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

or concepts emerging from an inductive analysis of the data were added as the analysis proceeded.

Long interviews and frame-based analysis and synthesis allowed this research to embrace both emic and etic perspectives (Harris, 1976; Woodside, 2010) and to provide a more detailed interpretation (Cohen, 1999). As an insider's view of the culture or context of consumption at multi-brand stores and tailor shops, the subjects' responses were interpreted from an emic perspective (Abdul-Ghani, Hyde, & Marshall, 2011; Harris, 1976; Warner, 1999). On the other hand, the researcher's interpretation of these insiders' perspectives using a dandyism framework took an etic perspective, looking at a culture or a context from the outside (Abdul-Ghani et al., 2011; Harris, 1976; Warner, 1999).

4. Findings

4.1. Appearance recognized as social competency

Many respondents believe that being well dressed is a measure of success or social competency, a recognizable tendency among male fashion consumers (Jang, Hwang, & Jeon, 2007; Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012). Similar to contemporary male consumers, dandies also use their appearance to impress others, and are very conscious of their bodies and style (Walden, 2002). Table 2 presents a selection of quotes from the respondents.

4.2. Pursuit of distinction from others and refusal to conform to existing clothing norms

The attitude mentioned above, that one's appearance represents one's ability, corresponds to the philosophy of dandyism (Levíllain, 1991). Dandies value an appearance that distinguishes them from others, pursuing this objective by selecting, purchasing, and wearing fun and unique clothes that others would not wear (Barbey d'Aurevilly, 1845/1977; Breward, 2000, 2008; Cho, 2012; Ko, 2010). They justify their styles using various information and knowledge (Breward, 1999, 2008) and demonstrate their disapproval of popular trends (Breward, 2000). Like dandies, many respondents consider the uniqueness and originality of their clothes and the expression of individuality to be important. They make a conscious effort not to follow the typical fashion of general fashion consumers or mainstream clothing products. Tables 3 and 4 provide a selection of relevant respondent quotes.

4.3. Establishing new, individual aesthetic rules

The desire to be distinct from others and the refusal to conform to clothing norms has led many male fashion consumers to establish their own aesthetic rules. They purchase and wear clothes from multi-brand stores or tailor shops to achieve this nonconformity. This behavior mirrors the attitude of dandies, who attempted to establish their own specialized modes for their appearance and clothes (Levíllain, 1991). For example, some rules of dress imposed by Brummell include the reduced use of color and detail, a suitable combination of colors, an appropriate surface finish of the cloth, and perfection in the cut of their clothes (Breward, 2008; Levíllain, 1991). Accordingly, dandies value the choice

Table 2
A selection of quotes illustrating appearance being recognized as a social competency.

"… I think it's natural for companies to choose candidates who make a good impression among those that have similar abilities and competence…so I think an individual's appearance has become a social competency these days…" (Case 9)
"…these days there are many occasions in which I get treated well by others when presenting a good look…so I think stylish dress or a well-managed appearance is indeed a social competency in our country…" (Case 11)

Table 3
A selection of quotes illustrating the pursuit of distinction from others.

"… I have come to like select shops because I wanted to wear different clothes from others … the clothes being sold in select shops are not from common, popular brands in general …" (Case 1)
"… I think select shops fulfill my desire to stay ahead … now the unique and pretty clothes that people in general don't know about have come to Korea through select shops …" (Case 3)

of textiles and personal, tailor-made designs (Breward, 2000; Walden, 2002). Instead of blindly purchasing fashion items in a market environment where different tastes are rampant, the respondents prefer tailored suits made of materials of their choice and designed to their specifications or to adopt brands typically sold in multi-brand stores. As a result, they establish a standard that allows their attire to stand apart from general consumers and fulfills their own aesthetic desires (see Table 5).

4.4. Explorative and academic approach to fashion brands and how to wear them

Results suggest contemporary Korean male fashion consumers try to approach brands, individual clothing products, and how to wear them from an academic point of view in order to establish new aesthetic rules relating to the purchase and wearing of clothes. Specific examples help to illustrate this view. For instance, they visit many different multi-brand stores with various brand concepts and explore the sensibility of each brand (Case 1). They also try to obtain and understand information explaining how a brand concept or design philosophy is reflected and sublimated in clothes when purchasing a specific brand or a certain designer's products (Cases 3 and 8). They may also study via tailor shops or related blogs the types and materials of classic menswear and how to wear the clothing (Cases 9, 10, and 11), or identify the image they want to emulate and determine the style that best fits by reading fashion magazines and foreign magazine collections (Case 5). These actions demonstrate that male fashion consumers put considerable time and effort into creating and expressing a fashion image that reflects their uniqueness (see Table 6).

