Factors Influencing Buyer Satisfaction and Repurchase of Instant Noodles: The Moderating Roles between Korea and China*

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the important selection attributes of instant noodles that significantly affect consumer satisfaction in Korea and China. Several factors such as taste, price, quantity, design, and brand were tested, and the relationships between satisfaction and repurchase intention were analyzed. Results of the study reveal that "taste," "price," "quality," "brand," and "design" affected satisfaction significantly. Furthermore, the path coefficient of satisfaction that leads to repurchase was found to be significant. However, consumers' perceived importance of selection attributes of instant noodles varied according to their consumption value. The path coefficients from taste to satisfaction were more significant for Korean consumers than for Chinese consumers. Meanwhile, the path coefficient from corporate brand to satisfaction was more significant for Chinese consumers than Korean consumers. By suggesting significant selection attributes of instant noodles, the results provide meaningful implications for instant noodle companies in each country regarding the specific attributes they need to prioritize.

Keywords: Instant noodles, Selection attribute, Satisfaction, Repurchase, Moderating role.

1. Introduction

Ramen was first introduced in Korea in the 1960s. In the back alleys of Seoul, which was devastated by the war, the president of Samyang Food, Jeong Joong-yun, witnessed people eating the so-called "Pig Porridge" made from the edible leftovers of US troops. To solve this problem, he decided to establish Samyang Food. Subsequently, in cooperation with the Japanese company Myojo Food Co, Ltd, they began to produce "Samyang Ramen" in chicken broth flavor. At that time, Korea's food self-sufficiency rate was below 60%, but the tremendous population increase caused the food situation to deteriorate further. Therefore, the government encouraged the production of flour from the US, and the market grew rapidly as the efforts of companies to develop new products are linked. Ramen is the second rice in Korea which has been steadily patronized by consumers. Moreover, it plays an important role in the export industry.

According to the World Instant Noodles Association, global instant noodle consumption in 2018 was about 103.6 billion servings, and by simple calculation, 280 million instant noodles were sold every day. In recent years, the demand for ramen has decreased because of the emergence of various alternative foods. However, the 103.6 billion consumption of ramen a year is equivalent to about 15 servings of ramen per year for all 7 billion people in the world. Hence, ramen is still essential in the global food market.

China has the highest ramen consumption in the world, reaching 40 billion in 2018, more than 10 times the annual consumption of Korea, which has a population of more than 1.4 billion people and records one of the world's largest national consumption of ramen Indonesia ranks second, with annual consumption of ramen reaching 12.5 billion in the same year. It is followed by India, third in terms of ramen consumption, which consumes 6 billion. Meanwhile, Korea consumes 3.8 billion ramen a year and ranks eighth. However, Koreans have a special affection for ramen, and in terms of per capita consumption of ramen, Korea ranks first, with 74.6 per capita consumption per year, which is much higher than that of Vietnam (53.9) (Lee, 2016).

The result of the 2018 Nielsen Korea survey reveals that the domestic ramen market, which has only shown an upward trend, has shrunk in 2017 from the previous year. The decline was caused by home meal replacement (HMR) that has been launched with various products in recent years. In addition, consumers are increasingly reluctant to consume instant noodles according to health-conscious trends. In 2017, four major domestic ramen producers, namely, Nongshim, Ottogi, and Samyang Foods, recorded sales of 1,987 billion won, which is 2.6% lower than their sales in 2016. The domestic ramen market surpassed 2 trillion won in sales for the first time in 2013, but has since fallen to 1.9 trillion won and then remained stagnant. Ramen sales of four major companies declined year-over-year in 2017. Nongshim, which has the largest market share, dropped 2.7%, and Ottogi recorded a 4.1% decline for the first time in seven years. Moreover, the decline rate of Faldo's sales exceeded 10%. To address this problem, ramen companies started launching products that cannot be fried, such as various container

products and noodles, targeting consumers who use convenience stores and prefer healthy foods. They are also launching new products with some changes from existing popular products. However, in the food industry, the HMR market is expanding, and products are becoming more diverse. As the name implies, HMRs are foods that can replace traditional meals. Thus, we refer various kinds of HMR as " instant food," " fresh food," "delivery food," "simple food," "packaged food," "take-out food," and so on (Na & Kim, 2012). Ana, Schoolmeester, Dekker, and Jongen (2007) define pre-assembled main courses as foods designed to replace home-made dishes quickly. HMR is categorized by the Ministry of Food and Drug Safety as instant food and fresh food that are manufactured, processed, and packaged that can be consumed without cooking or with simple cooking (Kim, 2017).

