative images, if they understand what the fashion brand intends to convey, and if they can confirm this information visually via product placement.

Fashion brands utilize SNS to interact with their consumers directly without the help of intermediaries. Fashion contents created within the realm of the new media, such as SNS, are now in the forms of videos and images unlike its analog predecessors, and such media-focused contents convey a variety of information regarding the content, design trend, fashion program, and brand departments. For instance, 70% of the posts created by the official Instagram account of Vogue Korea consisted of 30 seconds to a minute-long video. In 2018 S/S season, Prada utilized animation that rendered virtual reality through computer graphics in its "Real Life Comix" contents (Son and Kim, 2019). As such, recent fashion brands consider the visual, auditory, and virtual aspects

that could enhance its consumers' aesthetic experience and their imagination, and convey more meanings through its contents. Direct product placement, which is to view the actual product in this virtual space where reality and imagination is synthesized, evoke positive sentiments from the consumers. Thus, based on previous literature, it is hypothesized that:

H6: The association among aesthetic experience, flow, and purchase intention is influenced by narrative image and product placement in the following manner:

H6.1: In perceiving high levels of narrative image and direct product placement in SNS of fashion brand, the association between aesthetic experience and flow is stronger than in perceiving low levels of narrative image and indirect product placement.

H6.2: In perceiving high levels of narrative image and direct product placement in SNS of fashion brand, the association between aesthetic experience and purchase intention is stronger than in perceiving low levels of narrative image and indirect product placement.

Based on the above research hypotheses, this study suggests the following research model (see <Figure 1>).
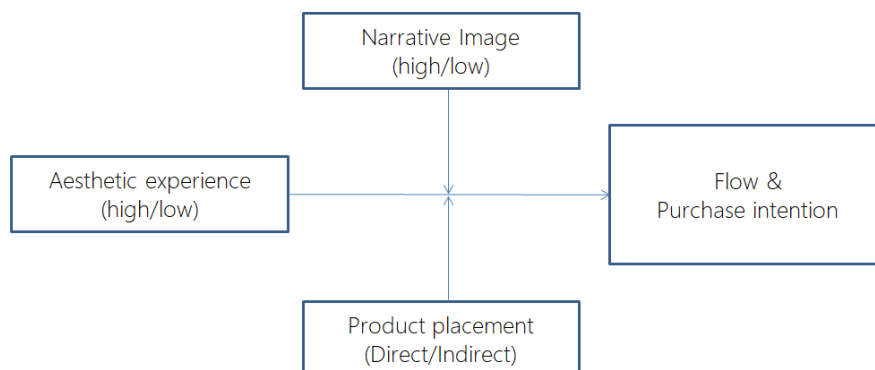
Ⅲ. Method

The study used a 2 × 2 × 2 between-subjects experimental design with two levels of aesthetic experience (high / low), two levels of narrative images (high / low) and two levels of product placement (direct / indirect). A manipulation check was also performed for each group. The experimental materials were selected from the Instagram posts of two brands and the experiment was conducted by 20 people in each group. For the manipulation check, the operational definition and measurement items of each variable were derived. In this context, aesthetic experience can be defined as consumers' passive experience and appreciation of aesthetic elements in a particular space (McLellan, 2000; Pine and Gilbert, 1998; Sheng and Teo, 2012). The aesthetic experience is a result of the dynamic interaction between the perception of an object's specific categories and the cognitive information process through which individuals add their own meanings to said object based on their own judgment and appraisal (Venkatesh et al., 2010). Respondents were asked to evaluate the degree of aesthetic experience that they achieved through a fashion brand's social media images. A higher number on the response scale indicated higher

<Figure 1> Research Model

levels of aesthetic experience, while a lower number indicated lower levels of aesthetic experience. This was measured by items such as "The posted images of this SNS are beautiful," "The posted images give me new pleasure," and "There are many beautiful things to see on this SNS account." Pine and Gilbert (1998) modified and applied based on the literature of McLellan (2000).