These results support the proposition that these men approach fashion from an academic perspective to establish unique, individual aesthetic rules similar to the original dandies (B.R. Kim, 2010). In both cases, these consumers are obsessed with promoting their aesthetic sense and analyzing their appearance to ensure the look reflects their own unique tastes (Breward, 2008; Moërs, 1960; Park, 1998).

4.5. Aesthetic efforts to pursue refinement

Most respondents have a behavioral intention to refine their style to fit aesthetic rules. This behavior plays a powerful role not only in arousing their intellectual desire to explore and learn about fashion but also affects what they purchase and wear. In other words, they have a strong tendency to explicitly express the style they value. This behavior is similar to dandies, who pursued a refined and delicate look by trying many different alternatives and dressing up in the ways they wanted, with a

Table 4
A selection of quotes illustrating the refusal to conform to existing clothing norms.

"… I sometimes wear women's clothes too. I don't care about such a distinction. I just wear them if they fit me. For example, large women's jeans came out from this female brand called Seven Jeans. I actually went to the store to buy them for my sister, but I ended up buying and wearing the jeans after I learned they fit me …" (Case 2)
"… I think male suit brands in Korea are all too slim—probably because of men's tastes these days. I don't like this style–it's too popular … that's why I started getting suits tailored in an Italian style that are fancier than Korean suits and fit my body size …" (Case 9)

Table 5
A selection of quotes illustrating the establishment of one's own aesthetic rules.

"… I have my own rules when buying and wearing clothes … I usually get to visit select shops to find styles and brands that suit me well …" (Case 8)

"… I get information about what materials are popular in male suits these days and which imported materials are used often from online blogs or the tailor shops I visit … then I select these materials and purchase tailored suits. I can wear ordinary patterns in terms of design, but I want to give a conservative and professional and yet classy image by using high-quality materials …" (Case 12)

considerable effort to reflect their taste in clothes (Barbey d'Aurevilly, 1845/1977; Levíllain, 1991; Walden, 2002). For example, Brummell, a typical dandy, spent 2 h every morning choosing a necktie or fixing his appearance (Levíllain, 1991; Seo, 2003). The respondents' aesthetic rules help to identify several specific behaviors. For example, they attempt to express certain images by finding new and novel products in terms of overall style, materials, and design. They also employ made-to-order services so that they can wear custom handmade suits which use fabric they have chosen directly to fit their body type. Table 7 presents a selection of quotes from the respondents.

4.6. Perfectionist tendency toward looks

The study group's explicit behaviors prompt them to establish an impeccable style with matching clothes, shoes and accessories in order to ensure the completeness of their beauty and the look they are pursuing. This behavior corresponds to the pursuit of perfection demonstrated by dandies (Breward, 1999; Ko, 2010; Levíllain, 1991). Dandies were interested in makeup and "accessorization" and often spent excessive amounts on them in order to solidify their own unique look (Breward, 1999; Levíllain, 1991). Similarly, male consumers use products purchased at tailor shops to collect a matching set of clothes (e.g., tops and bottoms, shirts, ties, shoes, socks, and accessories) for each concept and color they value. Table 8 lists some representative quotes.

The pursuit of perfection is especially noticeable when male consumers wear suits. The desire for total coordination, providing the detail, a wearing sensation, and a classic sensibility that ready-made suits cannot provide continues to increase. A perfectionist 'total coordination' tendency parallels the attitude of dandies, who regarded the strict use of materials, such as highly elastic wool and forms that exactly fit each part of the body, wearing a tie in various ways, and wearing shoes, socks, hat, and gloves as accessories of the perfect look (Lee & Cho, 1999).

5. Conclusion and discussion

This research analyzes the dandyism tendency of contemporary male fashion consumers. These consumers use multi-brand stores or tailor shops to focus on common views of new consumption behavior and the attributes of dandyism. Study results show that the use of multi-brand stores and tailor shops and resultant purchase motives derive from the pursuit of an appearance that distinguishes individual male fashion consumers from others, a goal based on the purchase of attire that differs from popular styles and the desire to be seen as well-dressed men. Respondents believe that their clothes should reflect a

Table 6
A selection of quotes illustrating an explorative and academic approach to fashion brands and how to wear them.

