

Innovation and Diffusion of A-Jae Fashion

- Reverse Generational Influence in South Korea -

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(received date: 2025. 8. 4, revised date: 2025. 9. 13, accepted date: 2025. 9. 17)

ABSTRACT

In South Korea, *A-Jae* fashion—derived from the colloquial term for “uncle” and linked to older men’s distinctive style—has emerged as a generationally inclusive trend. This study examined its cultural significance, reception among younger consumers, and implications for the fashion industry. A mixed-methods design that combined qualitative interviews and field observations was used, with an online survey accordingly administered to 173 younger adults (mean age = 23.27 years) at *Dongmyo* Market. The qualitative data were analyzed to determine older men’s motivations, style choices, and views on recycled clothing, and the survey measured awareness of, willingness to adopt, and attitudes toward *A-Jae* fashion and Gorpcore aesthetics. Results showed considerable awareness among the younger adults (67.4%) and nearly half willing to adopt the style. Older men creatively mix vintage and contemporary items, while the younger participants were more receptive to recycled fashion than their older counterparts, who prefer new garments for reasons of dignity and status. These findings position *A-Jae* fashion as a form of expressive consumption that challenges traditional notions of masculinity and aging, expands older men’s influence in fashion trend diffusion, and opens opportunities for intergenerational style exchange.

Key words: A-Jae fashion, fashion trend diffusion, innovative style, older men, South Korea

I. Introduction

In the United States, the “Peacock Revolution” marked a dramatic shift in men’s fashion by challenging conventional notions of masculinity and introducing styles that bridged men’s and women’s clothing (Flores, 2022). Since then, media outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal* (2023) have devoted special issues to men’s style, featuring apparel, grooming, fragrances, and colorways not traditionally linked to menswear. Designer brands are also expanding their menswear lines, signaling renewed attention to the male consumer.

South Korea mirrors this global shift. Men’s fashion marketing has gained greater visibility, and both younger and older men are emerging as style innovators. This trend reflects WGSN’s *Drivers of the Future 2022*, which identifies the aging population as an untapped business opportunity and urges brands to address older consumers’ desires. In Korea, style-conscious seniors—often referred to as “inimitable seniors”—confidently wear clothing associated with younger demographics, thereby challenging stereotypes about age and fashion (Shin, 2019).

Historically, research on men’s dress, particularly older men’s appearance, has been limited. Reilly and Cosbey (2008) noted two main reasons: fashion was long equated with women, and men were assumed to lack interest in clothing. Yet contemporary evidence contradicts this view. Many older adults—who often feel five to ten years younger than their chronological age—pursue both physical vitality and outward youthfulness (National Research Council, 2002). They are attuned to shifting social trends

and express their evolving identities through fashion.

While the Peacock Revolution represented a youth-driven transformation that expanded masculinity by breaking rigid sartorial codes, the rise of A-Jae fashion demonstrates a reverse dynamic. Rather than younger generations inventing a new aesthetic, older men’s existing style practices are being reinterpreted and valorized by youth culture. This reverse generational influence highlights a key distinction: the Peacock Revolution showed how young men challenged traditional masculinity, whereas A-Jae fashion reveals how older men, often overlooked in fashion discourse, have become unexpected sources of innovation and trend diffusion. Both phenomena signal critical shifts in men’s fashion and identity, but along opposite generational trajectories—one led by youth, the other rediscovered from elders.

This paper, titled “Innovation and Diffusion of A-Jae Fashion: Reverse Generational Influence in South Korea,” examines the emergence of A-Jae fashion within broader shifts in masculinity, demographic change, and cultural consumption, and considers its implications for the Korean fashion industry. The aim of this study is to investigate how A-Jae fashion, as a reverse generational influence, contributes to the innovation and diffusion of men’s style in South Korea. Specifically, the research seeks to (1) analyze the cultural significance of A-Jae fashion, (2) explore older men’s style practices and motivations, and (3) assess younger consumers’ perceptions and willingness to adopt A-Jae fashion.

