A model of behavioral intention to buy domestic versus imported products in a Confucian culture

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Consumer behaviour, National cultures, Country of origin, Confucianism

Abstract
This study examines the predictors of Korean consumers’ behavioral intention to buy imported and domestic products, based on Lee’s revised Fishbein model. The revised model incorporated two salient Confucian concepts – face saving and group conformity. There were two phases to the study, qualitative (focus group interviews) and empirical (experimental survey design). From the focus group data, parallel self-report mail survey instruments were developed and sent to Korean students studying temporarily at a large midwestern university in the USA. Instruments were randomly assigned to subjects using a between-subject experimental design. Findings indicate that there is a positive relationship between Korean consumers’ attitudes toward a product and their product evaluation. Further, there is a positive relationship between their attitudes and their intention to buy either domestic or imported products. The components of cultural pressure, face saving and group conformity have a weaker influence on attitudes than product evaluation, and they are significant predictors for domestic products but not for imported products. Finally, managerial implications and marketing strategies are discussed for multinational and domestic marketers.

Introduction
Koreans’ consumption of imported products has rapidly increased in various product categories since the Korean market recently opened its doors to international marketers (Chun, 1992). For example, according to the International Trade Administration (1995), the imported-apparel market has increased 30 per cent annually over the past two to three years, and this trend is expected to continue and accelerate in the future. There is a need, therefore, to identify the underlying factors influencing Korean consumers’ decision making practices so that international and domestic marketers will be able to develop informed marketing strategies.

To better understand the behavioral intentions of Koreans, Lee (1990) proposed a modified Fishbein’s behavioral intention model. Because Korea is a country that is strongly influenced by Confucian values (Jacobs, 1986), Lee (1990) incorporated two salient Confucian concepts – face saving and group conformity – to Fishbein’s behavioral intention model. Both of these concepts have been found to influence the attitudes and behaviors of consumers in Confucian cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Yau, 1986). The purpose of the current study, therefore, is to examine predictors of Korean consumers’ behavioral intentions toward imported versus domestic products using Lee’s (1990) modified behavioral intention model.

Theoretical framework and literature review
To identify the underlying mechanism determining Korean consumers’ choice of imported or domestic products, Lee’s (1990) modified Fishbein behavioral intention model was employed. For a better understanding of Lee’s model, Fishbein’s model is reviewed briefly.

Fishbein’s behavioral intention model
As described below, Fishbein proposed that behavioral intention (BI) leads to behavior (B), and that behavioral intention (BI) is determined by the consumer’s attitudes toward purchasing or using a brand (Aact) and by a normative value or subjective norm (SN) (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

\[ B \sim BI = (\text{Aact})w_1 + (\text{SN})w_2 \]

where,

\[ \text{Aact} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} B_i E_i \text{ and } \text{SN} = \sum_{j=1}^{k} NB_j MC_j \]

The personal attitudes toward the behavior refer to whether the person is in favor of or against performing the behavior in question. The subjective norm is the person’s perception of the social pressures for or against performing the behavior. The \( w_1 \) and \( w_2 \) components represent empirically determined regression coefficients.

The attitudes toward purchasing or using a brand are, in turn, a function of the cognitive belief structure (\( \sum_{i=1}^{n} B_i E_i \)). The cognitive belief structure is a belief-evaluation composite where \( B_i \) is the belief that performance of the behavior will lead to a specific outcome, \( i \), and \( E_i \) is the evaluation of each consequence, and \( n \) is the number of salient outcomes. The subjective norm (SN) is represented as a function of a normative structure (\( \sum_{j=1}^{k} NB_j MC_j \)), where \( NB_j \) is the perceived expectation that referent \( j \) thinks the individual should or should not perform the behavior. \( MC_j \) is the consumer’s motivation to comply with referent \( j \), and \( k \) is the number of salient referents. Support for
the Fishbein model has been extensive in the consumer behavior literature (Farley et al., 1981; Ryan and Bonfield, 1980; Sheppard et al., 1988). Its strong predictive power for Western consumers has been demonstrated with a variety of consumer products, such as dress (Miniard and Cohen, 1983), toothpaste (Ryan, 1982), dog food and beer (Miniard and Cohen, 1983), mineral water (Knox and Chernatony, 1989) and facial tissue (Mitchell and Olson, 1981).