A narrative image can be defined as a visual that essentially and explicitly narrates a story (Kozinets et al., 2010; Pimenta and Poovaiah, 2010). Narrative images with various symbolic meanings contribute to consumers' increased understanding of a brand's implied story (Marković, 2011). Social networks can use implied images to communicate certain information. In this study, narrative images are associated with consumers' level of understanding of a brand's implied message communicated through that brand's uploaded SNS images. Respondents were asked to indicate how well they understood the brand's story or message through its posted images. Some of the measurement items for this included "The images on this SNS are well understood" (Pimenta and Poovaiah, 2010) and "It is easy to understand what the images on this SNS mean" (Kozinets et al., 2010; Marković, 2011). For these questions, high scores indicate that respondents understood the message of the brand's SNS images clearly.

Product placement in media provides exposure to potential target consumers and advertises brands to be consumed in natural settings (Stephen and Coote, 2005). Product placement in brands' SNS images affects consumers' information processing (Coker and Altobello, 2018). This effect tends to differ based on the type of product placement that is used. In this study, product placement was divided into two categories—direct presentation and indirect presentation—by measuring the extent to which

products appeared directly in brands' SNS images. Some of the measurement items for product placement derived from the work of Stephen and Coote (2005). Those included "The product is a prominent feature in the image of this SNS," "The product is at the center of the image in this SNS," "The image of this SNS seems to advertise the product directly." For these questions, high scores indicated direct presentation while lower scores indicated indirect presentation.

A manipulation check was also performed for each group. The results of the t-test indicated that there were significant differences between high aesthetic experience ($M = 4.01$) and low aesthetic experience ($M = 2.34$) ($F = 248.76$, $P < 0.001$). Moreover, significant differences were found between high narrative image values ($M = 2.83$) and low narrative image values ($M = 1.00$) ($F = 255.38$, $p < 0.001$). The t-test also showed that there were significant differences between direct product placement ($M = 3.68$) and indirect product placement ($M = 1.49$) ($F = 407.14$, $p < 0.001$).

As defined previously, flow refers to an optimal mental state or a feeling of mental immersion (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). In this study, flow also signifies a state where individuals feel pleasure and curiosity while being online and where they lose track of time. When consumers are in a positive mood, they may emotionally respond to situational stimuli and then perform buying behaviors (Huang, 2016). Aside from hedonic gratification from social interaction, flow experience may play an important role in the formation of buying behavior. This study suggests that aesthetic experience, narrative images, and product placement will enhance users' flow states as they interact with fashion brands' SNS accounts. Thus, flow was measured based on respondents' degree of immersion and losing track of time while

browsing brands' SNS accounts (Mahnke et al., 2015).

It is essential to understand consumers' purchasing behavior for customer retention and discovery (Ko et al., 2008). From this point of view, this study also attempts to analyze whether the combination of messages delivered by SNS accounts of fashion brands can trigger purchase intentions. Purchase intention was also measured based on respondents' desired level to purchase the products presented in the brands' SNS accounts (Kim and Ko, 2010). All constructs were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Data collection was conducted with individuals in their 20s and 30s in South Korea. The study's respondents actively interact with fashion brand accounts on social media. The survey was administered to 180 respondents. In total, 140 of the survey responses were used for analysis after excluding respondents who did not use fashion brands' SNS accounts (28) and removing inadequate or incomplete questionnaires (12). Each of the eight groups consisted of 17-20 people. In terms of gender distribution, 44.3% (n = 62) of respondents were men and 55.7% (n = 78) were women; moreover, 60.7% (n = 85) of respondents were in their 20s while 39.3% (n = 55) were in their 30s. The Instagram fashion brand

accounts with which they interacted were diverse, including luxury brands (Burberry, Chanel, Gucci, Hermes Louis Vuitton, Prada, Trussardi, etc.), sports fashion brands (Adidas, Converse, New Balance, Nike, Puma, Under Armour, etc.), and SPA brands (Cos, Gap, HandM, Mango, Top Shop, Zara, etc.). The average number of fashion brand accounts followed by respondents was 2.8, while the average number of fashion-related accounts was 3.5. The collected data were input into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program for analysis.