II. Research Background

1. General Men's Fashion Shift Toward Idealized Masculinity

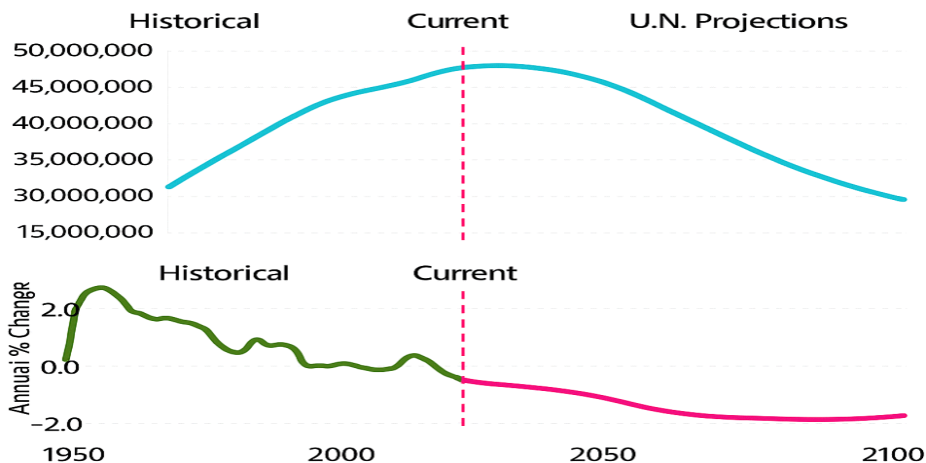
In modern society, men are increasingly moving away from rigid, traditional expressions of masculinity and toward more diverse forms of self-presentation (Lee et al., 2015). While most fashion magazines historically targeted women, recent years have seen an expansion of fashion media catering to men. Cole (2012) emphasized the central role of men's bodies in shaping aging, masculinity, and identity (Sadkowska 2018). Merleau-Ponty (2002) argued that increased bodily awareness enables men to engage with fashion in new ways, breaking from narrowly defined appearances rooted in rational consumption.

In South Korea, the postwar baby boomer generation has been at the forefront of this change. Once associated with conservative consumption patterns, middle-aged and older men

are now actively engaged in leisure, health management, and self-expression, resulting in significant shifts in fashion preferences. Historically, idealized Korean masculinity emphasized physical strength, stoicism, and patriarchal authority, particularly during the industrialization era of the 1970s and 1980s. Since the 2000s, however, rapid economic growth and evolving consumer culture have fostered new masculinities centered on personal grooming, anti-aging, and aesthetics—evidenced by the rapid expansion of the men's cosmetics market.

2. Demographic Shifts and the Aging Population in Korea

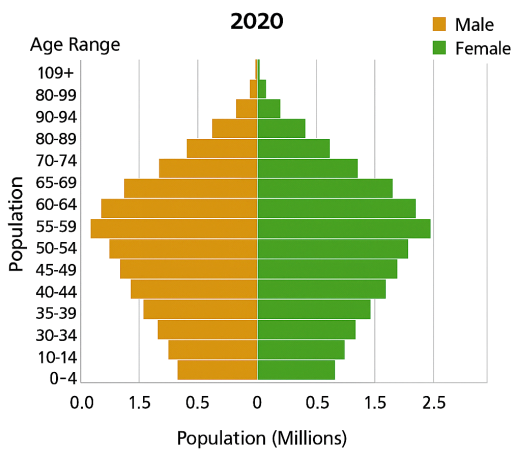
South Korea is undergoing one of the fastest demographic transitions in the world. According to the United Nations (2019), the proportion of people aged 65 and older in East and Southeast Asia nearly doubled from 6% in 1990 to 11% in 2019 <Fig. 1>. Korea's total fertility rate—0.84 in



<Fig. 1> Population Trends in Korea, 1960-2020.

Image source from United Nations - World Population Prospects
<https://population-pyramid.net/en/pp/south-korea>

2020—is the lowest globally, far below the replacement rate of 2.1, leading to a rapidly aging population and declining birth rates. With retirement generally occurring at age 60 (65 for certain professional roles), many older Koreans now face decades of post-retirement life. For active older adults, this extended life stage offers opportunities to redefine lifestyles, social roles, and fashion engagement.



〈Fig. 2〉 Age Structure of Korea's Population, 2020.
Image source from United Nations - World Population
<https://population-pyramid.net/en/pp/south-korea>

3. A-Jae Fashion and Cultural Consumption

Over the past decade, older consumers have

emerged as active, influential participants in cultural consumption—spanning art, leisure, dining, and fashion (Jones et al., 2017). Unlike earlier “silver generations” who prioritized savings and austerity, today’s active seniors invest in self-care and seek aesthetic, personalized clothing choices. In men’s fashion, this has translated into a shift from formal business attire to functional, stylish casual wear 〈Fig. 3〉.

