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Author: Dr. Jyoti Aggarwal, Vasundhara Verma

Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi, India

FACTORS AFFECTING CLOTHING PREFERENCES OF COLLEGE

GOING GIRLS

[1]Dr. Jyoti Aggarwal, [2]Ms. Vasundhara Verma

[1,2]*Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi, India*

[1]*jyotiagg1975@gmail.com ,*

ABSTRACT

Selection of clothes by an individual is a complex phenomenon affected by personal, social and psychological factors. How each of these factors affects clothing selection of an individual depends upon age, sex and socio economic status to name a few. Present paper examines the factors that affect the choice of clothes of college going girl students of university of Delhi. In the first phase of the study, that was exploratory in nature, 12 focus group discussions were carried out on 114 girl students enrolled in university of Delhi. This helped to identify the main factors that affect their clothing decisions. Based on findings of first phase, a 54 item, five point likert scale questionnaire was developed with the help of standardized scales, during the second phase of the study. It was pretested on 50 respondents. Final data was collected from 253 college going students. All questionnaires were personally administered.During last phase of the study, reliability of each part of the questionnaire was checked using Cronbach's alpha, value for which was higher than .6 for most parts. Principal component analysis was carried out to find the factors that affect clothing preferences of college going girls. It was found out that choice of clothes mainly influenced by: desire to look good, guidance from fashion innovators or leaders, advise of peers. It also emerged that girls who are innovators in fashion, influence others for clothing selection.Keywords: clothes, preferences, college-going girls

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a time of rapid growth in terms of physical and emotional development and is a subject of interest to many research scholars in the fields of psychology, sociology, health, nutrition and most importantly clothing behavior. Past researches says that clothing and fashion interest is highest in teenagers, especially among the girls. At this age, girls seem to be more interested in clothing because they are developing emotionally, mentally and socially, but still far from the poised and popular adults they would like to be (Kulshrestha and Kshyap, 2007). They think in more experimental way rather than concrete terms and therefore, dressing and fashion of teenagers have always been areas of interest. In fact, this is the area of research where many researchers are still working and trying to understand the psychological makeup of teenagers for clothing. Therefore, to interpret the psychological makeup it is very important to understand the factors affecting clothing perceptions.

Perceptions and selection of clothes is a complex phenomenon, which depends upon the psychological makeup of an individual. The way college going girls perceive clothes for self and others involves lots of influences like: cultural, religious, interpersonal and body image etc. Many of researches are done in past to identify the factors that influence perception of clothes. Major challenge in understanding the reasons behind perception of clothes is the vastness of the influences affecting it. It is difficult for any one researcher to cater to all these influences at one point of time. Also, as cultural influence is very strong, researches done at one geographical location may not hold true across the globe with a wide spread cultural diversity. In the present research, an effort has been made to identify and understand factors that may affect young girls' self perception and clothing choices. Factors of interest in this study were Clothing Behavior; Importance of Clothing; Fashion Innovativeness and Leadership quality; Interpersonal Influence and Information

Seeking; and Leadership quality and Influence of self on others for clothing selection. Also, not many researches are been carried out in the recent past to assess the perception of clothes and reasons behind it in the Indian context. Clothes are very important aspect of our daily life and we keep listening to various diktats given by social and religious leaders about the clothes that young girls should wear. This makes study of clothes very important. Researcher feels that the outcome of the present research could help understand the present trends of the society towards perception of the clothes. Such trends when analyzed with past trends can be used to predict the future trends as well.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

How, choice of clothes is related to an identity of an individual? Why individuals behave in a particular way is a complex issue. Several social and psychological theories explain the multidimensional nature related to why we do what we do. Likewise, clothes, extended as an exterior self, have multidimensional characteristics, and relates to many different aspects of an individual (Sancheti, 2009). The review of literature provided in this section will focus on the factors affecting the clothing perception of young college going girls.