Ⅳ. Results

This study analyzes variations in flow and purchase intentions depending on the degree of aesthetic experience, narrative images, and product placement perceived by users while interacting with fashion brands' SNS accounts. For this purpose, MANOVA was employed with aesthetic experience, narrative images, and product placement as independent variables and flow and purchase intentions as dependent variables. <Table 1> presents the analysis results.

First, the analysis results for Hypothesis 1 and

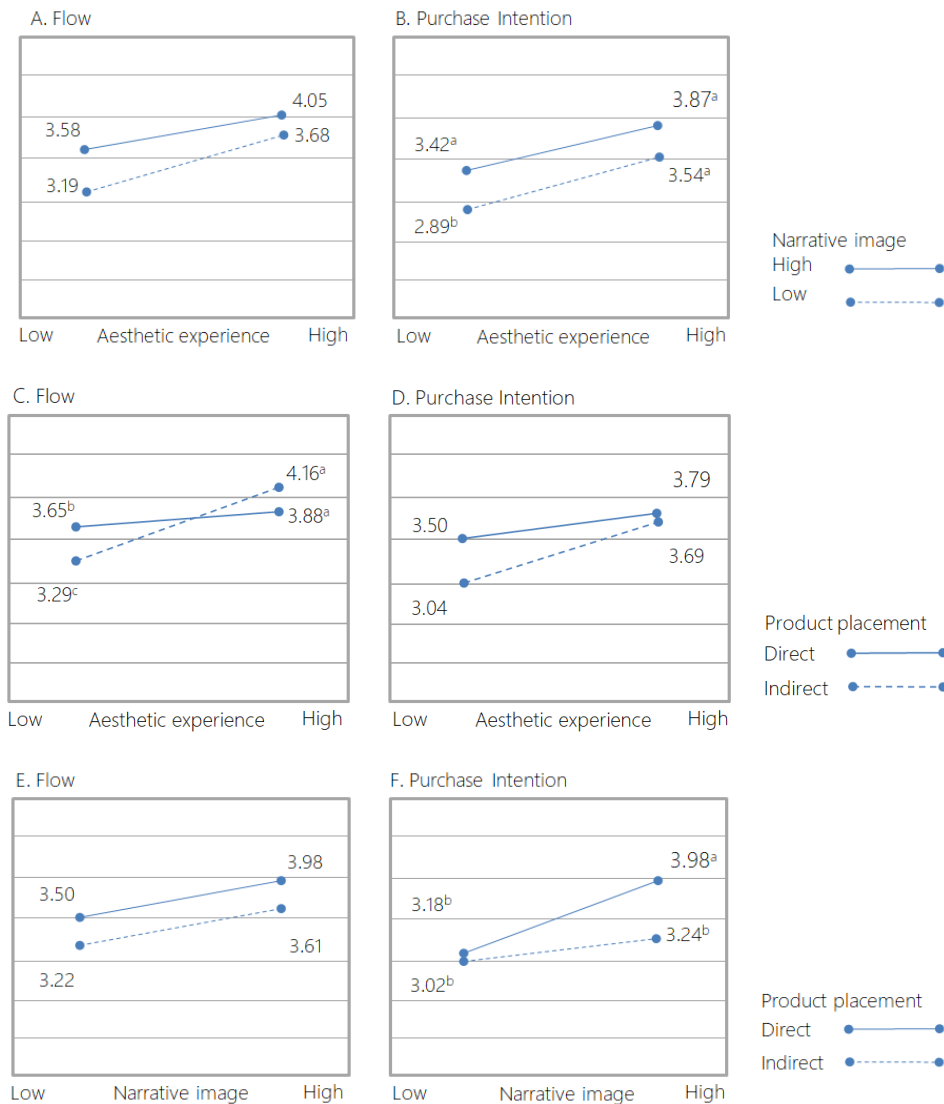<Table 1> MANOVA for Perceived Preference Fit Related Hypotheses

