Contemporary dandies: The behavioral characteristics of Korean male consumers in fashion multi-brand stores and tailor shops ☆

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ABSTRACT

This study provides emic and etic interpretations of the dandyism tendency of contemporary male fashion consumers who use multi-brand stores and/or tailor shops. Based on in-depth interviews, the study explores six major consumer characteristics in the context of dandyism: appearance recognized as a form of social competency, the pursuit of distinction from others and refusal to conform to existing clothing norms, the establishment of one's own aesthetic rules, an explorative and academic approach to fashion brands and how to wear them, aesthetic efforts to pursue refinement, and a perfectionist tendency toward looks. The study also offers the promise of more effective and precise market segmentation analysis relating to specific retail formats or services.

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1. Introduction

The South Korean fashion market has long been regarded as a test market for many top global fashion brands. Now, Korea's fashion market has reached maturity, with a number of different brands in competition with each other (Jin, Kandagal, & Jung, 2012). As Korean consumers' demand for high quality branded products continuously increases, traditional retailers seek unique imported brands for their selective consumers (Jung, 2012; Lim, 2011). In particular, the male fashion market for branded apparel products has grown noticeably over the past decade, and leading retailers and national apparel brands have made considerable efforts to satisfy the increasingly diverse desires of Korean male consumers (Kim & Park, 2016; Hwang, 2010). Some leading national brands employ a multi-brand strategy for their retail stores (Kim, 2008), offering not only their own products but also imported or domestic designer brands that fit their brand concept and provide variety to the customers (Eom & Pyo, 2014; Jung, 2012, Kim & Kim, 2004; Kim & Park, 2016; Kwon, Chang, & Kim, 2010). Another trend is the increasing demand for custom-made suits. More Korean male consumers prefer buy suits customized to their taste and lifestyle at tailor shops rather than buying ready-made suits (Jung, 2013; Kim, 2011; Kim & Lee, 2015; Park, 2010).

Contemporary Korean male customers' behavioral characteristics are similar to the European dandies in the late 18th Century in many respects. In addition to their strong interest in fashion and grooming (Breward, 1999, 2000; Lee & Lee, 2013; Sung, 2009), these male consumers consider appearance and style to be an indication of social competency, defy popular trends (Jung & Lee, 2011; Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012; Levíllain, 1991; Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013), approach fashion from academic and theoretical stances, and maintain their own meticulous and detailed rules about what defines a stylish appearance (Breward, 1999, 2000; Levíllain, 1991; Walden, 2002). In this sense, analyzing contemporary Korean male consumer behavior based on dandyism as an analysis framework may help to understand this new consumer culture.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Popularization of male fashion multi-brand stores and tailor shops in Korea

In the early 2000s, fashion multi-brand stores (i.e., select shops) were established in Korea to draw consumers (Kim, 2007, 2008; Kim & Hwang, 2011). Select shops focusing on luxury import brands or premium jeans started this trend (Kim & Kim, 2004; Lee & Jo, 2007). High prices made these shops unaffordable for most consumers. In response, large domestic department stores and major fashion companies actively began introducing fashion multi-brand stores between 2004 and 2008 (Kim & Hwang, 2011; Kim & Kim, 2004), and the revenues for these stores have increased from below KRW 30 billion in 1997 to KRW 180 billion by 2006 (Kim, 2008). Select shops and multi-brand shops are relatively new retailing forms in the Korean fashion market, albeit a form with limited popularity due to high prices (C.K. Kim, 2010; Lee & Jo, 2007). By the late 2010s, fashion multi-brand stores selling goods within reach of the middle class emerged, with an estimated market size of KRW 420 billion (Ham, 2011). With continuous development and

expansion, fashion multi-brand stores have potential to become a key distribution channel.

In addition to fashion multi-brand stores, tailor shops offering custom-made suits also are now significant retailers attracting male consumers in South Korea (Park, 2010). Handmade suits are favored not only by Korean male consumers in their 40s and 50s, but also younger men in their 20s and 30s (Kim, 2011). The rising demand for one-of-a-kind custom-made suits is an emerging trend. Surprisingly, little research has been conducted on the recently changing consumption practices among South Korean male consumers.

2.2. Dandyism as a conceptual framework

In order to establish an a priori conceptual framework that provides adequate descriptors of the purchase behavior of male consumers described above, this study applies the dandy subculture concept, a group of men who are identifiable by their way of dressing, fashion identity, or common behavior in a cultural context. Dandyism is an appropriate methodological framework, because the concept's characteristics emerged during the initial data coding. The themes emerging from the qualitative data resonate with the characteristic factors of dandyism (i.e., the subculture's rebellious tendencies) (Breward, 2000; Cho, 2012; Favardin & Bouëxière, 1988; Levíllain, 1991) and male involvement in fashion and unique sartorial style, which translates to contemporary consumption culture (Breward, 2000, 2008; Cho, 2012; Ko, 2010; Walden, 2002).