Clothing behavior & perception; Clothing is of great importance for girls at adolescence than any other period of life. Adolescence is the wonderful period of transition, profound physical and mental changes and social pressure etc. This is the period when clothes have a greater effect upon the individual and girls realize that clothes can do much to improve appearance and to camouflage an unattractive appearance (Kulshrestha and Kshyap, 2007). Cox and Dietz (1993) said that for adolescence, self acceptance and popularity is determined by appropriate and attractive clothing. For them clothing reflects a feeling of self worth or insecurity or is used as a means of coping with environmental satiations. Clothing may be used to enhance one's body satisfaction or to hide body

2

dissatisfaction relative to cultural ideas (Kaiser, 1997). Thus, clothing perception and behavior is evident.

Importance of Clothing& perception; Importance of clothing is derived from Makus' self schema theory, defined as "cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of self – related information contained in an individuals' social experience" (Markus, 1997). Schemas influences and represents one's way of self evaluation as well as index of self – worth in terms of personality, appearance and identity (Merritt, 2010). Appearance Schematics are those who place more importance on appearance. Thus, they are more psychologically indulged in their looks and are judgmental about themselves and others (Cash and Labarge, 1996). Hence, clothing perceptions and importance of clothing have direct associations with each other.

Fashion Innovativeness, Leadership & Perception; Fashion leaders are the first members of their social group to learn and wear a new fashion when it appears in the market (Gutman &Mills, 1982; Kaiser, 1990). Fashion leadership has long been a topic of interest of researchers because fashion behavior meets a variety of human needs, interests and affords scholars a rich and stimulating view of many aspects related to human behavior (Kaiser, 1990). Fashion innovators try new clothing fashions and hence they have a strong need to gather and assess information pertaining to fashions because they are the trendsetters for fashion clothing (Kobia, 2000). Innovators spend more money on clothing, they know more about clothing styles and brands and own more styles than non – innovators (Baumgarten, 1975). Hence, clothing and fashion are vehicles through which adolescence; especially girls may express their unique styles and personalities and fashion leadershipness.

Interpersonal Influence, Information Seeking Behavior & perception; During the college years, how girls should relate to clothing is determined by peer and familial influences. A peer group can have great influence on how people dress and act. Problems arise though, when the group's idea of "right" conflicts with the individual's beliefs as well as the family's (Weber, 2008). Mantyi and Lanwenya (2014) reported that, during the adolescence, the desires to belong to an identifiable peer group are often expressed through clothing and behavior. Such is the importance and the need for conformity to avoid provoking ridicule and social isolation. Clothes that do not fit in the peer standards may be criticized; as the wearer can be teased and laughed at. When it comes to familial influence, throughout their lifespan, children are influenced by their family members especially, mothers. But this influence weakens with child's growth and that of peers increases; therefor peer conformity becomes more important during adolescence years (Sancheti, 2009).

Leadership Quality & Influence of self on others for clothing selection Scale & perception; Fashion leaders have always been of great interest for marketers as well as researchers as they not only provide much needed sales of costly new items but also promote and justify new fashion to fashion followers who look up to them for guidance about new clothing styles (Kaiser, 1990). The kind of clothing people wear is closely linked to their self concept as they seek to reflect how they see themselves through the clothes they wear. It is likely that fashion leaders see new clothing styles as symbols of unique dimensions of their self concept, expressing their view of themselves and reflecting their involvement in new fashion (Goldsmith, 1996). Understanding of the behavioral aspects of fashion leaders can also help researchers understand the ways in which they can influence followers in clothing choices.

METHODOLOGY

Phase I: Exploratory Study

The research began with a series of 12 focus group discussions carried out with 114, undergraduate and post graduate girl students of Delhi University. For the purpose of the focus group discussions, the young college going girls were considered appropriate as the young adults indulge in maximum experiments with clothes. This is also the age when perceptions of an individual are taking more concrete shape. The series of focus group discussions were designed and anchored to elicit responses and identify factors affecting perceptions towards clothes, the way college going girls visualize clothes for themselves and others as well as their clothing decisions process. 10 visuals were used as a stimulus to elicit responses. The participants' responses were then used to construct the survey instrument used in the second phase of the study.