Dependent Variable		Flow		Purchase intentions	
Source	D.F	M.S.	F-value	M.S.	F-value
A. Aesthetic experience	1	5.916	7.252**	5.185	6.596*
B. Narrative images	1	0.491	0.602	0.427	0.543
C. Product placement	1	0.090	0.110	0.188	0.239
A×B	1	0.420	0.515	4.610	5.865*
A×C	1	3.825	4.689*	2.552	3.247
B×C	1	1.010	1.238	8.602	10.943**
A×B×C	1	3.422	4.195*	4.696	5.974*
Error	132	0.816		0.786	

Note: *p < 0.05, **p < 0.01

2 on the effects of aesthetic experience on flow and purchase intentions are as follows. This analysis revealed that the greater degree of perceived aesthetic experience, the higher the flow state; thus, Hypothesis 1 was accepted (Mlow: 3.38, Mhigh: 3.93, F = 12.049 $p < 0.01$). The analysis also uncovered that the greater degree of perceived aesthetic experience, the higher the purchase intentions; thus, Hypothesis 2 was also accepted (Mlow: 3.16, Mhigh: 3.77, F = 14.081, $p < 0.01$).

The analysis results for Hypothesis 3 and 4 on the interaction effects based on low and high levels of aesthetic experience and narrative images are as follows. The study's analysis found no significant differences in the effects on flow (F = 0.515, $p > 0.05$, <Figure 2A>); however, the effects on purchase intentions did exhibit significant differences (F = 5.865,

<Figure 2> Results of the Effects of Two-Way Interaction

$p < 0.05$, <Figure 2B>). A post hoc test (Duncan test) was performed to compare the differences in purchase intentions more specifically. A comparison of four groups based on aesthetic experience and narrative images revealed that purchase intentions were low only when both aesthetic experience and narrative images were low (Group A: 3.87, 3.54, 3.42 / Group B: 2.89, $F = 7.720$, $p < 0.001$). This implies that there is no difference in purchase intentions based on narrative images when the level of aesthetic experience is high; however, purchase intentions may decrease if *both* narrative images and aesthetic experience are low.

Hypothesis 5 compares the differences in the effects of XYZ based on the level of aesthetic experience and product placement methods. First, significant differences were found in the effects on flow ($F = 4.689$, $p < 0.05$, <Figure 2C>). A post hoc test (Duncan test) was performed to compare these differences more specifically. Through the test, three separate groups were identified (Group A: 4.16, 3.88 / Group B: 3.65 / Group C: 3.29, $F = 5.138$, $p < 0.01$). Flow was found to be high when the level of aesthetic experience was high, revealing no difference based on product placement methods. Nonetheless, when the level of aesthetic experience was low, flow was also low—and even lower in the case of indirect placement versus direct placement. These findings imply that direct product placement has more positive effects on flow if the level of aesthetic experience is low. No statistically significant difference was found in purchase intentions depending on the level of aesthetic experience and product placement methods; thus, Hypothesis 5 was rejected ($F = 3.247$, $p > 0.05$, <Figure 2D>).

Further meaning was derived from the analysis results. Although this study did not propose this as a hypothesis, significant differences were found