This study is significant for the following reasons. First, despite the fact that ramen is regarded as a second meal for domestic consumers, previous studies on the relationship of consumers' purchasing preferences and satisfaction with repurchasing were insufficient and limited. The present study was conducted to investigate the actual status of ramen intake in domestic adults (Yu, Jung, & Yoon, 2013), determine the sodium content of ramen (Kim, Choi, & Bae, 2015), analyze the eating behavior and soup intake of university students (Kim, Lee, Kim, Kim, Pyun, Chung, & Nam, 2013), and assess the metabolic index by ramen consumption (Yeon & Bae, 2016). However, there is no research suggesting that the importance of ramen attributes leads to satisfaction and repurchase. Second, due to the rapid expansion of the HMR market in Korea, the sales of ramen noodles have been declining for the first time in history. Thus, it is necessary for ramen noodle makers to overcome the current crisis and revive the market.

The empirical result that specific attributes affecting selection of instant noodles have a positive effect on consumer satisfaction of the product, which in turn leads to re-purchase, can suggest a strategy that can lead to a positive response from customers in the long term. Therefore, in this study, we conducted an empirical analysis of the effects of selection attribute on consumer satisfaction and, in turn, on repurchase in Korea and China.

The aims of this study are as follows. First, the relationship between importance of selection attributes and consumer satisfaction will be investigated. Second, the relationship between satisfaction and repurchase intention will be verified. Third, when the importance of selection attributes of instant noodles influences satisfaction, the inter-country moderating effect between Korean and Chinese consumer groups will be studied.

2. Theoretical Background and Research Hypothesis

2.1. Selection Attributes for Instant Noodles

Existing studies related to the selection attributes of foods have focused mainly on processed foods to investigate the effects of HMR foods (Seo, Choi, & Lee, 2011; Lee, Park, & Cho, 2011; Chung et al., 2007; Jang, 2009), instant food (Chae et al., 2008), Kimchi (Cho, 2008), seafood-processed food (Kim & Ha, 2010), tea (Kim & Han, 2010), and others. However, there has been no research on the selection attributes of instant noodles. In addition, research on the

behavior of noodle product consumers has been mostly limited to exploratory research, such as the frequency of ingestion for instant noodles (Lee & Lee, 2003; Lee et al., 2009; Chung, Lee, & Cho, 2010). Studies on the selection attributes of ramen affecting consumer satisfaction and repurchase have been few and limited.

2.1.1. Taste of Instant Noodles

Chae et al. (2008) determined that taste and food hygiene were the most important attributes among instant food selection attributes for college students. Chung et al. (2007) found that consumers consider the quality, taste, and freshness of HMR the most important factors. Dhir (1987) proposed 10 optional attributes including restaurant turnover, food quality, convenient location, price, kindness of employees, menu variety, and consistency in his study on restaurant selection factors. Miller and Ginte (1979) categorized types of meals as snacks, busy meals, leisure time meals, and weekly lunches; they also studied selection attributes such as taste, price, variety of menu, service speed, cleanliness, and children's menu.

2.1.2. Price of Instant Noodles

Chung, Yang, and Lee (2007) found that quality, taste, freshness, menu, and price are important factors to consider when choosing HMR. Meanwhile, Lundberg (1989) conducted a study of hotels and restaurants, categorizing them according to price, menus, and services that were perceived important to their customers. Morgan (1993) suggested that food quality should not be run in a short-term perspective. In addition, the market segmentation study of chain restaurants suggested the quality of food, price, and convenience of time. Finally, Jung (2009) classified the attributes of choice as service factors, commodity factors, and store factors in the study of selection attributes of foods sold in discount store; results revealed that kindness in service factor, price in product factor, internal environment in store factor had the most significant influence on customers' purchase behavior.

2.1.3. Quantity of Instant Noodles

Schroeder (1985) presented nine aspects, such as food quality, service quality, price, atmosphere, menu variety, building appearance, food nutrition, and hygiene as criteria for restaurant evaluation. Doi (1992) presented franchise restaurants with optional attributes such as quantity of food, service, availability of beverages, menu, congestion, and price. Schroeder (1985) included the quantity of food in a study of restaurant evaluation criteria. Cadotte and Turgeon (1988) and Hart and Casserly (1985) conducted studies on food quantity as a customer preference attribute.