Although historically laggards in adopting fashion trends (Beaudoin et al., 2003) 〈Table 2〉, Korean older men are increasingly visible as innovators, aided by media portrayals and brand campaigns that feature senior models. The A-Jae fashion phenomenon intersects with global trends such as “Gorpcore,” which embraces outdoor gear and utilitarian aesthetics. Popularized internationally and reinterpreted in Korea through figures like designer Kiko Kostadinov, this style combines practicality with bold, eclectic choices, often blurring generational boundaries.

4. A-Jae Fashion as a Representative Look of Gorpcore

Gorpcore, first coined by The Cut (May 2017), describes a fashion trend that elevates outdoor gear and utilitarian apparel—such as

〈Table 1〉 Population of South Korea (2015-2020)

Year	Population	Yearly % Change (year change)	Median age	World population (South Korea Global Rank)
2020	51,269,185	0.09% (43,877)	43.7	7,794,798,439 (28)
2019	51,225,308	0.10% (53,602)	41.4	7,713,468,100 (28)
2017	51,171,706	0.22% (112,958)	41.4	7,547,858,925 (27)
2016	51,096,415	0.32% (160,364)	41.4	7,464,022,049 (27)
2015	50,823,093	0.51% (255,491)	40.8	7,379,797,139 (27)

Sourced from <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/south-korea-population>



〈Fig. 3〉 Lifestyle and Clothing Style Transitions of Retired Male Baby Boomers.
(Image by the author)

fleece jackets, hiking suits, raincoats, and parkas –into everyday style (Wallace, 2017). The term derives from “Gorp,” an acronym for “granola, oats, raisins, and peanuts,” referencing trail snacks, and blends this origin with the suffix “-core,” signaling a distinct aesthetic movement. Unlike Normcore, which emphasized plain, unremarkable everyday clothing such as mom

jeans, plain sweatshirts, and sneakers, Gorpcore foregrounds functionality and technical wear, often combined in unconventional or deliberately mismatched ways.

Fashion commentators have characterized Gorpcore as an “anti-fashion” statement built on intentional absurdity—a styling approach that disregards traditional ideals of harmony, refine-

〈Table 2〉 Fashion Adoption by Gender

	Gender		Chi-square
	Male	Female	
Innovators	6 (17.1%)	29 (82.9%)	15.11***
Early adopters	54 (34.4%)	103 (65.6%)	15.29***
Early majority	139 (46.4%)	161 (53.71%)	1.613
Late majority	84 (55.9%)	145 (44.1%)	4.62*
Laggards	120 (65.6%)	63 (34.4%)	17.75***

Notes: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

The sample was composed of 501 women and 503 men; 17 respondents did not report their gender.

Sourced from Beaudoin et al., (2003)



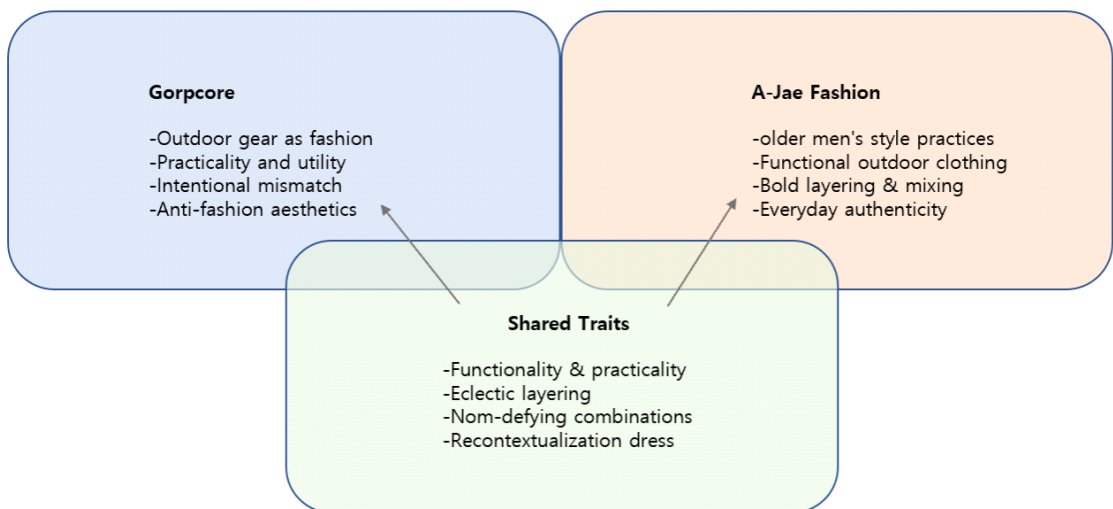
〈Fig. 4(a) and 4(b)〉 Example of Korean Menswear Advertising Targeting Older Consumers. (Image source from <http://www.sejung.co.kr/brand/men/wmc/page.do>).

