Male Consumers' Behaviour in a High-Priced Clothing Market

- Based on Depth Interviews for Brand Image Evaluation -

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Abstract : Since the Korean economic crisis in 1997, consumers are selecting goods that are more economical and more reasonably priced. Markets for wealthy people, however, have seldom been influenced by economic conditions. Consequently, "noble marketing" is a new term that marketers should become acquainted with (Kim, 1998). The continuously expanding "noble market" that generates high profit for marketers needs to be explored, especially the men's wear market. This study adopted a qualitative method (i.e., in-depth interview) with 16 male consumers each. These men who spent more than 3,600,000 won on apparel goods in 2000 and each man had purchased at least one item - suit, jacket, trousers, or coat - from a list of high-priced brands that were selected by the researcher. Findings imply that material or functional benefit of the high-priced apparel were not a critical determinant for choosing the brand. Rather, a socially well-established image for the brand name, especially in terms of psychological/symbolic appeal, played a more important role. This finding supported previous studies. Therefore, for high-priced men's wear, the role of promotion, including advertising or word of mouth, is critical; the image that advertisers should promote is one that characterizes the clothing, and ultimately the wearers, as dignified, legitimate, traditional, and upper class.

Key Words : high-priced brand, male consumer, clothing behavior, brand image, depth-interview

I. BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Apparel markets can be divided into several tiers based on retail price levels; these are classified as budget, moderate, better, bridge, and prestige; or, more simply put, low-priced, medium-priced, and high-priced. Usually, apparel brands in the high-priced market in Korea are associated with high-quality, symbolic brand image, imported brands, and

conspicuous consumption. The high-priced Korean apparel market continually imports many globally famous brands which target a small portion of consumers who spend a considerable amount of money on their appearance. Even with the Korean economic crisis of 1997, this has not changed. Many trade magazines and TV news shows have reported that markets for wealthy people have seldom been influenced by economic conditions. This is why "noble marketing' has become a term that marketers should be aware of (Kim, 1998).

This continuously expanding and relatively stable high-priced market needs to be explored in terms of consumers' general clothing behaviour and brand competition. Studies of high-priced market consumers are relatively limited, especially studies of men's wear consumers. Along with more studies of the high-priced market, attention should be paid to another notable trend in the apparel market - the increase of casual wear in the office (Focust, Cassill, & Herr, 1999; Levi, 1995). The casual workplace means men's clothing behaviour is expected to be different from the past when formal wear was required in the workplace. However, this new trend is arguable. It is reported that as the overall economic situation gets worse worldwide, men's attire at work may become more conservative and more formal (Lee, 2001). Whether males who spend more money on their appearance adopt casual wear at their workplace or not is questionable.

Male consumers' clothing behaviour has been studied less than female's. This is not a surprise because women spend more money on clothing; and, historically, gender roles have forced females to focus on their appearance. Therefore, their behaviour in the marketplace has been more carefully studied (Kaiser 1997). Korean consumers' expenditures in the women's wear market have also been compared to expenditures in the men's wear market in 1999 (2.6 trillion won vs. 1.8 trillion won) and 2000 (3.1 trillion won vs. 2.2 trillion won). The expenditure on women's wear is clearly higher (Korea Apparel Industry Association 2001). Even though males don't spend as much the money as females, their expenditure is significant enough to warrant attention.

This study was designed to focus on male consumers' clothing behaviour in the high-priced men's wear market. It compares male consumer's styles at work and during leisure time to describe how male consumers evaluate high-priced men's wear in terms of brand images. The findings will support apparel marketers who are engaged in building strategies

based on general clothing behaviour and male consumers' identification with brand images.

Based on this background, this study developed research questions and reviewed relevant literature and previous studies.

1) What is the current male consumers' clothing behavior in high-priced market brands? (i.e., their clothing styles at work and in leisure time and their attitude toward made-to-measure service)

2) How are high-priced men's wear brand images formed? (i.e., which brands have a distinctive and differentiating brand image and which ones do not? what is the current level of brand awareness?)