Phase II: Confirmatory Study

Questionnaire Development

The survey was carried out using a structured questionnaire. The instrument included several statements designed to identify factors affecting clothing perception of young college going girls. In constructing the questionnaire items specific to this study, items in prior studies related to clothing and decision making as well as the results of 12 focus group discussions were kept in mind. Variables that were cited as most probable reasons defining the perception towards the clothes, during focus group discussions were selected for the questionnaire development. Ultimately, on the basis of the factor identified in phase I, a 54 item, five point likert scale questionnaire was developed with the help of standardized scales. All the survey items were measured on a 5 point likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Relevant pre tested scales for measuring the variables were included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by combining and modifying key elements found in these scales so that the questions would be better related to clothing and fashion. The items included in the questionnaire intended to capture following five underlying variables: -

Variable 1: Clothing behavior; Clothing Behavior was measured by the scale developed on the research of Know and Parham (1994) and the Body Image Avoidance Questionnaire's Clothing Factor (Rosen et al, 1991). The scale consisted of 11 items, four negative and seven positive worded items that measured behavior towards clothing and fashion in relation to the body such as avoiding revealing clothing choices because of body discomfort. According to previous research, the internal reliabilities of this standardized scale ranges from .590 to .648 (Merritt, 2010).

Variable 2: Importance of Clothing; The importance and self – relevance of appearance with clothing in an individual's life was measured by using the Appearance Schemas Inventory developed by Cash & Labarge, (1996). This scale consisted of 20 items, six negative and fourteen positive worded items that measured the importance of clothing. The reliability of Cash & Labarge's item was .859. Higher scores revealed that one is more appearance self – representational than others. Specifically, those with a high cognizance towards appearance are more likely to represent themselves as well as others based on appearance (Merritt, 2010).

Variable 3: Fashion Innovativeness and Leadership quality; Six – item Domain Specific Innovativeness Scale (DSI) originated by Goldsmith and Hofacker (1991), was used to measure the Fashion Innovativeness and Leadership quality. The reliability of this scale was .83 (Goldsmith et al., 1996). This scale consisted of six questions, three positively and three negatively worded items.

Variable 4: Interpersonal Influence and Information Seeking Behavior; To access Interpersonal Influence and Information Seeking Behaviour among girls, two different constructs were used. 2 items were adapted from Opinion Leadership and Information Seeking

Scale originated by Reynolds and Darden (1971), to measure the degree to which a person expresses the tendency to seek information about products by asking for their advice. The reliability of this scale reported by Bearden et al. (2011) was 0.73 The other 9 items were adopted from Interpersonal Influence: Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence Scale developed by Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989), to measure the susceptibility of girls to peer pressure, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others or the tendency to take advice about the new products and services by others or by observing others (Bearden et al., 1989, p. 474). The reliability of this scale reported by Bearden et al. (2011) was .91. The scale consisted of 11 items, all positively worded.

Variable 5: Leadership quality and influence of self on others for clothing selection; Leadership quality and influence of self on others for clothing selection were assessed by Reynolds and Darden's (1971) Opinion Leadership Scale adopted by King and Summers (1970) to reflect the extent of giving advice regarding a particular topic especially clothing to others. The reliability of Reynolds and Darden's item was .79 (Bearden, 2011). The scale used consisted of 6 items, 3 negative and 3 positive worded items.

Sample

Primary data was collected from 253 young college going girls. Sample included 200 undergraduate and 53 post graduate students of University of Delhi, India. Respondents were chosen through convenient sampling.

