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Yun Jeong Kim

Seoul National University, Kyj7934@snu.ac.kr

Yoo Jin Kwon

Korea National Open University, kwonyoojin@knou.ac.kr

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Meaning of Wearing Faux Fur

Yun Jeong Kim*, Seoul National University, Korea
Yoo Jin Kwon, Korea National Open University, Korea

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The world-renowned Italian fashion designer, Giorgio Armani, has pledged to go 100 percent fur-free across all his labels from the Autumn/Winter 2016 collection onwards. Armani said, “*Technological progress made over the years allows us to have valid alternatives at our disposition that render the use of cruel practices unnecessary as regards animals.*” (Gibbs, 2016) This decision reflects the current attention to the issues of protecting and caring for environment including animals. Consumption of faux fur is a part of ethical consumption and valuable in this regard. The purpose of this study is to understand meanings of consuming faux fur from the perspective of consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2002).

Ethical Consumption and Faux Fur as Ethical Product

Ethical consumption refers to the conscious and deliberate consumption choice on the basis of personal and moral beliefs (Crane & Matten, 2004). Values related to ethical consumption are categorized into altruistic and egoistic value (Schwartz, 1994). Altruistic orientation relates to values such as universalism and benevolence, whereas egoistic orientation relates to pursuit of personal interests, such as power and achievement (De Groot & Steg, 2007). Previous studies found that those with altruism have stronger pro-environmental beliefs and they are more likely to engage in pro-environmental behavior than those with egoism (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003; Stern & Dietz, 1994). On the other hand, Eckhardt et al. (2010) identified three types of consumer’s strategies for rationalizing their unethical consumption behaviors: economic rationalization, institutional dependency, and developmental realism.

Ethical fashion is understood as fashion with conscience (Joergens, 2006). Skov (2010) identified five problems in the apparel industry. One of the problems is animal rights and actual fur is particularly related to a problem that fur production often involves cruelty to animals. As consumer’s negative perception of actual fur has increased, faux fur became popular. New technology significantly improved quality of faux fur. Recently, faux fur is referred to as *eco fur* or *fun fur*, which reflects its newly gained positive image. Despite the change, negative perceptions of faux fur still exist. There are only few studies on consumption of faux fur. Therefore, this study investigates why consumers choose faux fur, what the characteristics of consumers of faux fur are, and to what extent consumers think about ethical issues.

Methodology

A qualitative method was adopted. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 10 Korean female participants in their 20s and 30s who have purchased faux fur. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to analyze the data. Photo elicitation was conducted for deeper understanding of orientations (Collier & Collier, 1986).

Findings

Two overarching themes, altruistic and egoistic orientation, on consuming faux fur emerged.

Altruistic Ethical Consumption

Sympathy with animals. Participants had sympathetic attitude toward issues of cruelty to animals and thus took a stand against actual fur. They felt a sense of responsibility for animal welfare and expressed positive attitude toward faux fur.

Practice of social responsibility. Participants considered consumption as part of practicing social responsibility and ethics, which included consumption of faux fur.

Irony of altruistic orientation. Altruistic participants had a concern for animal rights and other's welfare. When it comes to egoists who consume actual fur, participants showed a reserved manner toward judging others. They had to deal with the irony.

Alternative fur. Participants thought that faux fur could be an alternative material to actual fur. They did not like faux fur that imitated actual fur. They wanted their ethical choices to be presented without distortion. Participants preferred faux fur to actual fur.

Egoistic Ethical Consumption

Separation from ethical issues. In order to escape from the guilty feeling of using unethical materials, participants separated themselves or animal rights from ethical issues.

Compromise between desire for fur and social criticism. Even though participants had a preference for actual fur, they attempted to compromise between desire for fur and social criticism.

A negative outlook on social change. Although they wore faux fur, they believed that actual fur was not likely to go completely out of use or that faux fur would extensively be diffused.

Disguise or a whole new style. Participants who pursued a luxurious image had intention to pretend wearing actual fur. They considered faux fur as a different style compared to actual fur.

Discussion

This research identified the nature of ethical consumption. The findings contribute to a better understanding of consumer culture of consuming faux fur. Apparel companies could utilize the findings in planning and marketing activities about faux fur. Further research on diverse aspects of ethical consumption is warranted.

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