3) What factors about the brand drive male consumers to choose the brand? (i.e., what are the psychological/symbolic aspects or material/functional aspects of the brand image?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Brand Image

Brands have attributes that can be tangible or intangible depending on how or why consumer identify with one brand among so many competing choices. Keller (1993) defined "brand image" as the perception of the brand formed by combining brand associations which have accumulated in consumers' memories. Brand association is referred to as everything remembered about the brand. For a brand to be competitive in the market - favourable, strong, and unique brand associations must be formed in consumers' minds. "Brand image" is also defined as an integrated concept of psychological/symbolic factors and material/functional factors about the brand (Rhee, 1999). Moreover, brand image is usually connected with symbolic characteristics of the product beyond its practical performance and simple brand name (Lee, 1997). According to Aaker (1993), brand image can be defined as a cluster of attributes and associations that consumers connect to the brand name. These evoked associations can then be divided into two categories - tangible/functional attributes and emotional attributes.

Consumers pursue benefits from apparel products in terms of material/functional attributes (i.e., style, color, quality, sewing, size, fit) and psychological/symbolic attributes (i.e., price, brand popularity, promotional activities, brand wearer image). In many previous studies, when purchasing apparel products consumers have been found to be more dependent on brand images that have an abstract and spiritual appeal than on brand images that have a material and specific performance quality appeal (Hong, 1969; Park & Lim, 2000).

According to Aaker (1991), a well-established brand image is beneficial for both consumers and brand marketers. Consumers can obtain emotional satisfaction when the brand is highly recognized and delivers desirable messages about the wearer. Among the many alternatives of choice in a saturated market, consumers can also select a product with the confidence that the brand has a well-established image. For marketers, investing much effort in building a brand image is beneficial in that the brand image is a critical factor of brand equity; this enhances competitiveness in the market and triggers consumer loyalty to the brand.

In this study, brand image is studied especially for high-priced, name-brand men's wear. High-priced brands are assumed to be the brands which appeal to consumers' emotional values and which require more clothing involvement level. When an apparel product is high-priced, its level of functional or material performance is thought by the consumer to meet the basic requirements for satisfaction. Therefore, psychological or symbolic aspects of brand image are major reasons why consumers choose a certain brand. This study is designed to verify these assumptions and can be generalized in a real market situation.

2. Male Consumer's Clothing Behaviour

As a result of the growing power of materialism and the influence of communication through mass media, current male consumers tend more to express themselves via their outfits and they ask for more varied styles of clothing. According to Ryan (1966), clothing can be used as a way of symbolizing social success and achievements because it exhibits a positive and confident self-image. This tendency of using clothing as a symbol is reinforced

as male consumers grow older.

In many previous studies of Korean consumers, Korean consumers have been found to be very brand conscious and loyal to their brands (Lin & Owens, 1997; Ho, 1991; Lee & Burns, 1993). But most of these studies have been conducted on samples of female consumers.

Based on studies of Korean male consumers who have upper socio-economic status (Lee & Lim, 1985; Ko, Kang, & Han, 1987), Korean male consumers have been found to seek more functional benefits, as well as certain symbolic expressions of social status, from their clothing purchases after they get married or grow older. They also tend to conform more to what other members were in their reference groups. The benefits of male consumers' clothing are found to be different according to their age, occupation, living standard, values, and lifestyle. The status of their occupational levels also leads to significant differences in the types of benefits they seek (Ko, Kang, & Han, 1987). For example, men in higher positions appreciate the symbolism of name brand clothing goods, while those in lower positions seek more functional and economic benefits. Although many previous studies have been done on male consumers, studies on consumers in the upper or upper-middle class who spend a relatively large amount of money on clothing products are rather limited. The men's wear market should be segmented by consumers' social status and their economic wealth in order to provide more focused marketing strategies for high-priced brand mangers. This study will deal mainly with Korean male consumers of the higher social status.