ment, or coordinated elegance. Instead, its defining features are practicality, eclectic layering, and the recontextualization of outdoor apparel as fashionable rather than purely functional. Global high-fashion brands have appropriated Gorpcore aesthetics to reach wider audiences: for example, Armani integrated utilitarian outdoor elements into luxury ensembles during the 2020 Milan

Fashion Show (Priya, 2020), while Vetements' Spring/Summer 2018 collection exaggerated outdoor gear into avant-garde silhouettes aligned with the ethos of "fashion terrorism." These cases demonstrate how Gorpcore has shifted from subcultural experimentation to mainstream high fashion, while maintaining its emphasis on utility and irony.

The connection between Gorpcore and A-Jae fashion becomes evident through their shared reliance on functional clothing, bold layering, and norm-defying combinations. Observations at Dongmyo Market revealed older Korean men styling colorful windbreakers with tailored trousers, pairing long wool coats with mountaineering boots, and mixing luxury sneakers with second-hand vintage items. These ensembles embody the same eclectic, pragmatic qualities that define Gorpcore, yet they emerge organically from older men's everyday wardrobes rather than deliberate subcultural play.

What distinguishes A-Jae fashion is its re-



〈Fig. 5〉 Connection Model for Gorpcore and A-Jae Fashion. (Image by the author)

verse generational influence. Whereas Gorpcore originated among youth who adopted outdoor wear as an ironic or experimental gesture, A-Jae fashion stems from older men's authentic style practices—later rediscovered and valorized by younger generations. This reversal disrupts traditional models of fashion diffusion, in which innovation typically flows from youth to elders, by positioning older men as inadvertent style innovators. In this sense, A-Jae fashion can be interpreted as a localized adaptation of Gorpcore that affirms older men's agency in shaping contemporary fashion discourse, while simultaneously enabling intergenerational style exchange.

III. Methodology

1. Research design

Dongmyo Market has long been a popular shopping destination for older adults in Seoul, South Korea. Located near the historic Dongmyo Shrine and in close proximity to Dongdaemun Market—a major hub for Korean fashion, accessories, and vintage goods—this area has become a cultural landmark. The market includes

a large vintage flea market, where hundreds of street vendors line the shrine's stone walls, selling a variety of clothing and accessories.

Traditionally frequented by ajossi ("uncles") wearing colorful outdoor clothing and high-waist trousers, the market has increasingly attracted younger visitors in search of second-hand "rescue" fashion items. While many older men continue to shop there, the merchandise—including leather jackets, denim apparel, wool coats, and fedoras—has also gained appeal among younger consumers. High-quality designer items are often sold at significantly reduced prices (e.g., a Versace sheepskin rider jacket originally priced over USD 1,000 available for approximately USD 50). Bargain-priced items can be purchased for as little as USD 1. This mix of affordability, rarity, and vintage appeal has turned Dongmyo Market into a vibrant intersection of generations and styles (Fig. 6).

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to evaluate young consumers' perceptions of senior male fashion innovators. The research consisted of: (1) qualitative interviews with middle-aged and older male shoppers at Dongmyo Market; and (2) a quantitative survey assessing



〈Fig. 6〉 View of Dongmyo Market in Seoul, South Korea
(Image by the author)

younger adults' perceptions of senior models, A-Jae fashion, and Gorpcore. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB/2024_46_HR).

2. Qualitative interviews

Field observations and semi-structured interviews were conducted at Dongmyo Market during two visits in August 2023 and March 2025. Middle-aged and older men whose clothing styles stood out were invited to participate in brief conversations about their fashion choices and attitudes. Twenty men agreed to participate: five provided extended interviews (10-15 minutes). Five interviewees in Table 3 granted permission to be photographed, and three consented to the publication of their images. Interviews were conducted informally along the market's shopping street to preserve ecological validity.

Interview prompts covered: visit motivations and frequency; items purchased; the outfit worn that day (distinctive elements, color, combinations); demographic information (age, occupation, retirement status, previous work); style change before/after retirement; and practices and perceptions regarding recycled/second-hand clothing. This qualitative phase yielded first-hand accounts of how older Korean men engage

with fashion in public spaces, illuminating generational shifts in style and growing acceptance of senior fashion innovators.