in the interaction effects related to purchase intentions depending on narrative images and product placement ($F = 10.943$, $p < 0.01$, <Figure 2F>). When aesthetic experience was high, three separate groups were identified. Purchase intentions were found to be highest when narrative images were low and indirect product placement was used (group d: $M = 4.60$), followed by high narrative images and direct product placement (group b: $M = 4.02$). When the level of aesthetic experience was perceived to be high, purchase intentions became lower when narrative images were low and direct placement was employed ($M = 3.24$) and when narrative images were high and indirect placement was employed ($M = 3.24$). No statistically significant differences were found in flow based on narrative images and product placement methods; thus, Hypothesis X was rejected ($F = 1.238$, $p > 0.05$, <Figure 2E>).
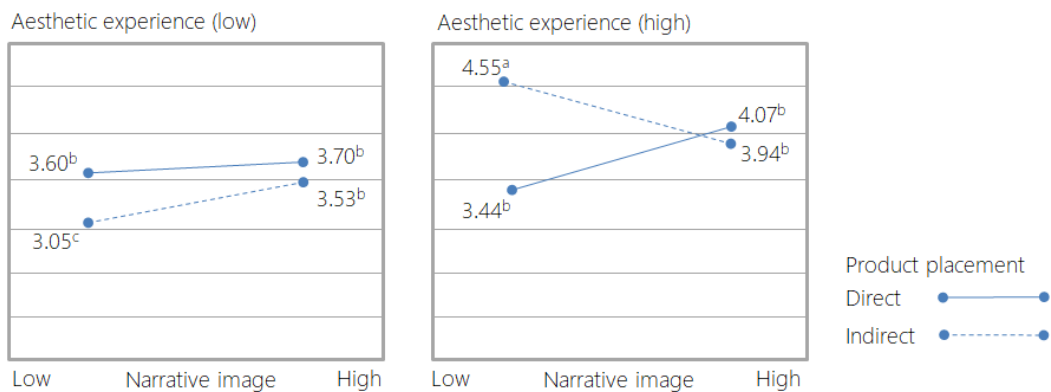
Hypothesis 6 aimed to test the effects of the three-way interaction of the study's independent variables—aesthetic experience, narrative images, and product placement—on flow and purchase intentions. Hypothesis 6-1 assumes that flow will exhibit differences due to the three-way interaction effects between the independent variables. An analysis revealed statistically significant differences ($F = 4.195$, $P < 0.05$); thus, the hypothesis was accepted. A post hoc test (Duncan test) was performed to compare specific between-group differences (<Table 2> and <Figure 3>). Eight groups were divided into three groups, labeled a, b, and c ($F = 3.764$, $P < 0.01$). Flow was found to be highest (a) when narrative images were low and products were placed indirectly with a high level of aesthetic experience ($M = 4.55$). In contrast, flow was lowest (c) when narrative images were low and products were placed indirectly with a low level of aesthetic experience ($M = 3.05$).

More specific results based on low and high levels

<Table 2> Mean and Standard Deviations for Flow

	Aesthetic experience (low)		Aesthetic experience (high)		
	Narrative Images		Narrative Images		
	Low	High	Low	High	
Product placement (Direct)	3.60b (.918)	3.70b (.943)	3.44b (.744)	4.07b (1.039)	3.81 (.969)
Product placement (Indirect)	3.05c (.514)	3.53b (1.014)	4.55a (1.258)	3.94b (1.069)	3.42 (.925)
	3.19 (.666)	3.58 (.987)	3.68 (.963)	4.05 (1.031)	

Note: The standard deviations are in parentheses. To examine the differences, the Duncan test was employed.

<Figure 3> Results of Differences in Flow based on Three-Way Interaction Effects

of aesthetic experience are as follows. First, two separate groups were identified at a low level of aesthetic experience. Flow was found to be low when narrative images were low and indirect product placement was employed (group c: $M = 3.05$); however, flow became relatively high in the remaining case (group b: $M = 3.70, 3.60, 3.53$).

