

Adolescent Consumers' Luxury Consumption: The Consumer Socialization Perspective

Juha Park and Jaehoon Chun
Seoul National University, Korea

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Introduction Along with the recent expansion of the age group purchasing luxury goods, the barriers to opportunities to purchase luxury goods are gradually lowering. Adolescents are also undergoing consumer socialization, experiencing luxury consumption, building related habits, and acquiring knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward the market. However, since improper consumer socialization during adolescence can cause problematic purchasing behaviors such as impulsive and compulsive buying, consumer socialization is important (Kim & Kim, 2016). In particular, the interest and consumption of luxury goods by young people in Korea, who are under the influence of social media, is attracting much attention (Pang et al., 2021). Therefore, this study examined the consumer socialization of Korean adolescents from the perspective of luxury consumption and discussed the characteristics of consumer socialization outcomes. The research conducted in-depth interviews with 26 Korean adolescents aged 14 to 24.

Literature review Consumer socialization refers to the social learning process in which adolescents interact with environmental factors in order to become independent adult consumers and acquire the functions, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for appropriate consumption (Ward, 1974). Here, a socialization agent plays a great role in the process in which an individual learns certain consumption behaviors, and there are representative agents such as family, school, peer groups, and mass media (Ward, 1974; Moschis & Churchill, 1978).

As for the consumer socialization process, individuals are influenced by the agent as an external factor model and reinforce their repeated consumption behaviors in light of their past consumption experiences. Furthermore, with a theme of their own consumption experiences, they come to engage in social interaction with others, eventually developing their consumption values. From the perspective of social processes, this research investigated the processes of modeling, reinforcement, and social interaction for adolescents to purchase luxury goods. Next, the characteristics of their consumption outcomes resulting from their repetitive consumption behaviors were discussed.

Method In-depth interviews were conducted with Korean adolescents aged 14 to 24, selected as research participants under the Juvenile Protection Act standard (Youthpolicy, 2008). 26 participants who had experience purchasing luxury fashion items at least once in the past two years and posted them on social media were interviewed. As adolescents are vulnerable participants, the study was carried out after obtaining IRB approval. Face-to-face interviews were conducted and ranged from 90 to 110 minutes.

For data interpretation, since the study aimed to examine the overall processes of luxury consumption from the perspective of adolescent experiences, it followed the interpretative procedure for qualitative research data by Giorgi(2009). First, the raw data were transcribed into ClovaNote and Word for repeated reading. Then, data classification and interpretation were done by semantic unit, and categories were derived with a title. Finally, the adolescents' experiences were structured according to the theory of consumer socialization.

Findings The total amount spent on luxury goods over the past two years was predominantly between 5~10 million won by 12 participants, with 5 participants spending about 10 million won. They funded their luxury purchases through savings from allowances, part-time jobs, and online second-hand transactions.

In the process of luxury consumption, adolescents' modeling was heavily based on fashion-related content on social media made by influencers and celebrities. In addition, they reported that they became more interested in luxury brands while sharing trends with peers at school. On the other hand, the influence of their parent's financial status and TV significantly decreased. Therefore, the most influential figures affecting adolescents' luxury purchases can be regarded as fashion/beauty influencers whom they follow. While accessing selfies or content introducing luxury goods, adolescents actively searched for additional information and compared prices. When considering purchases of luxury goods, they said they used to check brand awareness online from unspecified others or peers with whom they shared tastes and engaged in conversations about luxury items, expressing a stronger desire for purchase. In addition, adolescents were enjoying interacting with unspecified others on social media. They were mainly communicating with people of various age groups who shared the common goal of purchasing luxury items and using them as sources of information to explore rational purchase places. They have also expressed their empathy with luxury-related postings of images.

The outcomes of consumer socialization have two characteristics. First, adolescents engaged in reselling used luxury goods for purchasing new ones or sharing information about a limited-time offer and cross-border shopping with anonymous others online instead of impulsively buying luxury brands. This enabled them to pursue reasonable consumption through information search and comparison from various angles. Second, they authenticate their purchased luxury goods through social media posts and exchange positive feedback with unspecified others. Consequently, consumer socialization outcomes for adolescents extend beyond consumption-related attitudes such as repeated purchases or positive perceptions of luxury goods. The overall luxury purchase process, from information search to purchase and posting, increases immersion in the use of social media while decreasing caution against indiscriminate content exposure or luxury consumption itself.

Conclusion This study examined the consumer socialization process of Korean adolescents who had experienced the purchase of luxury goods. The findings show that adolescents are influenced by adults who have luxury brands on social media, followed by self-comparison and a longing for a luxurious lifestyle, which stimulates the herd mentality which is manifest in luxury

purchases. This study identified that the modeling target of adolescents is changing to unspecified others and rich adults online from influential family members or reference groups of similar age. Future research should shed light on the issues such as adolescents' overspending, the appropriateness of media content, and the relevance of consumer socialization.

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