3. Quantitative Survey

1) Questionnaire design and measures

To complement the qualitative data, an online survey was conducted to examine younger adults' perceptions of unconventional fashion styles, focusing specifically on A-Jae fashion and Gorpcore. The survey collected responses from 173 participants, comprising 46 males and 127 females, with a mean age of 23.27 years (range: 19-33 years). Only age and gender were recorded, as other demographic variables were deemed non-essential for the purposes of this analysis. The questionnaire was structured into three sections: (1) general interest in fashion, (2) awareness and perceptions of A-Jae fashion and Gorpcore, and (3) willingness to adopt unconventional fashion practices. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree / very low, 5=strongly agree / very high). Key variables included fashion interest, awareness of A-Jae fashion, attitudes toward A-Jae fashion, willingness to adopt, familiarity with Gorpcore, and perception of intergenerational influence.

<Table 3> Interviewees Information

Interviewee	Age	Occupation	
		Before	After
A	63 years old	interior design	inventor
B	65 years old	business	wedding business
C	74 years old	civil servant	retirement
D	75 years old	headmaster	retirement
E	72 years old	business	self-employed

〈Table 4〉 Survey Questionnaire Items

No.	Questionnaire items (5-point scale)
Q1.	Fashion interest
Q2.	Awareness of senior fashion models
Q3.	Awareness of A-Jae fashion
Q4.	Perception of social acceptance of A-Jae among older men
Q5.	Would you consider following A-jae fashion?
Q6.	Willingness to adopt A-Jae fashion
Q7.	A-Jae-Gorpcore relatedness
Q8.	Evaluation of Kiko Kostadinov's A-Jae-referencing Gorpcore look
Q9.	Perceived adoption stage of A-Jae

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS 27.0. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize awareness and attitudes, while correlation analysis was employed to examine associations between fashion interest, awareness, and willingness to adopt A-Jae fashion.

2) Statistical analysis plans

Analyses were conducted in SPSS 27.0. We report descriptive statistics for all variables. Primary association tests used Pearson's r (two-tailed, $\alpha=.05$) under the common treatment of Likert-type measures as approximately interval for correlational purposes. To increase transparency and address the ordinal nature of some items (e.g., Q9), we ran robustness checks with Spearman's ρ ; the pattern of significance did not change (results available on request). Pairwise deletion was used for missing data (<2% per item; no patterns detected). Effect sizes (r) and significance levels are reported in the Results.

Exactly which variable pairs were tested (as referenced in the Results):

- ① Fashion interest (Q1) ↔ Willingness to adopt A-Jae (Q5)

- ② Fashion interest (Q1) ↔ Perceived trend relevance (Q9)
- ③ A-Jae awareness (Q3) ↔ Gorpcore familiarity/engagement (Q6 &/or composite Q6-Q7)
- ④ (Exploratory) A-Jae awareness (Q3) ↔ Awareness of senior models (Q2)

All tests were two-tailed; where multiple related correlations were explored, interpretations were conservative and theory-driven (exploratory analyses clearly labeled in the text).

4. Observational Fieldwork

In addition to interviews and surveys, on-site observations were conducted to document the clothing styles, behaviors, and interactions of older male shoppers at Dongmyo Market. This ethnographic approach provided a direct view of A-Jae fashion in its everyday setting. Common style features observed included bright color palettes, high-waist trousers, functional outdoor performance wear, and distinctive vintage accessories such as hats, leather bags, and statement footwear. These ensembles frequently com-

bined practicality with bold personal expression, reflecting the wearer's lifestyle and fashion sensibilities.

The observational data served as an important contextual layer, enriching the interpretation of both survey results and interview narratives. By linking visual evidence with participants' accounts, the study constructed a holistic understanding of A-Jae fashion as both a personal style expression for older men and a source of interest for younger audiences. These field observations provided valuable contextual grounding for interpreting the survey responses and interview narratives. By linking firsthand visual data with attitudinal and experiential accounts, the study was able to capture a holistic view of how A-Jae fashion operates both as a personal style choice for older men and as a point of interest for younger audiences.

5. Interview Analysis Process

The qualitative interview data were analyzed using a multi-stage coding workflow to identify key themes related to A-Jae fashion and its cultural significance. All field notes and transcripts were transcribed verbatim and anonymized prior to analysis. First, open coding was conducted line-by-line to capture recurring ideas and expressions, including motivations for visiting Dongmyo Market, fashion practices, generational identity, and attitudes toward recycled clothing. These initial codes were created inductively from the data, but guided by prior research on fashion, aging, and cultural consumption.