At a high level of aesthetic experience, two groups were identified. Flow was found to be high when narrative images were low and indirect product placement was employed (group a: $M = 4.55$); however, flow became relatively high in the remaining case (group b: $M = 4.07, 3.94, 3.44$).
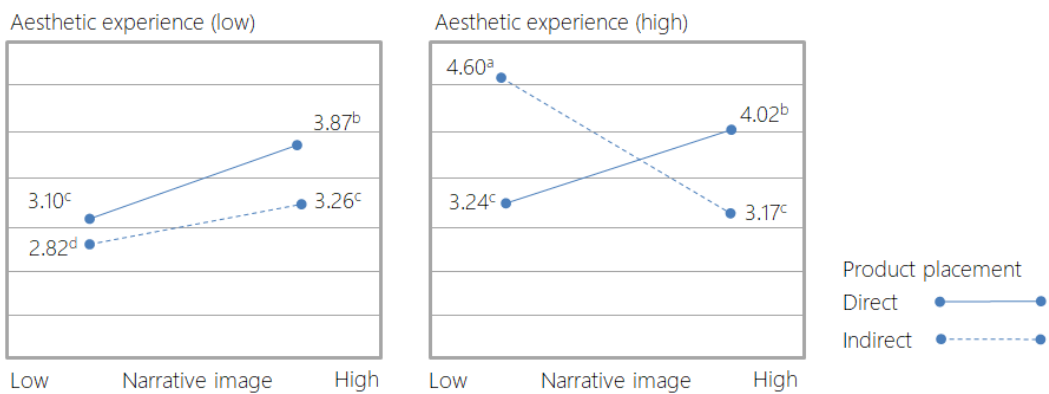
Hypothesis 6-2 aimed to evaluate differences in purchase intentions depending on the independent variables' three-way interaction effects. An analysis revealed statistically significant differences ($F = 5.974$, $P < 0.05$); thus, the hypothesis was accepted. A post hoc test (Duncan test) led to the creation of eight groups, further divided into four groups (<Table 3>, <Figure 4>, $F = 6.073$, $P < 0.001$). Purchase intentions were found to be highest (a) when narrative images were low and products were placed indirectly with a high level of aesthetic experience ($M = 4.60$). In contrast, purchase intentions were lowest (d) when narrative images were low and products were placed indirectly with a low level of aesthetic experience ($M = 3.05$). These findings mirrored the results for

<Table 3> Mean and Standard Deviations for Purchase Intentions

	Aesthetic experience (low)		Aesthetic experience (high)		
	Narrative Images		Narrative Images		
	Low	High	Low	High	
Product placement (Direct)	3.10c (.849)	3.87b (.904)	3.24c (.744)	4.02b (1.173)	3.70 (1.067)
Product placement (Indirect)	2.82d (.425)	3.26c (.922)	4.60a (1.414)	3.17c (.534)	3.14 (.838)
	2.89 (.558)	3.42 (.946)	3.54 (1.055)	3.87 (1.131)	

Note: The standard deviations are in parentheses. To examine the differences, the Duncan test was employed.

<Figure 4> Results of Differences in Purchase Intentions based on Three-Way Interaction Effects

flow, as described in detail above.

More specific results based on low and high levels of aesthetic experience are as follows. Three separate groups were identified at a low level of aesthetic experience. Purchase intentions were lowest when narrative images were low and indirect product placement was employed (group d: $M = 2.82$); purchase intentions were found to be highest, in contrast, when narrative images were high and direct product placement was used (group b: $M = 3.87$). Purchase intentions were found to be at an intermediate level when narrative images were low and direct placement was employed ($M = 3.10$) and also when narrative images were high and indirect placement was used

($M = 3.26$) (group c: $M = 2.82$).

At a high level of aesthetic experience, three groups were identified. Purchase intentions were highest when narrative images were low and indirect product placement was used (group d: $M = 4.60$), followed by the scenario of high narrative images and direct product placement (group b: $M = 4.02$). Moreover, when the level of aesthetic experience was perceived to be high, purchase intentions were found to be low when narrative images were low and products were placed directly ($M = 3.24$) and also when narrative images were high and products were placed indirectly ($M = 3.24$).

Ⅴ. Discussion

5.1. Discussion of Findings and Implications

In the digital era of the 21st century, fashion brands are not marketing to compete with clothes. They should inform the brand's culture and history to consumers who want to purchase the brand's culture and values and develop real-time communication with them quickly and unusually. Therefore, marketing using SNS in fashion brands will appear in more and more diverse aspects, and at the same time, it will play an essential role in fashion marketing. However, there is a lack of research regard to how consumers have a pleasant experience through fashion brand SNS and receive the message that companies want to deliver through SNS account.

This study classifies the images that are currently actively used in fashion brand SNS according to the level of aesthetic experience, narrative image, and product placement (direct/indirect), and compares a total of 8 situations to analyze the difference between flow and purchase intention. It is meaningful in that it is possible to propose a selection strategy suitable for the purpose of presenting the image as follows by conducting a MANOVA analysis suitable for this difference analysis. The following implications were derived from the analysis results. First, if the level of aesthetic experience is high, flow and purchase intentions tend to increase. That is, fashion brands can meaningfully utilize SNS platforms for the purpose of enhancing aesthetic experience, which can provoke higher levels of pleasure (Marković, 2011). Consumers actively use SNS platforms to access these kinds of aesthetic experiences, to reinforce their fashion preferences, and to feel trendy and fashionable. Simply utilizing SNS platforms to invoke individuals' aesthetic experience can enable users to access a state of flow and enjoyment, which can also lead them to purchase products.