2.1.4. Brand of Instant Noodles

When customers are satisfied with a particular brand, they develop a preference for the brand, and thus make a purchase decision for the most preferred brand, resulting in an actual purchase (Brown & Stayman, 1992; Low & Lamb, 2000). Kim and Ha (2010) classified the selection attributes of processed fish products into brand, price, product information, and recipe. Moreover, they examined the selection attributes of tea with brand, production, and preference

factors, and verified the difference in the importance of selection attributes. Meanwhile, No (2017) found that the brand image of the firm plays a moderating role between the quality of the food, packaging, and repurchase intention of the HMR selection attributes. Han and Lee (2017) have verified that the brand image has a moderating effect between corporate image and attitude toward HMR products.

2.1.5. Design of Instant Noodles

In Chong's (2013) study, health, convenience, economic orientation, and taste orientation were found to have significant effects on visual appeal such as packaging and color of HMR. Seo, Choi, and Lee (2011) found that, among consumers' preference attributes, food quality, packaging, service, and convenience influenced perceived utility value in department and discount stores, which, in turn, affected repurchase intention. Chambers and Moulton (1978) concluded that color is a design element that elicits automatic reactions from people—in particular, physiological and ocular responses—and the strongest to something. According to Biren, an American psychologist, "every color gives a different impression to humans for each color, and also affects the taste of food and the sale of goods in real life" (Oh, 2004). Lastly, Geeroms, Verbeke, and Kenhove (2008) examined the differences in selection criteria of readymade meals by dividing them into external, trust, sensory, and functional. On the basis of these studies, we propose the following hypotheses.

Table 1: Summary of Previous Researches

Selection Attributes of Instant Noodles	Researchers
Taste	Chae et al.(2008), Miller and Ginte(1979), Chung et al.(2007), Dhir(1987)
Price	Chung, Lee and Yang(2007), Lundberg(1989), Morgan(1993), Jung(2009)
Quantity	Schroeder(1985), Doi(1992), Cadotte and Turgeon(1988), Hart and Casserly(1985)
Brand	Brown and Stayman(1992), Low and Lamb(2000), Kim and Ha(2010), Kim and Han(2010), No(2017), Han and Lee(2017)
Design	Chong(2013), Seo, Choi, and Lee(2011), Chambers and Moulton(1978), Oh(2004), Geeroms, Verbeke and Kenhove(2008)

H1: The taste of ramen has a significant effect on consumer satisfaction.

H2: The price of ramen has a significant effect on consumer satisfaction.

H3: The quantity of ramen has a significant effect on consumer satisfaction.

H4: The brand of ramen has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.

H5: The design of ramen has a significant effect on customer satisfaction.

2.2. Satisfaction and Repurchase

In Lee, Park, and Cho's (2011) study, among the hypothetical

simplification selection attributes, preference menu, simplicity, quality, and usefulness were found to have a significant positive effect on satisfaction. Quality and usefulness were determined to influence repurchase intention significantly. Satisfaction in the marketing field is an important variable for predicting customer behavior, and it plays a significant role in evaluating consumers' expectations and desires and enabling them to predict their behavior (Kapoor, 1989). The relationship between customer satisfaction and repurchase has been continuously studied in the field of food service (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & Luke, 1997; Clark & Wood, 1998; Kivela, Inbakara, & Reece, 2000, Cha & Park, 2014, Cha & Seo, 2018, Cha & Lee, 2018). In particular, Cha and Lee (2018) found that satisfaction with HMR selection attributes had a significant effect on repurchase intention. On the basis of these prior studies, we propose the following hypotheses.

H6: Ramen consumers' satisfaction has a significant effect on repurchase intention.

2.3. The Moderating Effect of Instant Noodles between Korea and China

Dziadkowiec and Rood (2015) studied differences in preferences for restaurants in the US and Poland among various cultures and found significant differences in factors. The differences in the perception of intercultural culture on hotel restaurant tips were studied (Jo, Choe, & Jang, 2004). Furthermore, the analysis of tourism advertisement contents for the US, Korean, and Japanese consumers showed that various approaches to cultural aspects are necessary (Chung & Kim, 2001). Jeong (2003) conducted a study on differences in eating motivation and preference attributes in Japan and Korea and found significant differences between these countries. Han, Choi, and Kwon (2017) found that Chinese people showed a preference for the spicy taste while their Japanese counterparts preferred simple food for strengthening their taste perception, and these preferences vary according to country. As can be inferred from the studies above, China and Korea are not the same in terms of politics, economy, history, technology, and culture. Accordingly, we derive the research model shown in Figure 1 and propose the following hypothesis.