Second, during axial coding, related codes were grouped into broader categories such as nostalgia, market as social space, style trans-

formation after retirement, and fashion as self-expression. Relationships among these categories were examined to understand how personal motivations influenced fashion practices and generational positioning. Finally, selective coding was employed to identify the central themes that connected multiple categories. Three dominant themes emerged: (1) nostalgia and memory as drivers of market engagement, (2) style transformation after retirement as a form of identity reconstruction, and (3) fashion as self-expression in later life, contrasted with reluctance toward recycled clothing.

To enhance the credibility of the analysis, findings from interviews were triangulated with survey results and field observations. This comparison highlighted convergences—such as the creative mixing of old and new clothing—and divergences, notably younger participants' receptivity to recycled clothing versus older participants' preference for new garments. Together, this analytical process provided a holistic understanding of A-Jae fashion as a phenomenon shaped by intergenerational dynamics and reverse diffusion of style.

VI. Results

1. General insight about A-Jae fashion

Among the 173 survey participants, awareness of A-Jae fashion—currently popular in Dongmyo—was relatively high: 72.8% (n=126) reported being aware of it, 15.6% (n=27) had “heard of it a bit,” and only 12.1% (n=21) were unfamiliar with the term. Willingness to try A-Jae fashion was also notable, with 24.2% (n=42) moderately willing, 29.4% (n=51) very willing,

and 20.2% (n=35) extremely willing. Regarding Gorpcore, a style associated with the “ugly” aesthetic of A-Jae fashion, 61.5% of respondents reported familiarity, with 48.9% “familiar” and 12.6% “very familiar.” When asked whether A-Jae fashion reflects current trends, 44.8% responded “familiar” and 13.2% “very familiar,” indicating that it is widely perceived as fashionable.

Correlation analysis further clarified these associations. Fashion interest (Q1) was positively correlated with willingness to adopt A-Jae fashion (Q5) ($r=.273^{**}$, $p<.01$) as well as with perceived trend relevance of A-Jae fashion (Q9) ($r=.179^*$, $p<.05$). In addition, awareness of A-Jae fashion (Q3) was moderately correlated with familiarity with Gorpcore (Q6-Q7 composite) ($r=.214^{**}$, $p<.01$). These findings indicate that participants who reported greater fashion interest were more open to adopting A-Jae fashion and perceived it as more trend-relevant, while those more aware of A-Jae fashion also tended to recognize its conceptual overlap with Gorpcore aesthetics.

2. Overview of A-Jae fashion at Dongmyo

Field observations revealed that A-Jae fashion often features innovative pairings, such as colorful windbreakers with sweatshirts and suit pants, or long wool coats paired with mountaineering boots and soft hats. Older men were observed mixing luxury sneakers and branded outdoor wear with existing wardrobe staples, creating bold and distinctive looks. Popular items included leather jackets, denim clothing, and fedoras, often sourced from second-hand shops at affordable prices.

Survey data supported these observations: 45.3% of participants rated A-Jae fashion as “very innovative,” and 36.6% as “innovative.” Nearly half (49.4%) expressed willingness to wear it, while 81.4% viewed older adult fashion positively. Although younger consumers tended to be brand-sensitive, A-Jae fashion appears to be attracting younger fashion innovators and bridging generational style boundaries.

3. Interview insights: motivations style perceptions

Interviews with older male shoppers at Dongmyo revealed strong personal connections to the market, often tied to nostalgia, affordability, and social interaction (Table 5). Participants described Dongmyo as a place to “see and buy nostalgia” (Interviewee A), “a healing time” offering unique finds at low prices (Interviewee B), and “an attractive alternative to department stores” (Interviewee C). Some likened it to a “playground” free from social judgment (Interviewee D).