3. High-Priced Market

Price level is one of the more important criteria of brand positioning. The price of goods is generally related to their quality and style level. When classifying apparel products based on price level, high-priced brands are usually called designer collections which consist of the designer's high-end couture lines and ready-to-wear lines. High-priced apparel products are generally known as high fashion; they are produced and priced for a small percentage of the population. These particular consumers want something new and different from mass

fashion, with the added panache of exclusivity (Rabolt & Miler, 1997).

Lee's study (1995) of the brand orientation of young Korean consumers toward apparel products found that Korean consumers value imported casual brands more highly than domestic casual brands. Lee's study also revealed that Korean consumers prefer the imported brands because the price level is higher; higher-priced products, they believe, deliver more positive messages about the wearer than do lower-priced domestic products. In the men's wear market, especially in the formal suit market, the very high-end market in terms of price level consists mostly of imported or, at least, licensed or franchised brands. These brands compete with one another in Korea as well as in the global market. It is assumed that Korean male consumers will associate imported and high-priced brands with the positive brand images.

To determine which price level can be regarded as high, medium, or low, reviewing the average price of each apparel item in the current market can provide a rough basis. With respect to the price level, average prices for a male suit, jacket, trousers, and a dress shirt, for the 2000 fall and winter season are 690,000 won, 430,000 won, 180,000 won, and 100,000 won respectively (Samsung Fashion Institute, 2001). Most brands for this study were selected on the basis of this price criteria; these clothing items are much more costly than average clothing items.

III. METHODOLOGY

For this study, extensive in-depth interviews were completed with sixteen individuals for 75 to 90 minutes in Seoul during March 2001. Because the selected brands for the study are regarded as belonging to the high-priced market, the respondents' socio-economic status was inevitably upper class in terms of their income and their expenditure on clothing goods. Conducting quantitative research was a problem because recruiting respondents of higher social status to acquire an appropriate sample size for statistically stable analysis results was difficult. To overcome the limitation of the quantitative research for this market, the in-depth interview method was adopted. According to Malhotra (1996,

p.174), the in-depth interview is an unstructured, direct, personal interview in which a single respondent is probed by a highly skilled interviewer to uncover underlying motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and feelings on a topic. This type of interview can be used to exchange information freely, gain detailed understanding of complicated behaviour, or to interview with people who are hard to reach. For this study, a skilled interviewer, who had had five years of experience in qualitative study and who has run a research company on her own, carried out all sixteen interviews. She provided transcripts and tapes of the interviews to the researcher.

The preconditions of the interviewees were the following: they were male; their social class was assumed to be of upper or upper-middle class; and they had spent more than 3,600,000 won as an annual expenditure on selected, high-priced brands. According to the Korean Apparel Industry Association ("A Global Perspective," 2001), the annual average expenditure of Korean consumers on clothing items in 2000 was approximately $902 (1,080,000 won) worldwide and $762 (914,000 won) nationwide. Therefore, the interviewees selected for this study with clothing expenditures of over $3,000 (3,600,000 won) can be regarded as upper or upper-middle class. Additionally, the interviewees should have bought during the past year at least one of following items: a jacket, trousers, an overcoat, or a suit. The selected high priced brands included Armani collection/couture, Cerruti 1881, Daks, Ferragago, Givenchy, Gucci, Hugo Boss, Kenzo, Lanvin, Nina Ricci, Pal Zileri, Pierre Gardin, Prada, R. Laurent, Versace, and Zegna. These brands were selected based on pre-interviews with practitioners who were working in the marketing research company or the advertising agency of one of the listed brands. The practitioners identified these brands and possible competitors in the high-priced men's wear market; they also acknowledged that the price levels of these brands were known to exceed the average price level of the overall market. To exclude the bias caused by the age difference of the consumers, eight interviewees were between the ages of 25-40 and the other eight were between the ages of 41-55. The age and occupations of the sixteen interviewees are presented in Table 1. As stimuli for the interview, a set of pressed advertising photos for each brand was created by selecting photos from trade magazines which were provided by the practitioners in the advertising agencies of the selected high-priced brands. To discuss brand images,

