Korean Consumers' Perception of Fashion YouTube Creators as Informants: Generation Cohort Comparisons

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YouTube is not only the second most popular social media platform, but it also holds the same title for search engines (Anderson, 2020). This manifests the new trend of consumers preferring video content as information sources compared to original media content. The platform has become one of the chief sources of information, influencing consumers' decision-making process because it makes it convenient for content creators to reach a large audience, thereby enriching the dimension of entertainment contents (Mohsin, 2021). Moreover, content is designed to reach targeted audiences (subscribers). As part of this process, YouTube creators constantly brand themselves as distinctive and unique products/services customized for subscribers (Labrecque, Markos, & Milne, 2011). Also, given that consumers prefer YouTubers with similar preferences (Lee et al., 2019), content creators have the power to influence and guide consumer perceptions in a particular direction. (Patrick et al., 2004).

It is interesting to note that the age demographic of YouTubers ranges from teenagers to senior citizens. This implies that the content consumption motivation of subscribers would also vary in accordance with their age. Research on the effect of age groups should be undertaken on the content consumption. Generation cohort groups may have different awareness and perception on YouTube contents. This study aims to assess the awareness levels of K-fashion YouTubers in Korea and analyze differences in their awareness levels. The influence of generation cohort groups was investigated. Three group categorization was used (Generation Z, Millennials, Generation X). Inter-group differences in awareness levels were analyzed through text mining and semantic network analysis. It is expected that the saliences of inherent differences in awareness levels as per the YouTubers' age would enhance understanding of YouTube content consumption motivation.

For spotting major You Tubers for each generation cohort group, all online documents and contents in two major Korean search engines (Naver, Daum) uploaded between December 3rd, 2020 and February 28th, 2021 were collected. Based on term frequency-inverse document frequency (Tf-idf) and the number of subscribers, the top 10 K-fashion YouTubers were selected. They were subsequently classified based on age, fashion/style preferences, and the estimated age group of their subscribers. Accordingly, three female YouTubers were selected (Kim Movie for Gen Z, Fashion Sis-Choi for Millennials, and Milanonna for Gen X). All

documents and content uploaded from the opening date up to March 5th, 2021 were analyzed to understand generation cohort-related differences in their awareness levels. Python 3.7 was used to measure the Tf-idf value, and NodeXL 1.0.1 was used in the network analysis stage to measure centrality. The network was constructed using the top 50 frequency keywords.

To study the differences in the awareness levels of fashion YouTubers, 50 keywords based on the Tf-idf value were identified. The common keywords used by the three selected YouTubers were "Recommendation," "Review," "Styling," "Brand," and in particular, "Sis," "Creator," and "Charming." These keywords indicated that fashion YouTubers are seen not only as providers of useful and easy tips related to style but also as friends/siblings.

The keywords mostly employed by generation Z YouTuber Kim Movie revealed more frequent use of non-fashion keywords ranging from affective reactions such as "Fun," "Happiness," "Feelings," and "Woe" to daily interests such as "Entertainer," "Friends," "Trip," "Shopping," and so on. It means that even though they are fashion YouTubers, their daily life is of primary interest to subscribers. However, for Millennials YouTuber Sis-Choi, fashion-related keywords were top-ranked. The words were mainly related to purchases such as "Trend," "Sale," "Hacks," "Information," and "Flea market." In addition to these, keywords for fashion styles in office also played a significant role. In the case of Senior YouTuber Milanonna, keywords included wisdom or mental well-being-related words such as "Story," "Life," "Love," "Adults," "Upgrade," "Wisdom," and so on. The most interesting difference between Milanonna and the other two YouTubers was in the use of keywords related to her personal background, for instance, "Italy," "Age," "Studying abroad," and "Senior" were used as keywords.

This study aimed to prove that the generation cohort group of YouTube subscribers has a significant influence on their awareness levels. The results of the study revealed that the composition of keywords differed according to YouTubers' age. In the case of Gen Z, they were perceived as friends rather than fashion mentors. Therefore, their contents were related more to their daily life coupled with fashion. However, Millennial YouTubers were perceived as real informants. This is mainly because 20–40-year-olds are the main workforce in society and hence require practical information as well as economically helpful "hacks" for improving their style. Interestingly, Senior YouTubers were recognized as fashion mentors. They simultaneously functioned as informants and mentors, thus revealing that young subscribers are eager to follow them or acquire wisdom from them.

The YouTube platform is an effective means for establishing identities, sharing opinions, and communicating interactively. Therefore, it is necessary to understand and analyze the kind of contents that subscribers want. In this context, this study clearly implies that fashion content consumption motivations differed according to YouTubers' age. These results would be helpful for potential YouTubers as well as existing ones who wish to gain an edge over their YouTube competitors.

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