The neighborhood where I used to live, Dongmyo, is where you can reminisce about the past with a lot of old memorabilia. Here is where you can feel the traces of time. I can see and buy nostalgia, retrospectives, and relics of the past. Here I can choose various things by being the subject. (Interviewee A)

There are many different kinds of old [things]. There are a lot of different foods that I enjoy. Dongmyo shopping is a healing time for me. The price is cheap and there are many good, old items. There is a pleasure that cannot be compared to a department store. (Interviewee B)

I like to go to department stores, but Dongmyo is another attractive place. It is a place where you can meet friends and buy various items at a reasonable price. It's nice to have traces of the past

and be able to enjoy time at will. (Interviewee C)

There are many old-fashioned items, and I come here often because there is an old custom store that reminds me of my frequent past visits. There are many things I want to buy. It's like a playground for me, where I can enjoy my time at will without worrying about other people's gaze. (Interviewee D)

Several interviewees described significant shifts in their style after retirement (mean Likert rating=9.8/10). For example, Interviewee A recalled moving from formal suits in his 20s-30s to casual wear in his 40s-50s, and now actively seeking clothing reminiscent of his youth. Others highlighted the importance of clothing for self-expression, comfort, and matching personal tastes, with many preferring bright colors and casual

styles over outdated outdoor wear. Interviewees who demonstrated A-Jae fashion were asked what clothes and style changes meant to them in the past and present.

I choose clothes that match my skin color and face. I independently choose clothes I want and like. I like to wear clothes that are simple and easy to wear and prefer clothes that make me look younger. I usually don't like outdoor wear, except when hiking or exercising. I often wear outdoor pants, but these days, I prefer to wear jeans. When I went to work, I mostly wore suits, but now, I like to wear simple casual clothes. I wear suits only on special occasions, and usually I like to wear comfortable clothes. I like sweat-shirts, shirts, jeans, sneakers, and hats with a brim, and I like blue, green, and pastel tones. (Interviewee C)

These narratives were subsequently coded

<Table 5> Coding Framework for Interview Data

Stage	Category / Theme	Example Codes (Interviewee)
Open Coding	Nostalgia / Memory	"see and buy nostalgia" (A); "reminds me of past visits" (D)
	Emotional comfort / Healing	"Dongmyo shopping is a healing time" (B)
	Alternative consumption space	"pleasure not comparable to department store" (B); "another attractive place" (C)
	Social interaction	"meet friends, buy at reasonable price" (C)
	Autonomy / Agency	"choose various things by being the subject" (A)
	Style transformation	"suits → casual → younger look" (A); "prefer simple, youthful casual" (C)
	Fashion as self-expression	"likes cycling clothes, bright colors" (B); "choose clothes that match my skin" (C)
Axial Coding	Nostalgia & Memory	Past-oriented fashion engagement, continuity of identity
	Market as Social & Emotional Space	Healing, affordability, community
	Style Transformation Post-Retirement	From formal wear to casual, expressive, colorful
	Fashion as Self-Expression	Youthful, sporty, colorful, individual agency
Selective Coding	1. Nostalgia and Memory	Market as site of reminiscence, connecting past and present
	2. Style Transformation After Retirement	Clothing as identity reconstruction and youthful expression
	3. Fashion as Self-Expression & Agency	Bright colors, sportswear, individuality
	4. Market as Social & Healing Space	Dongmyo as alternative consumption, freedom, social ties

through a multi-stage process (open, axial, and selective coding). The coding results are summarized in Table 5, which illustrates how individual interviewee statements (e.g., nostalgia, healing, casual style preferences) were grouped into broader categories and core themes. As shown, four central themes emerged—nostalgia and memory, style transformation after retirement, fashion as self-expression, and Dongmyo as a social and healing space—providing a structured interpretation of the interview data.

4. Broader context: fashion and older men

Although Dongmyo is associated with second-hand fashion, interviewees rarely purchased recycled clothing themselves, citing preferences for new garments. Some mentioned using platforms like Carrot Market for other goods but showed little interest in buying used apparel. Instead, they valued the market experience itself—browsing, reminiscing, and reconnecting with past styles—over acquiring recycled clothing for practical purposes.

Past studies have often characterized older men's dress as conservative, with limited influence from changing fashion cycles (Twigg, 2007). However, recent scholarship challenges this view, showing that style and identity remain closely connected in later life (Goode, 2017). Everyday dressing can also be seen as a creative practice (Almila & Zeilig, 2022), even outside traditionally "creative" professions.

In South Korea, A-Jae fashion offers a new perspective on men's style, demonstrating that older men can be trendsetters. The integration of Gorpcore elements into A-Jae fashion signals a shift in public perception, breaking generational

and gender boundaries in fashion consumption and positioning older men as visible contributors to contemporary style culture.

V. Discussion

The findings of this study provide new insights into the emergence of A-Jae fashion as a culturally significant style movement in South Korea. Survey results showed high levels of awareness among younger adults, with many expressing willingness to adopt the style. This suggests that A-Jae fashion is no longer limited to older men but is crossing generational boundaries, consistent with studies that highlight the democratization of fashion across age groups (Goode, 2017; Twigg, 2007). The positive correlation between fashion interest and favorable perceptions of A-Jae fashion further indicates that it appeals to consumers highly engaged in fashion culture, regardless of age.