Dandy refers to a polished or stylish appearance, was introduced by a young British man named George Bryan Brummell (hereinafter Brummell, 1778–1840) in the late 18th Century (Barbey d'Aurevilly, 1845/1977). Under George IV's rule between 1810 and 1820, Brummell influences the fashion of the period by expressing his belief in his superiority over the bourgeois class through a new restrained and simple fashion that he also positioned as a sophisticated hobby, which went against the sociocultural atmosphere in which a showy and glamorous appearance was popular. Due to his neat, stylish, and polished look, Brummell was called 'the Beau Brummell' or simply 'the Beau,' which means 'beautiful' in French (Barbey d'Aurevilly, 1845/1977). Consequently, the pursuit of external beauty, dressing up, and the acquisition of distinction and uniqueness through appearance (all of which Brummell promoted) are the unique characteristics of dandyism (Barbey d'Aurevilly (1845/1977); Breward, 2000, 2008; Cho, 2012; Moërs, 1960).

Arguably, dandyism is a philosophy in which men express their sartorial style in a form unique to themselves, as well as a cultural phenomenon reflecting this philosophy (Bartlett, 2013; Breward, 2000; Levíllain, 1991). Barbey d'Aurevilly (1845/1977) *Du Dandysme et de George Brummell* first describes the dandyism phenomenon. He was thought to be a French dandy himself. (Levíllain, 1991)

Barbey expressed his internal femininity by wearing red vests or powdery makeup to stand against bourgeois society and to create his own unique appearance by dying his hair and mustache (Breward, 2000; Cho, 2012). He also challenged himself to strengthen male beauty through makeup, and wanted to express the lyricism of women through appearance (Breward, 2000; Cho, 2012). Based on Barbey's behavior, dandyism goes beyond dressing up and managing outward impressions, but the style also expresses one's inner self through appearance (Breward, 2000; Cho, 2012; B.R. Kim, 2010). Thus, this research uses Brummellian dandyism as a conceptual framework, based on Barbey's perspective. Barbey's perspective has special implications by describing and re-evaluating the dandy characteristics in a cultural context (i.e., dandified forms of expression regarding appearance and behavior (Breward, 2000; Cho, 2012; Favardin & Bouëxière, 1988; Ko, 2010) and dandies' material and philosophical fashion consumption (Breward, 2000; Walden, 2002). Table 1 shows the main characteristics of dandyism.

Table 1
Main characteristics of dandyism.

	Characteristic
Breward (2000)	Through unique sartorial expression, challenges the aristocratic prerogative affecting the direction of fashionable taste
	Pursues fashionable novelties and superior taste
	Controls one's self-image and maintains a self-conscious attitude
Cho (2012)	Pursues a distinction and uniqueness that stand against conformism through appearance
	Makes oneself aesthetically pleasing through an elegant and refined appearance and distinction based on nonconformity against the bourgeois look
Favardin and Bouëxière (1988)	Resists an elegant life but pursues good taste
	Represents best appearance with self-esteem by refusing old-fashioned and ordinary styles
	Pursues the spirit of challenge and simple leisure
Ko (2010)	Respects norms and customs but pursues originality by not conforming to them
	Creates beauty through attire, makeup, etc. for a perfect look
	Forms an independence according to one's own rules
Walden (2002)	Resists the old aristocracy through by simplifying and refining its extravagant clothes
	Pursues originality in fashion and self-conscious appearance

3. Methods

Among male consumers, men in their 20s through 40s are the main clientele for fashion multi-brand stores and tailor shops (Kang, 2013; Kim, 2011; Park, 2010). In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 male consumers in this age group who use these two types of store. Snowball sampling was used to contact male consumers within the population of interest. This study follows Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) in conducting snowball sampling, analyzing the types and characteristics of the respondents on an ongoing basis while collecting, analyzing, and conceptualizing the data. This ongoing analysis of the respondents is expected to guide future referral chains and ensure that the sample included in the study reflects the general characteristics of the population in question and helps explore potentially unknown characteristics.

The decision to limit the number of respondents was made when the data became repetitive (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1999). The procedures suggested by Borghini et al. (2009) and Kim and Lee (2007) were followed when selecting those respondents with prior experience in both store types. All respondents were asked about their purchase and service experiences at the stores as well as their way of dressing, usual outfits, and opinions on fashion and branded apparel. For these conversational and informal interviews, a semi-structured interview strategy was employed using Spradley's (1979) descriptive, structural, and contrasting question types. Each interview took between 1.5 and 2.5 h, and all interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. In addition, the interviews were translated to English and back-translated to the original Korean to verify that the two versions accurately coincided (Brislin, 1970; Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012).

When analyzing the results, this study used the similarity between Korean male fashion consumers in the modern era and dandies in the early 19th Century as the frame of discussion. Prior studies suggest an a priori theory can guide a study by forming the basis of the analysis and discussion of the data gathered using qualitative research like interviews or observations (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Creswell, 2007; Sawyer, 2000). Framework-based analysis is a matrix-based method which allows the construction of thematic categories into which data might be coded (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). Dandyism provided pre-identified conceptual themes that could be used as coding categories. New themes