A Study on Female Sport Participants' Subjectivity: The Investigation of Consumer Types towards Sport Brands' Online Advertisements using the Q-Methodology

Yoonki Chun, Kyung Hee University
Ji-Hae Lee, Kyung Hee University
Hye-Kyung Cho, Kyung Hee University
Jeoung-Hak Lee (Advisor), Kyung Hee University

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As the sport participation gap between genders are rapidly diminishing, it is more than understandable that global sport brands such as Nike and Under Armour are focusing more in the production of female productions (Lim, 2017). Reflecting this global trend, the South Korea Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism reported that in 2018, the percentage of female sport participants (62.8%) surpassed the male participation rate (61.9%) in Korea. Consequently, the importance of female consumers within the sport industry is growing each year which is why brands are aggressively pushing out online advertisements daily specifically targeting women (Kim, 2009).

Shimp (1981) reported that classical conditioning theory is also applied in advertisements where people tend to adopt their attitude towards the advertisements that they were repeatedly exposed to towards the product itself. In addition to Shimp's work, many have proved classical conditioning's effect in the field of advertisement (Gorn, 1982; Koreber-Riel, 1983; Mechleit & Wilson, 1988). Acknowledging the importance of deriving positive attitude toward advertisements as they gradually affect consumers' attitude and behavior towards brands and their products, Stephenson (1969) suggests that the act of purchasing and consuming is subjectively organized, and that individual’s unique subjectivity is what drives their attitude and behavior towards advertisements, brands, and products. Therefore, despite there are efforts to distinguish consumers by their demographic features in order to specify targets for marketing purpose, it cannot provide deep understanding and implications that reflect individuals’ personal values, lifestyles, and other subjective priorities they seek during their entire consuming process (Choi, 2006).

Therefore, in attempt to explore and understand the role of female participants’ subjectivity when viewing sport brands’ advertisements, this study utilized the Q-Method designed by Stephenson (1953). Specifically, this study aims to (1) investigate and categorize consumer types according to the subjective attitude towards sport brands’ online advertisements, and (2) provide detailed implications according to each categorized type in hope to provide reference data for feature marketing and research purposes.

Following Stephenson's (1953) Q-Method, a research method that utilizes set theory and factor analysis to study individuals’ subjectivity in an objective matter, this study first produced 34 Q-Samples by collecting and analyzing online advertisements which were uploaded at the brands’ Korean social media channels that feature female sport products throughout July 2018 to June 2019. Next, 20 female subjects who are currently participating in sport activity were chosen as P-Samples and were asked to perform the Q-Sorting process designed by Stephenson followed by written comments on the subjects’ personal reason behind their sorting.

The collected data were processed by the QUANL PC program and resulted in extracting 5 factors and the subjects were grouped into five distinct consumer types. The types were named (1) role model followers, (2) brand reputation valuers, (3) first impression & product information seekers, (4) body “fitness” admirers, and (5) simple image & catchy slogan lovers. This study further provides detailed explanation and implications for each consumer types based on the findings which can assist sport brands’ future marketing activities when targeting female consumers.