

The Effect of Customer's Aesthetic Experience in Fashion Brands' Social Network Services

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패션 브랜드 소셜네트워크 서비스에서 고객의 미적 경험의 영향

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Abstract

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. Through a survey, empirical testing was done to investigate the effect of the aesthetic experience on consumer attitudes consisting of flow and purchase intentions. Thus, the study also tests the interaction effect among perceived aesthetic experience, narrative images, and product placement employing $2 \times 2 \times 2$ MANOVA. The findings herein reveal that the aesthetic experience affects consumer attitudes and that there is a statistically significant interaction effect between aesthetic experience, narrative images, and product placement.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the global fashion market has become increasingly competitive. 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. Many fashion brands have adopted social network service (SNS) platforms as an effective way to satisfy consumers' desire for these special consumer experiences. 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.

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. In particular, consumer experiences through SNS can provide unique emotions and perceptions of products and services in a different way from traditional marketing channels. 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 & Hall, 2011). For example, a consumer can have a unique experience by sharing his or her own experience with others via SNS. Additionally, the development of innovative technologies like virtual reality and augmented reality is enabling consumers to enjoy unique shopping experiences that are not possible via traditional marketing channels. In particular, 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. This study considers the aesthetic experience as one of these unique consumer experiences offered through fashion brands' SNS accounts.

More specifically, 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, Overbeeke, & Wensveen, 2009). Individuals having an aesthetic experience are in a state of fascination with a particular object, they cognitively evaluate that aesthetic object, and they feel exceptional emotions as a result. Thus, as a special state of mind,

the aesthetic experience occurs via certain information processes. 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.

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. The aesthetic experience in the retail space evokes affective experience and strengthens customers' experiential processing route. 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. 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.

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 they proposed can be largely 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. They 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 many limitations in explaining the aesthetic response induced by the brand. In consumer psychology, research has been conducted on sensory experiences that stimulate the five senses of consumers from product attributes, and studies to clarify the relationship with aesthetic response, Zaichkowsky, Neuhaus, Bender, & Weber (2010) are also found, but the cause can be found in the lack of research on the aesthetic response induced by the brand identity factor. Ultimately, this study explores the effect of the aesthetic experience on consumer attitudes in fashion brands' SNS environments. More specifically, the study examines consumers' state of flow in fashion brands' SNS accounts spaces and their purchase intentions as influenced by their SNS-based aesthetic experiences.

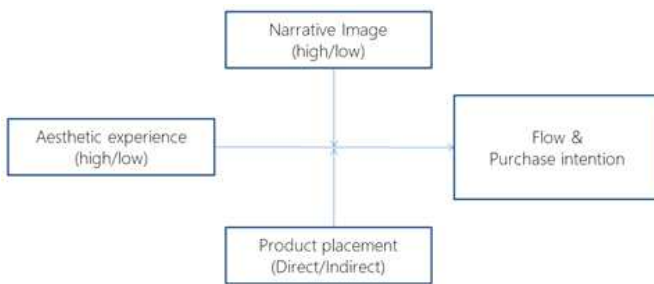
Listing only products on an SNS account cannot lead to good consumer reactions. It is important how to express and convey the story or message that the brand wants to deliver to the consumer. Several previous studies have suggested ways to optimize the combination of content components in SNS. However, they have conducted in-depth research on the elements and characteristics of contents in SNS, but there has been rarely doing research on practical use of contents elements in such SNS. 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, etc., audiovisual and visual content create the most visibility (Mozas-Moral et al., 2016). The visual content shows not only the company's PR information, but also the designer's life and episodes. Through this, it demonstrates narrative image. Therefore, this study suggests that the effect of the aesthetic experience on consumer attitudes 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, while product placement is a promotional marketing practice wherein brands and products are inserted into and used contextually in media for commercial purposes.

The SNS environment provides a marketing channel that can promote fashion brands in real time, making it easy to deliver

in-depth content using images or video. Moreover, 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 concentrated (Coker & Altobello, 2018). Therefore, this study expects to find a significant interaction between consumers' aesthetic experiences, narrative images, and product placement in this SNS environment.

2. Research Hypotheses



[Fig. 753] Research model

H1. Consumers' perceived aesthetic experiences will positively affect consumer attitudes.

H1.1 Consumers' perceived aesthetic experiences will positively affect flow.

H1.2 Consumers' perceived aesthetic experiences will positively affect purchase intentions.

H2. The association between aesthetic experience and consumer attitude is influenced by narrative image in the following manner:

H2.1 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.

H2.2 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.

H3. The association between aesthetic experience and consumer attitude is influenced by product placement in the following manner:

H3.1 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.

H3.2 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.

H4. The association between aesthetic experience and consumer attitude is influenced by narrative image and product placement in the following manner:

H4.1 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.

H4.2 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.

3. Methods

The study used a 2 X 2 X 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.

4. Conclusions

This study examined the interaction effects between consumers' perceptions of aesthetic experience, narrative images, and product placement on consumer attitudes in image-based SNS accounts of fashion brands. 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. 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. Therefore, if users are able to properly understand the content communicated by an image, they can have an aesthetic experience 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. 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. 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.

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