Table 1. Profile of Interviewees

	Age	Occupation		Age	Occupation
1	32	Trading company owner	9	34	Trading company owner
2	32	In between jobs	10	34	Self-employed (record production)
3	34	CEO of IT company	11	38	". Com" company owner
4	41	Entertainment business	12	41	Entertainment business
5	44	Sign company owner	13	42	An office worker
6	48	Manufacturing company owner	14	44	Trading company owner
7	27	Golf trainer	15	44	Medical doctor
8	32	Self-employed	16	54	Trading business

interviewees could refer to the advertising photos. Besides photos of the apparel products, some photos of leather accessory products were used. Additionally, a leaflet of advertising photos for made-to-measure service brands were presented in order to explore consumers' overall clothing behavior.

During the interview, the general clothing behavior of the interviewees was probed. Next, to determine how each high-priced brand was identified in their minds, the interviewees were examined about the brand image of each brand. To probe the brand image identification, the interviewer used various projective techniques such as brand user image, associations, construction, and expressive techniques; these techniques are popularly used in qualitative study such as focus group interview or in-depth interview (Malhotra, 1996).

IV. RESULTS

1. Clothing Behaviour

A gentleman, Armani man, the best dresser, a neat and tidy man, and a few other phrases were the nicknames that respondents gave themselves spontaneously when describing their style of clothing. Males in the younger group showed a greater interest in clothing, especially high-priced clothing and accessories.

Suits were the basic working clothes for most of the respondents. But the degree of formality was different for each respondent and depended on their age and the character of their job. The older or self-employed respondents appeared to be more semi-formal (i.e., suit without tie) at the workplace because they usually had more freedom to do things they wanted to at work. However, almost all of the respondents said they wore formal suits when they met their clients. On the weekends and during their leisure time, most usually wore comfortable and natural style of clothing that was appropriate for the occasion. And, almost all agreed that they were mainly concerned about brand names when they picked out clothing for leisure activities.

1) Changes in how men dress.

<u>At Work</u>. All respondents noted a tendency to break from uniformity and formality as the most notable change in how men currently dress at work. They also pointed out that men these days are much more fashion-conscious than men in the past, and most men think that dress expresses the wearer's individuality. One respondent stated, "Even in places where formality is still taken very seriously, we often see men in colourful shirts and matching ties." Another commented, "Recently I've seen more and more men wearing suits with three buttons and narrow pants. Maybe I should try those."

One of the interviewees noted that men are increasingly returning to suits and ties in the workplace because it is harder to make himself look more stylish with casual wear than with formal suits. Although they recognize the change in the workplace from formal to informal/casual, they are not actively accepting the change wholeheartedly. They are making the change more slowly.

<u>In leisure time</u>. Most of the respondents pointed out that they looked for "more diversified materials and styles of the leisurewear" and pursued "comfort and individuality" when buying leisure wear. The most representative styles were no-tie, casual shirts, and casual jackets. A tendency to buy clothing based on brand names was also noted.

2) Attitudes towards made-to-measure/tailored items of clothing.

Although everybody knew what made-to-measure service is, only 3 out of 16

respondents said they have used made-to-measure or custom-made services. When the respondents do need customer services on apparel, they usually visit tailors located in the first-class hotels. Although tailored suits from these shops are very expensive, the respondents like the services they receive there because the services are the best and exclusive to the higher classes. The older respondents who had not bought made-to-measure/tailored clothes in the past showed positive interest in using made-to-measure services because tailored items would fit their bodies better. On the other hand, the younger respondents who had not bought any made-to-measure/tailored clothes were indifferent or sceptical about using these types of services. It appears that the younger were more confident of their bodies; and, therefore, the merit of the service did not appeal to them as much. In addition, they believed that clothing looks perfect when it is produced by the manufacturer; once clothing is altered to fit someone's body, the value of the clothing is damaged.

3) Apparel and accessories purchased in the last 12 months

Interviewees were asked to specify what items and what brands of apparel and accessories they had purchased in the last 12 months. Table 2 presents the results of responses to the questions.