H7: The effect of importance of selection attributes of ramen on satisfaction is different for Korean and Chinese consumers.
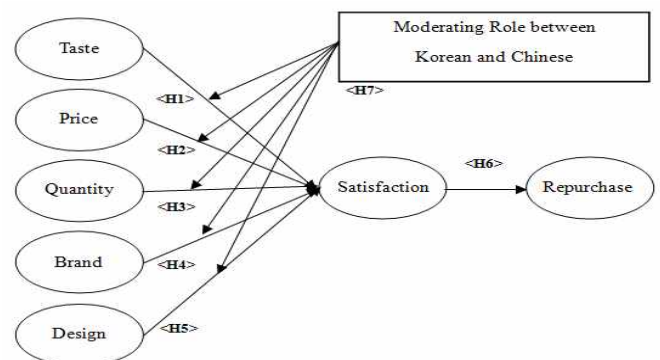

Figure 1: Research Model

3. Research Method

Questionnaire items from previous studies were revised to fit the context of this study. We conducted surveys in Korea and China from October 1, 2018 to December 30, 2018. For this, we distributed the questionnaires directly among our respondents using the SNS platform. We received a total of 1,027 questionnaires from Korea and China. After excluding 27 unfaithful or incomplete responses, 1,000 questionnaires were used for the empirical analysis. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis using Amos 23.0 to verify convergence validity and discriminant validity of the measured variables. Inappropriate factors were then removed. Subsequently, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis. The structural equation model was used to test our hypotheses. Of the 1,000 respondents, 378 (37.8%) were men and 622 (62.2%) were women.

4. Empirical Result

4.1. Evaluate Metrics

To test the validity and reliability of the measurement items, we analyzed the multi-item construction concept (Churchill, 1979). In particular, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to evaluate validity and reliability, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients were examined. Then, principal component analysis was applied for factor extraction, wherein factors were extracted based on eigenvalue 1. The VARIMAX method was applied to the factor rotation method. The results of the exploratory factor analysis are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

Table 2: Exploratory factor analysis

	Variables				
	1	2	3	4	5
Tas01	.443	**.802**	.135	.163	.063
Tas02	.381	**.809**	.138	.159	.100
Tas03	.298	**.840**	.095	.192	.113
Tas04	.469	**.779**	.123	.162	.098
Qua01	.083	.146	**.880**	.156	.039
Qua02	.040	.103	**.886**	.253	.067
Qua03	.086	.042	**.844**	.238	.046
Qua04	.396	.127	**.638**	.241	.078
Pri01	.251	.202	.292	**.721**	.061
Pri02	.227	.164	.259	**.825**	.066
Pri03	.228	.156	.260	**.843**	.069
Pri04	-.037	.092	.148	**.809**	.166
Bra01	**.802**	.433	.146	.128	.016
Bra02	**.797**	.389	.139	.188	.085
Bra03	**.777**	.422	.119	.199	.097
Bra04	**.803**	.452	.132	.123	.039
Des02	-.034	.030	.052	.108	**.888**
Des03	.579	.262	.110	.185	**.594**
Des04	.566	.255	.136	.197	**.608**
Variance (%): Total **81.96%**	21.96	19.04	16.25	16.17	8.53
Cronbach's Alpha	**.956**	**.948**	**.888**	**.893**	**.779**

Table 3: Exploratory factor analysis

	Variables	
	Satisfaction	Repurchase
Sat01	.636	**.640**
Sat02	.327	**.881**
Sat03	.614	**.702**
Sat04	.448	**.809**
Rep01	**.833**	.453
Rep02	**.855**	.429
Rep03	**.775**	.384
Rep04	**.860**	.372
Variance (%): Total **85.74%**	48.15	37.59
Cronbach's Alpha	**.934**	**.948**