"… Since I started wearing tailored suits, I've been studying how to wear them according to body type as well as the structure and materials of tailored suits through blogs or the tailors at shops I visit often …" (Case 10)

"… I get inspiration from Italian Simone Righi, who runs a select shop named Frasi. He's short, but the way he wears clothes makes him look taller than he is … rather than copying him, I try to learn how to make up for such physical shortcomings and find styles that look good on me from his classic wear styles …" (Case 11)

Table 7
A selection of quotes illustrating an aesthetic effort to pursue refinement.

"… I first look through many styles on blogs or internet communities and keep changing the styles I want to put on …" (Case 4)

"… I have to visit a store at least three times on average for tailored suits … But I still get tailor-made suits because of the feeling that they fit my body perfectly …" (Case 12)

refined aesthetic sense and taste in order to make their appearances original, unique, and distinct from others. Multi-brand stores and tailor shops are the retail outlets best suited to deliver this customer group the products they desire. Findings show that the respondents usually look through magazines and magazine collections to acquire a polished aesthetic sense and taste. They consistently explored new fashion brands that cannot be easily found in other places, the design philosophy of such brands, and new products by reading websites and blogs run by Korean multi-brand stores or by visiting the stores directly. Respondents interested in classic wear or tailored suits also examine the fabric types, the sewing process for handmade jackets, resultant advantages while wearing the products, the ideal suit's shape according to body type, and how to wear a tailored suit.

Most respondents prefer imported brands to Korean designer brands when purchasing clothes from multi-brand stores. In addition, their purchase preference is variety to express their individuality, rather than being brand loyal. These consumers believe clothes purchased from multi-brand stores and tailors are received positive by other people, leading to overall satisfaction with the products. The respondents also express a high level of satisfaction when other consumers recognize that the clothes the respondents are wearing are custom-made or relatively rare products produced by unique brands. However, dissatisfaction with this type of clothing was not examined in this research. Future research is necessary to explore whether or not cognitive dissonance exists or a gap between expectations and product performance develops over time.

The results suggest that an underlying contemporary male fashion consumers' attitudes toward fashion leads to a tendency to always strive to enhance one's own beauty and to become immersed in beauty. Consequently, this obsession with appearance develops into the continual exploration of fashion-related information, even while commuting or browsing multi-brand stores in their spare time. Furthermore, acquiring a broad knowledge of fashion and establishing a firm fashion philosophy in terms of dress and purchase behavior represents an attitude to that of dandies, who tried to achieve self-perfection by acquiring and displaying a polished taste by fixing their appearance and realizing their aesthetic ambition. Accordingly, the recent rise of multi-brand stores and tailor shops targeting males suggests the return of dandyism.

Considering the characteristics of contemporary Korean dandies, menswear brands and retailers may be able to develop strategies that appeal to these consumers. Brands and retailers need to carry unique products that allow their customers to experiment with different styles in store as men have become an important target group for them (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2006). These stores should present the designer's philosophy in an academic language style. Displaying written information about the brands or the designers (e.g., brochures, magazines, or books) may attract these consumers. Providing information about materials, designs, and styles likely will help these consumers make informed choices. In addition, multi-brand store staff members and tailors need to explain knowledgably about brands or products to

Table 8
A selection of quotes illustrating a perfectionist tendency toward looks.

"… I get a really fine look only by wearing a turtleneck sweater inside a tailored suit instead of a t-shirt … so ever since I found out about that I've got separate tailored suits—a classic suit for work and a business casual suit for everyday wear … and then I buy and wear socks, shoes, and neckties that fit each style …" (Case 10)

these male consumers. Therefore, further investigation into how person-to-person communication influences male fashion consumers' purchase behavior warrants further investigation.

Even though this study was conducted with Korean consumers, the dandyism tendency likely exists in other cultural contexts. Considering that the increasing popularity of multi-brand stores and tailor shops across Asia, conducting similar studies in other Asian countries such as China is recommended (Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency, 2016). Also, other factors likely relate to male attitudes toward fashion that may form the basis of modern fashion consumption behavior, such as the use of multi-brand stores and tailor shops. This investigation requires other data collection methods such as observations of purchases for a detailed analysis of behavioral patterns or a consumer survey. A survey may help explore the extent to which dandyish elements are reflected in today's menswear. A survey of males' aesthetic consciousness relating to fashion, such as the emphasis on color schemes in terms of clothing, may enable a generalized exploration of dandyism among consumers. Finally, other studies which qualitatively analyze the male consumption culture using dandyism or other subculture frameworks may offer more effective and precise market segmentation analysis and pursue the development of targeted marketing strategies, such as brand loyalty programs.

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