Lee and Green (1991) examined the cross-cultural applicability of Fishbein’s behavioral intention model. Their study used student samples in Korea and the USA to investigate a sample product, sneakers. They found that the Fishbein model could be employed to explain consumers’ behavioral intention formation in a Confucian culture as well as in the USA. However, they also found that the two samples exhibited substantial differences in the relative importance of subjective norms and personal attitudes derived from product beliefs and product evaluation. Korean consumers were more strongly influenced by subjective norms than personal attitudes, while US consumers were more strongly influenced by personal attitudes than by subjective norms.

**Modified Fishbein’s behavioral intention model for Confucian consumers**

Confucian cultures in Far Eastern countries are significantly different from Western culture in terms of collectivism and individualism (Hofstede, 1980). In the following section, two fundamental concepts of Confucian culture will be described in detail.

**Face saving**

“Face” is a concept of central importance among people in Confucian cultures, and it has a pervasive influence on their interpersonal relationships (Yau, 1986). The Chinese concept of face has two dimensions, lien and mien-tzu (Hu, 1944). Mien-tzu represents “the kind of prestige that is emphasized in America: a reputation achieved through getting on in life, through success and ostentation” (Hu, 1944, p. 45). Lien, on the other hand, represents “the confidence of society in the integrity of the ego’s moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for her/him to function properly within the community. Lien is “both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction” (Hu, 1944, p. 45). These two concepts of face have interdependent meanings. If one loses face (mien-tzu), then the confidence of society in one’s moral integrity (lien) is also lost.

Face is lost when conduct or performance falls below the minimum level considered acceptable or when some essential requirements corresponding to one’s social position are not satisfactorily met (Ho, 1977). Moreover, the possibility of losing face may arise from how an individual is expected to act or to be treated by other members in his or her group. Thus, interpersonal behavior in Confucian culture will be determined by its effect on others and on the individual’s reputation, dignity and integrity. People in this culture are always under strong constraints to act to meet the expectations of others so as to maintain face.

**Group conformity**

In a Confucian society, the dominant collectivist orientation calls for a primacy of the goals and welfare of the laterally extended group (Kluckhohn and Strodbeck, 1961). The collectivist nature of Confucian society is reflected in strong relationships among family members and within kinship systems. The maintenance of group cohesiveness and integrity is especially acute (Hofstede, 1980). Chinese and Koreans sacrifice themselves for benefits that largely accrue to a particular social unit or even to the whole society. Thus, most Koreans feel strong social pressure to comply with the group norms regardless of their own private views.

**Lee’s modification of Fishbein’s behavioral intention model**

Since the concept of subjective norms (SN) (a Western concept) does not capture the behavioral impetus, the social pressure, or the nature of personal moral obligation aroused by the face-saving pressure in a Confucian culture, Lee (1990) substituted face saving and group conformity for the subjective norms in Fishbein’s model. Furthermore, Lee (1990) added a causal relationship between the social-influence factor and personal attitudes, while Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) assumed that there was no linkage between such attitudes and the social-influence variables. Lee (1990) argued that, considering the strong social pressures on Korean consumers, it is likely that individuals’ attitudes will be heavily influenced by face saving (FS) and group conformity (GC) motivations as well as by personal beliefs and evaluations. Thus, as indicated in Figure 1, Lee assumed that beliefs about behavioral consequences (B) and evaluations (E) have multiplicative effects on attitudes (Aact), which, in turn, influence behavioral intention (BI). However, face saving (FS) and group conformity (GC) were substituted for the expectations of
Hypotheses

In order to identify the predictors of Korean consumers’ intentions to buy domestic and imported products, hypotheses are formulated in the present study from four aspects of Lee’s (1990) model:

1. the relationship between attitudes (Aact) and behavioral intention (BI);
2. the relationship between cognitive belief structure (BiEi) and attitudes;
3. the effect of face saving (FS) on attitudes and behavioral intention; and
4. the effect of group conformity (GC) on attitudes and behavioral intention.