Field observations and interviews add qualitative depth to these findings. Older men at Dongmyo were observed mixing vintage and contemporary items in ways that reflect both practicality and individuality. This supports Almila and Zeilig (2022) argument that everyday dressing is a form of creative practice and challenges stereotypes of older men as passive or conservative. The creative combinations—such as pairing wool coats with mountaineering boots or luxury sneakers with casual trousers—demonstrate stylistic innovation comparable to that of younger demographics.

Another important finding is the role of A-Jae fashion in identity reconstruction after retirement. Many interviewees reported signifi-

cant changes in their clothing choices once freed from workplace dress codes. They increasingly favored comfort, color, and personal expression, echoing Goode (2017) view that clothing in later life affirms individuality. The nostalgic dimension, also noted in interviews, highlights how fashion connects past and present selves, a theme consistent with Twigg (2007) work on fashion and memory.

The study also revealed ambivalence toward recycled clothing among older men. Although Dongmyo Market thrives on second-hand fashion, many older shoppers preferred new garments, associating them with dignity and status. This perspective reflects cultural values shaped during Korea's rapid industrialization. It nuances assumptions that participation in vintage markets equates to sustainability-oriented consumption, suggesting instead that the market's appeal lies in its social and experiential qualities rather than its environmental benefits. From a broader perspective, A-Jae fashion can be understood as both a local cultural expression and part of global style currents such as Gorpcore, which blends functionality with unconventional aesthetics. The integration of Gorpcore elements into A-Jae fashion illustrates how global trends are localized in Korea, contributing to the diversification of men's style. It also shows that older men can serve as early adopters or innovators when trends align with their existing wardrobes and lifestyles.

VI. Conclusion

Clothing functions as a key medium for expressing identity and personal agency (Twigg,

2007). In recent years, Korean men—particularly older men—have increasingly used fashion as a tool for self-expression, moving away from the conservative consumption historically linked to their demographic. A-Jae fashion, once seen as age-specific, now attracts strong interest from younger generations. The growth of athleisure-inspired looks, coupled with more discretionary time and spending power among retirees, has expanded style options for this segment.

As a transformative trend, A-Jae fashion has reshaped the fashion distribution system by fostering a sustainable and intergenerational market. Younger consumers purchase and reuse items favored by older generations, valuing them for originality and their challenge to conventional norms. This shift reflects a broader cultural movement from "rational" consumption, rooted in restraint, toward expressive consumption that embraces creativity, individuality, and aging as compatible forces.

Generational differences in attitudes toward recycled clothing also emerged. Younger consumers actively pursue second-hand fashion for its uniqueness, while many older men continue to associate new garments with dignity and status. Nevertheless, both groups sustain the vitality of spaces like Dongmyo, which function as hubs of style experimentation and cultural interaction.

In the South Korean context, fashion for older adults carries significant implications for understanding trend origins and identifying innovators across age and gender. Historically, older men were underrepresented among "fashion innovators" and "early adopters" (Beaudoin et al., 2003). The rise of A-Jae fashion challenges this view, positioning older men as active contributors

to contemporary style culture. These findings highlight the importance of recognizing older men as an influential market segment. Brands and retailers should develop campaigns and products that position them as style leaders rather than marginal consumers. Marketing that emphasizes the creative and intergenerational appeal of A-Jae fashion could help bridge the style gap between younger and older demographics. The nostalgic and identity-affirming qualities of A-Jae fashion also present opportunities for storytelling, heritage-based designs, and retro-inspired collections that resonate across age groups.

This study has limitations. It relied on self-reported survey data from a relatively young sample, which may not capture perspectives of other age groups, and the qualitative sample was small, limiting diversity. Future research should track the evolution of A-Jae fashion longitudinally, assess its persistence among youth, and compare similar trends in other aging societies. Examining the environmental impact of vintage and second-hand markets such as Dongmyo would also deepen understanding of how style innovation, sustainability, and generational exchange intersect.

The rise of A-Jae fashion represents more than a passing trend. It signals the democratization of fashion across generations and genders, showing that style innovation and individuality are no longer confined to youth or industry elites. Instead, they are increasingly embraced by people of all ages seeking to express themselves with dignity, creativity, and cultural relevance.

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