Second, high states of flow are found, above all, in cases of high aesthetic experience. For this, direct product placement enhances the experience of flow more so than indirect placement. Thus, enhancing the aesthetic experience is very effective for delivering brand images via SNS and increasing flow while users interact with certain brands. Since direct product placement more strongly enhances flow, a conclusion may be drawn that this type of product placement is helpful in creating flow states to facilitate consumers' processes of clearly understanding product information, browsing several products, and grasping the brand's identity. The aesthetic experience is activated through cognition-based interaction, not just through the evaluation of beauty or preference (Locher et al., 2009). Thus, if product images are understood directly, this type of interaction can be activated to help users sink into flow.

Third, if narrative images are low when the level of aesthetic experience is low, consumers' purchase intentions decline. When evaluated based on the levels of aesthetic experience and the levels of narrative images, no difference was found in the effects on flow; however, differences were uncovered in the effects on purchase intentions. These findings demonstrate that if aesthetic experience is low and users fail to understand the content that an image intends to communicate, it is difficult to generate a purchase. However, the study's findings also reveal that if either aesthetic experience or narrative images become high, a purchase can be generated (compared to the scenario where both factors are low). The aesthetic experience is activated by the dynamic interaction in an individual's information cognition process. If users are able to properly understand the content communicated by an image, they can have an aesthetic experi-

ence as they conduct their own evaluation and add their own meanings in a scenario with high levels of narrative images. It can then be expected for purchase intentions to be formed throughout such a process (Venkatesh et al., 2010). These findings reveal that even if a fashion brand does not operate an SNS platform to trigger consumers' aesthetic experiences, that brand can still increase purchase intentions through the effects of narrative images by making its content easily understandable.

Fourth, the study's findings on flow based on the levels of aesthetic experience were opposite to the results on XYZ. When the level of aesthetic experience was low, flow was found to be lowest when narrative images were also low and indirect product placement was used; however, when the level of aesthetic experience was high, flow was found to be highest under the same conditions. If aesthetic experience is enhanced even when users cannot fully understand the information communicated by an image and when products are placed indirectly, flow can be triggered; however, if aesthetic experience decreases in this type of situation, the development of flow is difficult. It may be assumed that this is also because the process of understanding a message presented indirectly in a situation of high-level aesthetic experience progresses, and the process of understanding further an image progresses, since aesthetic experience is processed on the basis of aesthetic information process (Chatterjee, 2003; Leder et al., 2004; Nadal et al., 2008). Moreover, the interpretation of the deep symbolic meaning of a narrative image can further strengthen a fashion brand's aesthetic experience of, which contributes to the development of positive attitudes (Phillips and Mcquarrie, 2010).

The study's findings on purchase intentions exhibited a similar trend to the results regarding flow. When the level of narrative images is low and prod-

ucts are placed indirectly, purchase intentions are lowest when the level of aesthetic experience is also low; however, purchase intentions increase if the level of aesthetic experience is high. The same was found in terms of flow, but with some important differences. First, when the level of aesthetic experience was low, purchase intentions declined when narrative images were also low and products were placed indirectly; meanwhile, purchase intentions were high under the opposite conditions. This reveals that, in the case of a fashion brand's SNS account with low aesthetic experience, high levels of narrative images and direct product placement can enhance purchase intentions. Second, when the level of aesthetic experience was high, purchase intentions were highest when the level of narrative images was low and products were placed indirectly; nonetheless, purchase intentions were second-highest with a high level of narrative images and direct product placement. These results are aligned with the finding that in evaluating a fashion brand, consumers' emotions have positive effects on flow and interest in the actual products (Campbell and Keller, 2003). Moreover, emotions are combined with aesthetic experience in consumers' information processing and will have significant effects on the formation of positive attitudes (Williams et al., 2011).