Relationship between attitudes (Aact) and behavioral intention (BI)

The relationship between attitudes and behavioral intention in Fishbein’s (1975) model is retained in Lee’s model (1990), which is adapted for consumers in Confucian cultures. As mentioned above, many researchers have confirmed the association between attitudes and intention in the Fishbein model (Knox and Chernatony, 1989; Lee and Green, 1991; Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Netemeyer and Bearden, 1992; Sheppard et al., 1988). Lee and Green (1991) also found that cognitive structure was a significant predictor of attitudes for both US and Korean samples.

Although few researchers have attempted to examine the relationship between attitudes and behavioral intention in regard to the choice of domestic or imported products among Korean consumers, previous research indicated a strong relationship between attitudes and behavioral intention across product categories and cultural backgrounds, as previously noted. Thus, the first hypothesis is proposed as follows:

H1: Among Korean consumers, there will be a positive relationship between attitudes (Aact) and behavioral intention (BI) in the choice of both domestic and imported products.

Relationship between cognitive belief structure (BiEi) and attitudes

The relationship between the cognitive belief structure (BiEi) and attitudes in Fishbein’s (1975) model is also retained in Lee’s (1990) model adapted for consumers in Confucian cultures. Various studies examining the efficacy of Fishbein’s model have confirmed the relationship between the cognitive belief structure and attitudes (Knox and Chernatony, 1989; Lee and Green, 1991; Mitchell and Olson, 1981; Netemeyer and Bearden, 1992; Sheppard et al., 1988). This relationship was also found to be significant among Korean consumers (Lee and Green, 1991).

Although no study has specifically investigated the relationship between cognitive belief structure and attitudes in determining the choice of domestic or imported products among Korean consumers, the following hypothesis is proposed based on the findings of previous research:

H2: Among Korean consumers, there will be a positive relationship between cognitive belief structure (BiEi) and attitudes in the choice of domestic and imported products.

The effect of face saving (FS) on attitudes and behavioral intention

Lee (1990) proposed that face saving is a predictor of attitudes and behavioral intention among consumers in Confucian cultures, but it is questionable whether face saving has a significant effect on attitudes and behavioral intention in the choice of imported products. In other words, face saving could be a significant predictor of Korean consumers’ attitudes and behavioral intentions to buy domestic products but not imported products. The rationale for this statement is as follows.

Since Korea opened its market to foreign marketers, “The Buy Domestic Products”
movement among Korean consumers has been pervasive to protect domestic industry (The Economist, 1985; Hoon, 1994; Kang, 1993). Thus, Korean consumers’ motivation not to lose face (reputation) or not to feel ashamed by purchasing an imported product (when people who are important to them in their group expect them to purchase it) is in conflict with the social pressure to support domestic industries. On the other hand, Korean consumers’ motivation to save face by purchasing domestic products is consistent with the social pressure to demonstrate loyalty to Korean products. Therefore, face saving will be a significant predictor of attitudes and behavioral intention to choose domestic products, but it will not be a significant predictor to choose imported products. Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed.

Among Korean consumers:

H3a: Face saving will have a positive relationship with attitudes and with the intention to buy domestic products.

H3b: Face saving will not be related to attitudes and the intention to buy imported products.

The effect of group conformity (GC) on attitudes and behavioral intention

Lee (1990) also proposed that group conformity is a predictor of attitudes and behavioral intention. However, it is doubtful whether group conformity is significantly related to Korean consumers’ attitudes and behavioral intention in the case of imported products because there is a prevalent social pressure to “buy Korean” (The Economist, 1985; Hoon, 1994; Kang, 1993). That is, Korean consumers’ motivation to comply with people around them or to fit in with other people by purchasing imported products is not congruent with the social pressure to “buy Korean.” Thus, group conformity would not influence their attitudes and intentions to buy imported products.

On the other hand, Korean consumers’ motivation to conform to their group by purchasing domestic products is consistent with this social pressure. Thus, group conformity would be a predictor of Korean consumers’ attitudes and intentions to buy domestic products. Therefore, the following hypotheses are suggested.

Among Korean consumers:

H4a: Group conformity will be positively related to attitudes and to the intention to buy domestic products.

H4b: Group conformity will not be related to attitudes and to the intention to buy imported products.

