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A Cross-cultural Study of Proximity of Clothing to Self between South Korea and Mongolia

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Key words: Cultural value, proximity of clothing to self, quality of life

Background and Purpose. While the cultural values, the collective programming of the mind, seem to be an important determinant of defining ‘self’ (Litvin and Goh, 2003), rare studies on the cultural influence on fashion psychology have been explored between South Korea and Mongolia which countries experienced totally different social and cultural background. The current study, therefore, explored how the level of the cultural dimensions affect the human psychology in relation to using fashion as a tool of representing ‘self’, and examined how the level of self-expression through clothing affects the quality of life.

Literature Review. In the cross-cultural research field, Cultural Dimension Model of Hofstede has been used predominantly to measure the value dimensions which consist of a nation’s overall culture and to compare them at the national level. Cultural Dimension Model is based on six major value indices (Hofstede et al., 2010). Power Distance Index (PDI) is the degree to which power is distributed unequally. Individualism Index (IDV) indicates how much an individual is subordinate to a group or a society. Masculinity Index (MAS) reflects a clear distinction on the gender role and focus more on material success, while femininity, the opposite concept, is more concerned with the relationship and the quality of life. Uncertainty Avoidance (UAI) means a society’s tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. Long Term Orientation Index (LTO) emphasize on perseverance for future reward. The final dimension, Indulgence versus Restraint Index (IVR), shows how much the society allows free gratification of desire to enjoy life and to have fun. In clothing psychology studies, Proximity of Clothing to Self (PCS) scale has been developed to describe the psychological closeness of clothing to self, based on four dimensions including Clothing in Relation to Self as Structure, Clothing in Relation to Self as Response to Others Judgment, Clothing in Relation to Self-esteem, and Clothing in Relation to Body Image and Body Cathexis (Sontag and Lee, 2004). The dimensions of PCS have been used to understand the contribution of clothing to the perceived quality of life and found to have a meaningful relationship with independence, enjoyment of life, achievement in desired level of attractiveness, and satisfaction in social and emotional needs (Sontag and Lee, 2004).

Method. The questionnaire was composed based on the Hofstede’s Cultural Variability Dimension Scale (Hofstede and Minkov, 2013), the Proximity of Clothing to Self Scale developed by Sontag and Lee (2004), and Quality of Life Scale from study of Lee, et al (2002). Women in their twenties and thirties, who are considered as one of the most influential consumer groups in fashion and beauty industry and show higher self-awareness of appearance (Hong, 2014), were recruited. Data collection took place from January 10 to March 11, 2018 via both hardcopy and online survey. Total 179 women in South Korea and 262 in Mongolia were recruited through convenient sampling method respectively.
Results. Through exploratory factor analysis, four original factors of PCS were identified: Clothing in relation to self as a structure (PCS1), Response to judgements of others (PCS2), Clothing in relation to self-esteem (PCS3) and Clothing in relation to body image and body cathexis (PCS4). To compare the level of cultural dimensions, each cultural index was calculated using formula suggested by Hofstede and Minkov (2013) and then independent T-test was performed to confirm significance. The results showed significant differences between two countries in PDI (M Korea: 0, M Mongolia: -11.35, t=2.540, p<.05), IDV (M Korea: 26.56, M Mongolia: 0, t=5.569, p<.001), LTO (M Korea: 12.75, Mongolia:0, t=2.654, p<.01), and IVR (M Korea:63.95, M Mongolia:0, t=9.527, p<.001) (mean values were adjusted for positive comparison). Independent T-test analysis identified the significant difference only in the level of PCS1 between two countries (M Korea: 3.63, M Mongolia: 3.85, t=3.050, p<.01). Multiple regression analysis identified negative relationship between the level of IDV and PCS2 (β=-.28, p<.001) and PCS3 (β=-.19, p<.05) as well as MAS and PCS4 (β=-.15, p<.05) in South Korea; whereas it found positive relationship between IVR and PCS2 (β=.15, p<.05) and PCS3 (β=.21, p<.001) in Mongolia. Further, regression analysis results revealed that PCS1 (β=.28, p<.001), PCS2 (β=.27, p<.001), and PCS4 (β=.20, p<.01) are positively related to quality of life in South Korea; and PCS1 (β=.16, p<.01), PCS2 (β=.30, p<.001), PCS3 (β=.22, p<.001) and PCS4 (β=.22, p<.001) are positively related to quality of life in Mongolia.

Discussion. The results indicate that South Korea is more large-power-distance, individualistic, long-term oriented, and indulgent society than Mongolia, whereas Mongolia women are more expressive of their identity, personality, and values through clothing than Korean women. In South Korea, individuals who are more collectivistic tend to show their concern about other’s judgements and self-esteem in relation to clothing, whereas who have high level of femininity tend to use clothes to enhance their body image. The results do not seem to be consistent with the previous research which suggests that self and personality are more expressed in an individualistic culture (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). However, for collectivists, showing self-esteem through clothing needs to be understood as representing a ‘social self’, because for members of collectivistic cultures self-esteem is linked to relationships with others (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2011). As a collectivist culture emphasizes duties, obligations, relationship, and context (de Mooij, 2017), individuals may improve their self-esteem through appropriate attire for their social expectations. This research also identified that, in Mongolia, the individuals who have higher indulgence level tend to have higher sensitivity to judgements of others and self-esteem in relation to fashion, suggesting that the pursuit of happiness is closely related to the use of clothing as a communication of self in Mongolia. In addition, in both countries, the expression of self through fashion has a significant effect on the quality of life. The findings of this exploratory study help explain differences in fashion psychology in relation to the cultural value and the important role of clothing in the quality of human life. These findings together suggest that specific cultural values of a country can affect motives for choosing certain product or brand to express self through fashion. Thus marketers need to be considerate in communicating advertisement message, as self-enhancement through fashion can be motivated by different cultural values.
References