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, Cronbach's alpha coefficients are all 0.7 or higher, which indicates the results are reliable (Nunnally, 1967). Moreover, the result of the exploratory factor analysis verified the discriminant and convergence validity to some degree. For statistical validation, confirmatory factor analysis was performed using Amos 23.0. As shown in Table 4, the chi-squared value of the measurement model is significant (p=0.000), but it is sensitive to the complexity and sample size of the model. Therefore, it is reasonable to evaluate the fit of the model by adding the normative index (NFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Bearden, Sharma, & Teel, 1982; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The overall model fit was considered satisfactory(NFI=0.960, CFI=0.969, and RMSEA=0.058). Furthermore, the Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extract (AVE) values were higher than the recommended values of Bagozzi and Yi (1988) (CR= 0.6, AVE=0.5), and the loadings were statistically significant (p<0.05). Therefore, convergent validity has been verified. Table 4 shows the results of the confirmatory factor analysis.

Table 4: Confirmatory factor analysis

Variables	Measure	Standardized Regression Coefficient	CR	AVE
Taste	Tas 01	0.935	0.948	0.820
	Tas 02	0.895		
	Tas 03	0.862		
	Tas 04	0.928		
Price	Pri 01	0.796	0.898	0.691
	Pri 02	0.894		
	Pri 03	0.927		
	Pri 04	0.686		
Quantity	Qua 01	0.876	0.893	0.680
	Qua 02	0.927		
	Qua 03	0.814		
	Qua 04	0.657		
Brand	Bra 01	0.920	0.957	0.849
	Bra 02	0.918		
	Bra 03	0.917		
	Bra 04	0.931		
Design	Des 02	0.414	0.821	0.628
	Des 03	0.921		
	Des 04	0.93		
Satisfaction	Sat 02	0.911	0.876	0.779
	Sat 04	0.853		
Repurchase	Rev 01	0.952	0.919	0.850
	Rev 04	0.891		

Chi-square=913.539(p=0.000, df=209), NFI=0.960, CFI=0.969, RMSEA= 0.058

The square root of the AVE was used to verify the discriminant validity among each factor. The value of square root of AVE is larger than 0.5, which is larger than the non-diagonal correlation value in the related row and column as shown in Table 5. Therefore, in the measurement results between different constitutional concepts, discriminant validity is confirmed through correlation analysis.

Table 5: Discriminant validity through correlation analysis

	Satisfaction	Taste	Quantity	Brand	Design	Repurchase	Price
Satisfaction	**0.882**						
Taste	0.789	**0.905**					
Quantity	0.422	0.337	**0.825**				
Brand	0.744	0.845	0.345	**0.922**			
Design	0.653	0.647	0.326	0.696	**0.793**		
Repurchase	0.843	0.864	0.377	0.877	0.676	**0.922**	
Price	0.562	0.488	0.574	0.487	0.484	0.498	**0.831**

note: the values presented at the diagonal are the square root of AVE

4.2. Research Hypothesis Verification

The research hypotheses were tested using Amos 23.0, and the results are presented in Table 6. The findings reveal that taste, price, quantity, brand, and cover design of instant ramen had a significant effect on satisfaction. This implies that the suggested selection attributes of instant noodles can be an important factor of customer satisfaction. In addition, since the path coefficient of satisfaction that leads to repurchase is significant, the customers who purchase instant noodles and obtain satisfaction have strong tendency to repurchase activities. Figure 2 presents the results of the analysis.

Table 6: Results of research hypothesis

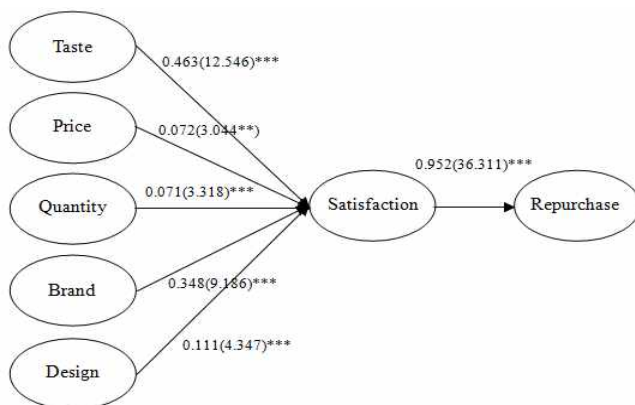| Hypothesis	Paths	Standardized Regression Coefficient	t-Value	Results
H1	Taste → Satisfaction	0.463	12.546***	Support
H2	Price → Satisfaction	0.072	3.044**	Support
H3	Quantity → Satisfaction	0.071	3.318***	Support
H4	Brand → Satisfaction	0.348	9.186***	Support
H5	Design → Satisfaction	0.111	4.347***	Support
H6	Satisfaction → Repurchase	0.952	36.311***	Support