### Research methods

#### Research design and data collection

There were two phases to the study, the qualitative phase and the quantitative phase. In the qualitative phase, focus group interviews were conducted with Korean students and their spouses to explore the conceptual meaning and cultural context of the target concepts of the study (Confucian values; ethnocentrism; and product beliefs, evaluations, attitudes, and behavioral intention). These concepts were examined in a product-specific context. Additionally, salient product attributes and brand names were discussed, along with qualitative views about country of origin (COO) and country of manufacture (COM).

Information gathered from the qualitative phase was incorporated into the development of the quantitative survey instrument. The resulting quantitative study was a cross-sectional, exploratory study using an experimental design. The design used a self-report mail survey instrument to collect consumer behavior data from Korean students studying temporarily in the USA in 1994. A cover letter explaining the purpose of the study; directions for completion of the survey; and a self-addressed, stamped return envelope were mailed with the questionnaire. Although the letter and questionnaire were addressed to the Korean student, the letter explained that any Korean living in the household over the age of 18 could respond to the questionnaire. Therefore, some respondents could have been students’ spouses.

#### Sample

Korean undergraduate and graduate students (and their spouses) studying at a large midwestern university in the USA were sampled to test the proposed relationships. Several factors support the use of a student sample to conduct a study in which the primary interest is to investigate the effects of culture on selected consumer behavior concepts. Korea, a Confucian culture, has been found to hold very strong Confucian values when compared to other Asian (Confucian) cultures (Chang, 1998). Given the strength of these values, it would seem unlikely that living in the US temporarily could broadly change these views.

Several studies have found that psychological acculturation is a long process, even for immigrants who have moved and plan to live in another country/region for the remainder of their lives. Studies from various disciplines (including economics, psychology and education) found that
immigrants who lived in the USA for several generations retained the values from their original culture (Carroll et al., 1994; Wang and Phinney, 1998; Youn et al., 1999). Similarly, other acculturation studies that investigated the adjustment of immigrants to new environments found that it took a significant amount of time – even generations – for immigrants fully to acculturate to the new environment (Yang, 1991; Chen, 1996; Park-Adams, 1997).

In the present study, to determine if the Korean students’ values had been changed due to the number of years they had lived in the US, statistical tests were run. Regression analysis results indicated that there were no significant relationships between the cultural variables (two face saving items and two group conformity items) and the number of years living in the USA for any of the three products. Therefore, it appears that living in the USA temporarily has not significantly changed the deeply held cultural views of this sample.

Other researchers found similar results. Berry (1990) found that refugees and sojourners (such as Korean students who are studying in the US but plan to return to their home country) are more likely to retain their original cultural values because they are not in an assimilation mode. In fact, in their study of various dimensions of Confucian values, Ko and Gentry (1991) found that there was no relationship between the years that Korean students spent in the US and maintenance of their Confucian values.

Additionally, Korean students at the midwestern university where the study was undertaken have strong ties among themselves by actively engaging in their student organization, the Korean students Organization; attending campus-based Korean community churches; and celebrating Korean cultural and religious holidays (e.g. Chu-Suk on August 15 and Ku-Jeong on January 1 on the moon calendar) and activities with fellow Koreans students.

The Korean students were randomly selected from the membership lists of a number of Korean student organizations at the midwestern university, and randomly assigned using a random numbers table to one of the two survey instruments (see discussion below). To increase the response rate, follow-up telephone calls were made to those students who had not returned the survey within two weeks of receiving it. Of the 388 questionnaires sent to Korean students, 93 were returned and usable, yielding a 24.2 percent response rate.

**Instrument**

To test the proposed relationships, the instrument was developed in a hypothetical shopping scenario format. The Korean students were asked to imagine that he/she was visiting different stores in Korea (not in the US) to compare various brands, features and prices for each of three products (TV, VCR, sweater). Subjects were presented with various information about each of the products and then asked to respond to questions about each of the products using a self-report written survey instrument. The three target products and brand names were selected based upon the outcome of focus group interviews, as previously discussed. The products were selected due to their familiarity to a broad cross section of students, varying levels of student involvement/interest and technological development. In the focus group interviews, discussion ensued about brand names, country of origin (COO) and country of manufacture (COM). Researchers were cautioned that the brand names, COOs and COMs used in the study must be recognizable and realistic to Korean consumers. Thus, the following three products and corresponding brand names were selected: a Samsung VCR (domestic brand), Sony TV (foreign brand), Ralph Lauren Polo sweater (foreign brand).