Armani was preferred mainly because of its high brand awareness and versatile styling. The respondents adored Zegna for its fabrics, styles, and quality. Hugo Boss was perceived by its customers as a high quality brand with affordable pricing. And, while Armani was preferred over Hugo Boss by the older respondents, Hugo Boss was chosen more often by the younger. The younger males appeared to be variety seekers (i.e., they had purchased a wider variety of goods from the various vendors). The brands the respondents rarely purchased were Y.S. Laurent, Daks, Dior, Cerruti 1881, Lanvin, and Ralph Lauren. The respondents did not like Cerruti 1881 and Lanvin styling, and Ralph Lauren was perceived as low quality. The younger men also believed that Cerruti 1881, Lanvin, and Ralph Lauren were for older men; their classic brand images did not appeal to them. Some respondents mentioned Smalto, Trussadi, and Hermes as brands they would try in the future because they are new and expensive.

Table 2. High-priced Brand Apparel and Accessories Purchased

Brands	Items and number of buyers in parentheses
Aigner	Belts (1), Shoes (1), Jeans (1)
Armani	Suits (6), Shirts (3), Ties (1), Scarves (1), Sweaters (2), Pants (1), Jackets (1), Belts (1), Gloves (1), Underwear (1), D/K * (1)
Bally	Shoes (1)
Bvlgari	Perfumes (1), Watches (1)
Calvin Klein	DK (1)
Canali	DK (2)
Cartier	Wallets (1)
Cerruti 1881	Semi-formal suits (1)
Daks	Suits (1), DK (1)
Dolce & Gabana	T-shirts (1)
Ferragamo	Shoes (2), Belts (1), DK (1)
Ferre	Suits (1)
Gucci	Belt (1)
Hugo Boss	Suits (4), Sports jackets (2), DK (2)
Kenzo	Sweaters (1), DK (1)
Missoni	Shirts (1), Ties (1)
Pierre Cardin	Suits (2)
Prada	Sweaters (1), Jacket (1), Shirts (1), Accessories (1), DK (1)
Ralph Lauren	Jacket (1)
Valentino	Suits (1)
Versace	Belts (1), Shoes (1), Wallets (1), DK (1)
Zegna	Suits (2), Shirts (3), Jackets (1), Ties (1), Overcoat (1)

* Don't Know; the case when the brand mentioned but items were not known

The respondents appeared to consider price, brand awareness, mood at the point of purchase, and personal preferences when purchasing clothing. The average price they would spend on a suit ranged from 800 to 1,700 US dollars (960,000-2,040,000 won). In addition, the average price they would spend on a shirt or an overcoat was US $150-250 (180,000-300,000 won) and US $1,500-2,500 (1,800,000-3,000,000 won) respectively.

2. Brand Image of High-priced Men's Wear

1) Defined as "High-priced"

Respondents spontaneously associated words like *luxury, intelligence, expensiveness, brand names, and durability* with the "high priced" apparel. Almost all of the respondents agreed that fabric, material, style, and design divided the top-quality clothing from low-quality clothing. Many, especially those in the older group, also responded that high-price is directly associated with top-quality which is a preliminary requisite of a prestige brand. They believed high-price is an indicator of a brand's prestige. Some added that a brand's reputation for its high quality and superiority would also be a good measure.

2) Brand awareness and image in the high-priced market

Armani was the first brand name mentioned spontaneously by the respondents. Most of the respondents (i.e., 13 interviewees) saw Armani as the top-quality brand in the high-priced market. They also mentioned other high-priced brnads: Ferre, Versace, Givenchy, Canali, Prada, Jill Sander, Ferragamo, Hugo Boss, Nina Ricci, Valentino, Dolce & Gabana, Lanvin, Kenzo, and P. Smith, Pierre Cardin, and Gucci. Most of the brands mentioned by the interviewees were identical to the brands selected by the researchers. This correlation implies that these brands are competitors in the high-priced men' wear market.