Additional implications may be derived from the analysis results beyond the study's hypotheses. For instance, purchase intentions were found to be highest when products were placed directly and the level of narrative images was high. This is true regardless of the level of aesthetic experience. However, if narrative images are low and products are placed indirectly, purchase intentions decline. In other words, even if narrative images were high, purchase intentions were found to decline if products were placed indirectly or if products were placed directly but narrative images became low. When using an image to

enhance purchase intentions, a strategy may be formulated whereby products are placed directly and product information is communicated clearly so that viewers can fully grasp the meaning and purchase the product.

In sum, a strategy for enhancing flow should (1) increase the level of aesthetic experience, (2) utilize direct product placement approaches, (3) refrain from lowering the level of narrative images if aesthetic experience is low and products are placed indirectly (still emphasizing the clear understanding of image contents), and (4) decrease the level of narrative images and place products indirectly when the level of aesthetic experience is high.

Additionally, a strategy for enhancing purchase intentions should (1) increase the level of aesthetic experience, (2) place products directly if the level of aesthetic experience is low, (3) place products directly and increase the level of narrative images when aesthetic experience is low, and (4) place products indirectly and decrease the level of narrative images when aesthetic experience is high.

Unlike traditional advertisements, social media advertisements based on narrative images must consider not only the task of delivering information but also how to improve communication efficiency by using the attention of the social media targets. Therefore, in the process of designing the narrative image of a social media advertisement, inappropriate use of the narrative element lowers the communication efficiency of the advertisement, which negatively affects the persuasive effect of the advertisement. As the research results, the message strategy that combines the narrative image and the product presentation method is a positive help in improving the persuasive effect of social media mobile brand advertising. Therefore, for investment companies in social media advertising, the results of this study have very im-

portant values and meanings for them to select and establish marketing strategies and persuasion strategies for social media advertising. As a producer of social media advertisements, in the era of mobile social media marketing with video as the mainstream, in order to improve the persuasive effect of social media advertisements for companies and brands, the method of designing a rational narrative image in the actual planning and creation process will have practical implications.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research

This study explores the differences in the effects of narrative images and product placement approaches on flow and purchase intentions within the context of users' aesthetic experiences as they engage with fashion brands' SNS accounts. The degree of aesthetic experience activated through fashion brands' SNS accounts varies for each individual, and it may be modified and enhanced through social interaction with other people. This is because the aesthetic experience in fashion, in particular, is influenced by culture, reference groups, and individual tastes (McCracken, 2005). One of the limitations of this study is that it does not consider the domain of such social interactions. This study focuses exclusively on the degree of aesthetic experience perceived by individuals. Therefore, future research on the processes and dimensions that can be modified and developed continuously via SNS information would be helpful.

The respondents are in their 20s and 30s in South Korea This is because the subject of this study is limited to a group who actively interact with fashion brand accounts on social media. Accordingly, the respondents were asked to the fashion brands that they are most interested in. Therefore, it would be

careful to generalized the result of this study that respondents are intimate to use SNS.

Additionally, although this study examines fashion brands in general and provides findings that regular fashion brands can use to formulate SNS strategies, further analysis of the interaction effects of aesthetic experience and other variables in category-specific brands—e.g., luxury, sports, and SPA brands—would derive additional meaningful results. Recent studies have shown that fast fashion brands are most effective at online communication and that haute-couture brands are good at improving interaction with their consumers. However, sports brands have been found to have a low level of overall communication and, in particular, a low number of photos and videos (Loureiro et al., 2019).

Studies examining brands' focus on aesthetics along with the level of aesthetic experience via those brands' SNS accounts would also be useful because SNS strategies may vary according to whether brands emphasize aesthetics or not. More specifically, it would be worthwhile to explore the question of whether aesthetics can be enhanced through SNS strategies without having to construct an "aesthetic brand" when the levels of a brand's aesthetics and its SNS aesthetics are different. Finally, it would also be useful to research whether a brand's image can be strengthened through SNS aesthetics alone.

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