Two parallel survey instruments were developed which contained identical hypothetical Korean market scenarios about the three products; the only difference was a manipulation of the country of manufacture (COM) cue. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of the two treatments. The two instruments were developed as follows:

1. **Instrument 1**:  
   - Sony TV (Japanese) manufactured in Malaysia;  
   - Samsung VCR (Korean) manufactured in Korea;  
   - Ralph Lauren Polo sweater (American) manufactured in the US.

2. **Instrument 2**:  
   - Sony TV (Japanese) manufactured in Japan;  
   - Samsung VCR (Korean) manufactured in China;  
   - Ralph Lauren Polo sweater (American) manufactured in Mexico.

Owing to the focus of this article, however, the COM manipulation was not a variable of interest. Therefore, only the data for each of the three products with matching brand COO and COM were analyzed. That is, the Sony TV (Japanese) manufactured in Japan, the Samsung VCR (Korean) manufactured in Korea, and the Ralph Lauren Polo sweater
A model of behavioral intention to buy domestic versus imported products in a Confucian culture

Jae-Eun Chung and Dawn Thornike Pysarchik
Planning Marketing Intelligence &

Evaluations (E). Prior to exposure to the hypothetical buying scenarios, subjects’ product evaluations were measured by asking respondents about the general importance of selected attributes when they shopped for each of the target products. Subjects were asked: “When purchasing any (product X) (TV, VCR, sweater), how important are each of the following features...” (subjects were provided with the same product-specific lists as in the belief section). The question was also measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (“1 = not at all important to 5 = very important”).

Attitudes toward the act (Aact). Respondents were asked to rate two items on a five-point Likert-type scale (“1 = highly disagree to 5 = highly agree”). The statement used for the first measure was “After seeing the product described above, my general impression of (brand X product X) would be good.” The statement used for the second measure was “I believe that it would be wise for me to buy the (brand X product X).”

Behavioral intention (BI). Behavioral intention was measured by asking respondents to answer the following question, “It is likely that I would buy the (product X) described above,” on a five-point Likert-type scale (“1 = highly disagree to 5 = highly agree”).

Face-saving pressure (FS). Respondents were asked two questions to rate the pressure they felt about losing face by buying brand X product, using a 5-point (“1 = highly disagree to 5 = highly agree”) semantic-differential scale. The first measure used the following statement: “My decision to buy the (brand X product X) described above would be influenced by whether owning it would hurt my reputation with the people who are important to me.” The statement for the second measure was “My decision to buy the (brand X product X) would be influenced by whether I feel ashamed when people who are important to me see me owning this product.”

Group conformity pressure (GC). Respondents’ perceived pressure to conform to a group norm was measured via two items on the same five-point scale used for measuring face-saving pressure. The first measure had the following statement: “I feel that most people around me expect me to comply with their decision to buy the (brand X product X).” The statement used for the second measure was “The decision to buy the (brand X product X) described above would be influenced by whether owning it would make me fit in with other people.”

Cognitive belief structure. This measure was obtained by the formula $\sum_{i=1}^{n} B_i E_i$, where $B_i$ is the belief that the target product will have a specific attribute, $i$, $E_i$ is the evaluation of the importance for each attribute, and $n$ is the number of salient attributes.

Data analysis
Data analysis of the self-report instrument was conducted using the Statistical Package of the Social Science (SPSS). To test the proposed relationships, LISREL VII was
employed. The averages of attitudes, group conformity and face saving variables (two items for each construct) were used in LISREL.

**Results**

**Sample characteristics**

As shown in Table I, the profile of the sample reveals that the age of the respondents ranged from 19 to 40 (mean age was 29). Females constituted about 39 per cent of the sample, about 54 per cent were married, and the average number of years the respondents had studied (lived) in the US was 4.84. Income levels were reasonably balanced but positively skewed.