As one of the projective techniques, interviewees were asked to group brands into families based on the brand images they have formed. Each respondent tended to use different criteria, such as popularity, personal preference, and overall image. Therefore, the results of grouping varied from respondent to respondent to some degree. An interesting difference between age groups was the tendency of the older respondents to group Hugo Boss in a class that was lower, younger, and cheaper than the other brands mentioned during their interviews.

Ferragamo, Gucci, Prada, and Versace were grouped as contemporary by many of the respondents. Respondents pointed out that these brands were open, young, bold, and unique. Twelve out of 16 respondents mentioned Armani as the leading brand because of its popularity and huge reputation. Zegna, Canali, Calvin Klein, and Gucci were among the

other brands most frequently recognized by the respondents.

The younger males mainly grouped Zegna, Lanvin, Givency, and Cerruti 1881 together because these brands were seen as old, static, serious, conservative, and traditional. However, some of the younger respondents grouped Ferragamo, Armani, Prada, Gucci, Versace, and Zegna together because they are the best brands in unique ways, and they are worn by dignified and successful people.

3) Brand image through advertising

Many recognized the fact that all ads try to deliver a brand image along with their products. Some older respondents pointed out that most brands try to appeal to the younger generation. One older gentleman asked, "Why are they all trying to get younger? Are they telling me their products are not for the old guys like me?"

Ads for Hugo Boss, Canali, Ferragamo, and Emprio Armani were mentioned more frequently than others. The major image each brand projects, according to the respondents, is as follows:

Hugo Boss	* Projected the existing image of Hugo Boss well. Easy, comfortable, and active...
Canali	* Communicated the serious and dignified image of the brand.
	* Aimed at customers in their 40's and 50's. Good use of a successful 40 year old Korean celebrity as the spokes-model.
Ferragamo	* The use of bright colors set the brand off to an advantage.
	* Putting emphasis on shoes (Ferragamo's Forte) boosted the brand image
Armani	* Delivered youthful image well.

The words and phrases interviewees used to describe high-priced brands were *luxury, intelligence, expensive, brand names, durability, fabric, materials, style, design, well-known, popular, open, bold, unique, old, static, serious, conservative, tradition, worn by dignified* and *successful* people, easy, comfortable, active, and successful. Although some worlds and phrases definitely point out the benefit of the material or functional aspects of the clothing, most of the words can be regarded as connoting something beyond material or functional aspect.

Their words, instead, bring to mind the respondent's psychological, symbolic, and emotional identification with the brand. This finding is important because we can recognize that Korean male consumers would value high-priced brands because of its high-performance in intangible attributes of a product.

3. Expectation of High-priced Brands

All of the respondents pointed out that high-priced brand awareness in Korea is relatively lower than it is in the global market, and they suggested that more aggressive marketing activities were one way to overcome this situation. The respondents said that interest would increase if brands used the following marketing strategies:

* continuous and more frequent advertisements;
* utilization of media exclusive to the upper-class people (magazines, web sites, etc.);
* use of celebrities with high profiles;
* a more friendly approach to customers at the individual level (one-to-one marketing)
  "Although I'd like to use made-to-measure services, I can never find the time. It would be wonderful if representatives from high-priced brands could provide in-home services," explained one respondent;
* sending DMs to customers regularly to introduce new product lines and announce promotional events like sales and fashion shows;
* sponsoring sports games, social programs, and TV shows;
  "I recently saw a movie called 'Family Man'. In the movie, Zegna suits were worn by the highly successful leading men. This got to me more than any other ads I've seen so far," stated one respondent;
* fashion shows exclusive to upper class people; and
* joint activities with other top-quality products like cars and golf products.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION FOR MARKETERS

The high-priced market is a market that guarantees high-profits to a company, making it worthy of careful academic studies. Considering that not much about male consumers' clothing behaviour in this market has been studied, the results of this study (with its mention of specific brand names) can help marketers and researchers who are building future marketing strategies. The detailed findings and implications of this study are presented below.