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Figure 2: Results of research hypothesis

4.3. Verification of the Moderating Effect between Korean and Chinese Consumers

Table 7 compares the path coefficients of the Korean and Chinese consumer groups when the importance of the selection attributes of instant noodles affects their satisfaction. The comparison results showed that the effect of taste and price of the instant noodles on satisfaction was more apparent on Korean consumer group, whereas the effects of quantity, brand, and appearance design on satisfaction were more apparent Chinese consumer group. However, comparing chi-squared incremental value with p value, we found a statistically significant difference in the effect of taste and brand on satisfaction. Korean consumers are more sensitive to the taste of instant noodles and Chinese consumers are more influenced by the brand. Therefore, the moderating effect of each country has been verified empirically. The result implies that both Korean and Chinese consumer groups are sensitive to the influence of preference attribute of instant noodles on satisfaction. Furthermore, the results of the hypothesis test reveal that the effects on satisfaction among Korean and Chinese consumer groups vary according to importance of optional attributes. Table 7 shows the differences between the Korean and Chinese consumer groups.

Table 7: Comparison of Korean consumer group and Chinese consumer group

	Standardized Regression Coefficient		Comparison Results	Chi-square increment	*p*-value
	Korean	Chinese			
Tas → Sat	**0.542**	0.359	>	6.138(d.f.=1)	**0.013***
Pri → Sat	0.164	0.106	>	0.026(d.f.=1)	0.872
Qua → Sat	0.072	0.080	<	1.599(d.f.=1)	0.206
Bra → Sat	0.218	**0.305**	<	4.214(d.f.=1)	**0.040***
Des → Sat	0.136	0.252	<	1.830(d.f.=1)	0.176

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine the most important factor of consumer satisfaction among the selection attributes of instant noodles for Korean and Chinese consumers. From the literature survey of existing studies, we examined the effect of the importance of selection attributes and determined the most suitable attributes for consumers in purchasing instant noodles. Furthermore, the causality from satisfaction to repurchase was analyzed.

Results of this study reveal that taste, price, quantity, brand, and design of instant noodles have a statistically significant positive effects on satisfaction. In addition, the path coefficient of satisfaction to repurchase was statistically significant. However, these relationships varied according to consumer groups in Korea and China. The effect of taste on satisfaction was positively significant in both Korean and Chinese consumer groups at p < 0.05. Meanwhile, the effect of price on satisfaction was found to be more influential in the Korean consumer group than in the Chinese consumer group, but no statistically significant difference exists. The effects of

quantity, brand, and appearance design on satisfaction were determined to influence the consumers group in Korea and China positively. In the case where only the brand affects satisfaction, Chinese instant noodle consumers were determined to be more influenced than Korean consumers. The difference was proved to be statistically significant at p<0.05. It can be seen that consumer purchase of instant noodles vary according to national differences in Korea and China. In other words, Korean consumer groups are more sensitive to the taste of instant noodles, whereas Chinese consumer groups are more sensitive to their brands.

These results provide the following implications for the instant ramen industry. First, taste, price, quantity, brand, and design were important attributes that consumers in Korea and China consider when purchasing instant noodles. Second, consumers in Korea responded to the taste of instant noodles, whereas consumers in China responded sensitively to the brand of instant noodles. Therefore, instant noodle companies should prioritize and focus on the promotion of instant noodle taste for Korean consumers and instant noodle brand through CRM marketing for Chinese consumers.

This study has some limitations and suggests the direction of future research. First, in this study, taste, price, quantity, brand, and design are suggested as important selection attributes of instant noodles; however, more selection attributes of instant noodles can be considered. Second, instant noodles can be classified into bag noodles and cup noodles. These two categories are examined simultaneously. Future research can be undertaken to analyze the bag noodles and cup noodles separately, especially for the cup noodles which recently reported an increasing trend in sales in Korea. Third, this study only compared Korea and China; future research will need to consider other countries where there is growing popularity of Korean instant noodles, such as Vietnam, Philippines, and India, and present the implications of the global marketing of Korean instant noodles.

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