**Scale reliabilities**

The reliabilities of the scales used to measure the constructs in the model were examined. The coefficient alpha for each scale was calculated for each of the three products, Samsung VCR, Sony TV, and Polo sweater. Since beliefs, evaluations, and behavioral intentions were measured with a single measure, coefficient alpha was not calculated for those variables. The reliabilities of face saving and group conformity for all three products were 0.73 and above, indicating an acceptable internal consistency (Table II). The reliabilities of the attitude measures for all of the three products were between 0.65 and 0.67.

**Predictors of Korean consumers’ behavioral intention toward domestic versus imported products**

The results of LISREL VII analysis are represented in Table III. Chi-square statistics, goodness of fit indices (GFI), and root mean square residuals (RMSR) indicate the model’s goodness of fit for the data. Chi-square statistics for each of the three products (Samsung VCR, Sony TV, and Polo sweater) show that Lee’s (1990) model for the Polo sweater is the only one significant at \( p < 0.05 \). The goodness of fit indices indicate that Lee’s (1990) model has an acceptable fit for all three products. The root mean square residuals also confirm that Lee’s (1990) model has an adequate fit for all three products. Therefore, the overall goodness of fit results indicate that Lee’s (1990) model does an adequate job of capturing the underlying structure of Korean consumers’ behavioral intention to buy domestic and imported products.

The squared multiple correlations for the structural equations of attitudes are: 0.59 for Samsung VCR, 0.27 for Sony TV, and 0.17 for Polo sweater. Thus, the endogenous constructs for attitudes (cognitive belief structure, face saving and group conformity) indicate that Lee’s (1990) model does a better job of explaining the exogenous variables for Samsung VCR than those for Sony TV and Polo sweater. In addition, the squared multiple correlations for the structural equations of behavioral intention are: 0.57 for Samsung VCR, 0.51 for Sony TV, and 0.46 for Polo sweater. Thus, the endogenous constructs for behavioral intention (cognitive belief structure, attitudes, face saving and group conformity) also indicate that Lee’s (1990) model has a slightly better fit for Samsung VCR than those for Sony TV and Polo sweater.

The relationships between each variable in Lee’s (1990) model were tested simultaneously for each product, but they will be discussed separately according to each of hypotheses. \( H_1 \) states that among

### Table I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample profile</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>20 and below</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 and over</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Marital status</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Years studying (living) in the US</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 and below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monthly income</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Won</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>700,000 Won and below</td>
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<tr>
<td>700,001-1,200,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1,200,001-2,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2,000,001-3,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>3,000,001 and above</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: \(^a\)1= 803.44 Won (1994 exchange rate)*

### Table II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reliabilities for face saving, group conformity and attitudes for the three products: Samsung VCR, Sony TV, and Polo sweater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Samsung VCR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face saving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group conformity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Korean consumers, there will be a positive relationship between attitudes and behavioral intention in the choice of both domestic products and imported products. The coefficients of the path between attitudes and behavioral intention for each of the three products are significant at $p < 0.05$ and in the expected direction (Table III). Thus, hypothesis $H1$ is supported.

$H2$ proposes the positive effect of cognitive belief structure on attitudes in the choice of domestic and imported products among Korean consumers. The coefficients of the relationship between cognitive belief structure and attitudes for each of the three products are positive and significant at $p < 0.05$. Thus, hypothesis $H2$ is supported.

$H3a$ states that face saving will have positive effects on attitudes and on the intention to buy for domestic products, but it will not be significantly related to attitudes and the intention to buy imported products ($H3b$) among Korean consumers. In the case of the Samsung VCR (domestic product), the path coefficients between face saving and attitudes, and between face saving and behavioral intention are significant at $p < 0.05$ and in the expected direction. In the case of the Sony TV and Polo sweater (imported products), the path coefficients between face saving and attitudes, and between face saving and behavioral intention are not significant. Therefore, $H3a$ and $H3b$ are supported.

$H4a$ proposes that group conformity will have a positive relationship with both attitudes and the intention to buy domestic products, and $H4b$ suggests that group conformity will not be related to attitudes and the intention to buy imported products. In the case of the Samsung VCR (domestic product), the path coefficient between group conformity and attitudes is significant ($p < 0.05$), but not in the expected direction. Group conformity has a negative relationship with attitudes. Further, the path coefficient between group conformity and behavioral intention is not significant. Thus, $H4a$ is not supported. In the case of the Sony TV and Polo sweater (imported products), the path coefficients between group conformity and attitudes, and between group conformity and behavioral intention are not significant. Thus, $H4b$ is supported.