Some brands in the high-priced market have attained a reputation for top-quality regardless of whether the respondent had purchased an item from the company or not. Although respondents knew that certain brands were better than Armani, they were reluctant to choose those brands because the awareness of the brand in Korea was low. They chose Armani because of its symbolic value. They felt its image reflected their own social and economic success in the same way that Armani has maintained an image of consistent top-quality products and services.

To some extent, respondents liked to show off what brands they were wearing to other people via their outfits. This is consistent with previous studies (Lee & Burns, 1985; Ko, Kang, & Han, 1987). If a brand lacks symbolic power due to low publicity, upper-class Korean men will avoid it. In fact, the respondents said they would choose Armani over any lesser known brand regardless of quality or price. This finding implies that the material or functional benefit of high-priced men's wear is not a critical determinant for choosing the brand. Rather, a well-established image, especially in terms of the psychological and emotional appeal of the brand play a more important role. Consumers take it for granted that high-priced brand names apparel, will perform well and be of high quality. But this is not as important as the image the brand projects onto the wearer.

Therefore, in terms of high-priced men's wear, the role of promotion, including advertising or word of mouth, is critical in building a reputation. Some brands in the study suffered from less intensive promotional activities in the high-priced market; the brand's image, its clothing lines, and its accessories have not been correctly marketed to consumers.

Although the creativity of their catalogues or advertising photos were evaluated positively when presented during the interviews, their products could be distributed to specific target markets in a more effective and efficient ways (e.g., DM, fashion shows, or personal services). Interestingly, the product placement of Zegna suits in the movie Family Man was a very successful advertising method and clearly enhanced the image of the brand.

High-priced brand-name consumers called for more extensive publicity of the brands they wear (except in the case of Armani and Hugo Boss). More publicity, they feel, would make them more confident with their choice to wear less famous brands. Consumers who have stuck to the most well-known brands such as Armani or Hugo Boss said they may start to buy less well-know brands if and when they associate symbolic meaning (i.e., success) with the brand. They would also consider wearing less famous clothing if it became socially acceptable throughout their reference group.

1. Recommendation

Although the way that men dress is becoming more informal, the respondents still recognized the importance of suits for special occasions. They do not want high-priced market brands to lose their dignified and upper-class image to sell more products. For example, recently many high-priced men's brands are launching a sub-line such as sports wear and casual wear along with the new trend of increasing informality in men's wear. The older respondents commented on the high-priced brands that have launched new sub-lines with the intention of "shifting" older images into younger and fresher images. These consumers agree that "adding" more variety to the brand is a good idea, but they also believe the brands should not lose their respected images. Some older respondents worried that image changes would ruin the brand's reputation, but felt that if adequate targeting of the sub-line is accomplished, the reputation for suits may not be damaged. For example, Georgio Armani or Armani Collezioni have not been affected by Emporio Armani or Armani Exchange.

Interestingly, sports/casual wear is an item most male consumers do not want to pay much for. However, brand-oriented young consumers may purchase sports/casual line

products from these high-priced brands even at a higher expense than they are worth. If the price level is too expensively set for an item, not many young people will buy the extended line products though they might be fond of the original brand products. If this becomes the case, the sports/casual wear line may remain one of "image" goods as opposed to "profitable" goods.

Another promising market for high-price brands is leather accessories. Almost all of the respondents greatly appreciated catalogues displaying quality crafted leather goods. However, other accessories such as pens, perfumes, and watches do not appear to be worthwhile sub-lines. In these accessory markets, several leading brands are already dominant. However, in men's leather goods, an outstanding leading brand does not exist. Although Dunhill, Coach, and S.T. Dupont, have a strong image; their images do not compare to similar brands like Cartier and Rolex in the watch market or Mont Blanc and Parker in the pen market. Therefore, leather goods that can be associated with brand-name hand-tailored suits may be an avenue for high-priced market brands.

Because this study was done qualitatively, the objective or statistical validity cannot be assumed. If possible, a subsequent study needs to be done quantitatively so the findings can be cross-validated. However, regardless of its small sample sizes, this study can provide insight into the clothing behaviour of men who buy high-priced men's wear and their identification with high-priced brand names.

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