### Discussion

This study found that Lee’s (1990) model has high explanatory power for predicting Korean consumers' behavioral intention to buy domestic and imported products based on the goodness of fit indices for each of three products. The adjusted goodness of fit indices, however, indicate somewhat large differences from goodness of fit indices due to small degrees of freedom (Table III).

This study found that attitudes were a better predictor of behavioral intention than face saving and group conformity, and cognitive belief structure was a better predictor of attitudes than face saving and group conformity for both domestic and imported products. This finding is not consistent with Lee and Green (1991). As previously discussed, Lee and Green (1991) reported that Koreans, who generally are collectivists, are more influenced in their consumer behavior by subjective norms than by attitudes, while US consumers, who generally are individualists, are more affected by attitudes than subjective norms. That is, the results of the Lee and Green study imply that face saving and group conformity[1] are more important determinants of Korean consumers’ behavioral intention than attitudes.

However, the current study revealed that of the three antecedents, attitude was the most influential predictor of behavioral intention for all three products. In addition, cognitive belief structure was the most influential predictor of attitudes for all three products. Therefore, for Korean consumers, evaluative criteria (such as price, or quality, etc.) are the most important factors in determining their attitudes and intention to buy either domestic or imported products, which would be similar to Western consumers.

Such a tendency is highlighted in the finding that group conformity was negatively related to attitudes when purchasing a domestic product, Samsung VCR. In other

### Table III

Parameter estimates for model tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Samsung VCR</th>
<th>Sony TV</th>
<th>Polo sweater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes $\rightarrow$ behavioral intention</td>
<td>0.674*</td>
<td>0.954*</td>
<td>0.741*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief*evaluation $\rightarrow$ attitudes</td>
<td>0.898*</td>
<td>0.532*</td>
<td>0.445*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face saving $\rightarrow$ attitudes</td>
<td>0.266*</td>
<td>0.165</td>
<td>0.149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face saving $\rightarrow$ behavioral intention</td>
<td>0.257*</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>0.157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group conformity $\rightarrow$ attitudes</td>
<td>-0.358*</td>
<td>0.047</td>
<td>0.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group conformity $\rightarrow$ behavioral intention</td>
<td>0.161</td>
<td>-0.204</td>
<td>-0.309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi square</td>
<td>1.90(1df)</td>
<td>1.36(1df)</td>
<td>4.16(1df)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-value</td>
<td>0.168</td>
<td>0.244</td>
<td>0.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFI</td>
<td>0.981</td>
<td>0.989</td>
<td>0.960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGFI</td>
<td>0.720</td>
<td>0.841</td>
<td>0.403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSR</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.016</td>
<td>0.026</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** GFI = Goodness of Fit Index; AGFI = Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index; RMSR = Root Mean Square Residual; *Significant at $p < 0.05$, one-tailed test
words, Korean consumers who felt less group conformity had more positive attitudes toward buying a Samsung VCR.

While these findings were unexpected, studies in other disciplines have found similar results. In studies of group decision-making behavior in management (Chung and Adams, 1997), self-perception in advertising (Wilcox et al., 1996), and gender perception in social psychology (Kashima et al., 1995), researchers found that Hofstede’s cultural distinction of individualism/collectivism has become blurred[2]. Especially in the study of Wilcox et al. (1996), there was no significant difference between US and Korean students in the degree of individualism/collectivism. Therefore, these studies may have detected the changing nature of Korean consumers’ cultural values in their buying behavior.

That is, due to Korea’s rapid economic development, urbanization, and the infusion of Western culture in today’s globalized world (Golden, 1988; Wilcox et al., 1996), perhaps Korean consumers have become more individualistic in their life styles.

It may be, however, that younger populations worldwide have been more impacted by Western cultural views through increased exposure to advanced communication technologies (e.g. Internet) and various media (movies, songs, etc.). Since the current study analyzed only the views of college-age Koreans, it may be that these results reflect a pervasive Westernization trend among younger populations globally (Czinkota et al., 1995).

Although the influence of the group conformity (Confucian) value was diminished in the current study, face saving, another Confucian value was still powerful. Specifically, this study found that face saving was a significant predictor of Korean students’ attitudes and behavioral intentions for the domestic product, Samsung VCR, but not for the imported products (Sony TV and Polo sweater). Thus, as proposed in the study, face saving influences Korean consumers to purchase domestic products due to the social pressure to “buy Korean”. Similarly, when Koreans purchase imported products, face saving has little effect. The amount of influence of face saving on attitudes for Samsung VCR, however, was quite small in comparison with that of cognitive belief structure (0.898 for cognitive belief structure and 0.266 for face saving). Therefore, this finding may reflect the stronger influence of certain Confucian values within the dynamic global changes occurring in Korean market environments.

Conclusions and limitations

This study has examined the underlying structure of Korean consumers’ behavioral intention to buy imported and domestic products, based on Lee’s (1990) revised Fishbein model. In general, Lee’s (1990) model has an acceptable goodness of fit for Korean consumers’ behavioral intention to buy domestic and imported products. Specifically, Korean consumers who hold positive attitudes toward either a domestic or imported product have a greater intention to buy the products. Similarly, Korean consumers who evaluate a product more positively also have more positive attitudes toward the product. The components of social (cultural) pressure, face saving and group conformity, have a weaker influence on attitudes than cognitive belief structure and the significance of the effects varies depending upon the country of origin (domestic versus imported products).

Overall, face saving and group conformity were found to be significant predictors for domestic products, but not of imported products.

There are several limitations in this study. First, Korean students studying in the United States were used as the sample, and only two imported products (the Sony TV and the Polo sweater) and one domestic product (the Samsung VCR) were used as target products. Different results may have been found if a broader population base in Korea and other products had been studied. A larger sample, no doubt, also would have improved the explanatory power of Lee’s (1990) model. Thus, caution should be exercised about the generalization of the findings.

Implications and recommendations

Although this study is exploratory, the findings may reveal new trends in Korea that have implications for the domestic and multinational electronics and apparel industries, which are targeting young adult consumers (20s and 30s). Korean consumers’ cognitive belief structures were strongly related to their attitude formation, which includes such cues as product quality, service, or price. Thus, domestic marketing managers in these industries should stress the utilitarian aspects of products in advertisements in order to appeal to these market segments. Furthermore, since consumers with positive attitudes toward domestic products were also more influenced by face saving, marketing managers in Korean consumer products companies
should focus their message on the importance of “buying Korean”.

For the imported products, neither face saving nor group conformity was a significant predictor of Korean consumers’ attitude formation. Thus, multinational marketers may not wish to center their promotional messages on such ethnocentric characteristics but rather emphasize the utilitarian aspects of products, such as product quality.

The present study revealed that the Confucian value of face saving still influences Korean consumer behavior, but group conformity might no longer be a strong influencer. Such an interesting finding requires more extensive research by employing a larger and broader Korean sample and different product categories, since the effects could be product specific (Assael, 1992; Mowen, 1990). Further study should verify broader changes in Confucian values and whether face saving and group conformity still influence Korean consumers’ buying behaviors.

Each of the products studied was presented in the context of a single well-known (global) brand name. Future studies should manipulate the brand names associated with the products to determine the extent to which brand influences consumers’ beliefs about products. Similarly, it also may be instructive to study the moderating effect of the perceived brand familiarity and image in the relationship between attitudes and behavioral intention.

Lastly, in this study, social pressure to “buy Korean” was employed as an explanatory variable in determining the role of face saving and group conformity on attitudes and behavioral intentions to buy domestic and imported products. However, this social pressure can be measured by the concept of ethnocentrism of consumers. Therefore, further study should examine the moderating role of ethnocentrism on consumers’ purchasing behavior of domestic and imported products.

Notes
1 Lee (1990) substituted face saving and group conformity for subjective norms as equivalent cultural values between Western and Confucian cultures.
2 Because no relationship was found between the numbers of years the Korean students lived (studied) in the US and the magnitudes of face saving and group conformity, it would appear this finding is not due to US acculturation of the Korean students, as previously noted.

References
Reports Title: The Men’s Apparel Market in Korea ISA9312, July 10.