Pre- testing

The questionnaire was pre tested on 50 respondents to remove any ambiguity in the language of the items. As the language was found to be fully understandable by all 50 respondents, the questionnaire was administered on the entire sample without any change.

Phase III: Analytical Study

Coding

Data collected through questionnaires were subjected to statistical analysis using SPSS (22). The items were then identified as positive and negative statement as per the measure of the scale. In positive statements, 1st rank was given to option strongly disagree, 2nd to disagree, 3rd to neither agree nor disagree, 4th to agree and 5th to strongly agree. Negative statements were marked in the reverse order i.e. rank 5 for strongly disagree, 4 for disagree, 3 for neither agree nor disagree, 2 for agree and 1 for strongly agree. In both the cases rank 3 remains as neutral (neither agree nor disagree).

DATA ENTRY & ANALYSIS

Responses were carefully entered as nominal scale data. After entering the data, reliability of each multi – item scale was assessed prior to subsequent analysis. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out on each scale to extract the factors leading to each measure of the study. For extraction of factors, method used was "Principal Components".

RESULTS

Instrument Reliability

Internal consistency was tested using Cronbach's α, a measure based on the intercorrelation of the items (Cronbach, 1951). Cronbach's α is a widely used measure for assessing the reliability of a psychometrical developed scale (Peter, 1979). A scale is considered to have a good reliability if it's Cronbach's α value is .60 or higher (Hair et al., 1995). All multi item structured scales had cronbach's α coefficients over .60 and were considered acceptable except clothing behavior and fashion innovativeness and leadership quality scale. Therefore, 4 items; "Item 4: I choose clothing that will hide any figure problems that I feel I have (large thighs)", "Item 5: I pick clothing regardless of my

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weight or shape", "Item 6: I prefer clothing that is dark in colour (e.g. black)", "Item 8: I feel uncomfortable in my clothing because of my body" were deleted from clothing behavior scale and 1 item " Item 37: compared to my friends, I do little shopping for new fashions" was deleted from fashion innovativeness and leadership quality scale to improve the reliability of the scale. Descriptive statistics for all the variables in the study appear in Table 1. These show that the responses covered the full range of possible scores for the variables and that most of them were approximately normally distributed.

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics of the Variables in the Study

Variables	Items	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Clothing behavior	7	22.63	3.807
Importance of Clothing	20	65.04	8.313
Fashion Innovativeness and Leadership quality	5	14.17	3.397
Interpersonal Influence and Information Seeking Behavior	11	31.71	6.874
Leadership quality and influence of self on others for clothing selection	6	19.24	3.553

Factor Analysis

Principal component analysis (PCA) with direct oblimin rotation determined meaningful dimensions of the multi – item research variables. This method was used to identify factors that are responsible for a particular variables. By using a criterion of factor loading of .40 or higher (Korgaonkar & Wolin, 1999; Chen & Hsu, 2001; Hair, Anderson, Tataham &Black, 1998) and with Eigen value greater than 1.0 factors of each construct were identified. Each key variable – clothing behavior, importance of clothing, Fashion Innovativeness and Leadership quality, Interpersonal Influence and Information Seeking Behaviour, and Leadership quality and influence of self on others for clothing selection had uni-dimensionality (see Table 2).

Based on the Factor Analysis, Kaiser–Meyer-Oklin Measure of Sampling & Bartlett's test of Sphericity plays an important role for accepting the sample adequacy. While the KMO ranges from 0 to 1, the world-over accepted index is over 0.5. Some researchers and books also accept 0.6 as KMO value. Also, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity relates to the significance of the study and shows the validity and suitability of the responses collected to the problem being addressed through the study. For Factor Analysis to be recommended suitable, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity must be less than 0.5

Scale 1: Clothing Behaviour Scale

From the 7 items of the scale remaining after deleting 4 to improve reliability of the scale, two factors were identified. Factor 1 was named style statement, which expresses the desire to choose stylish and trendy clothes. This factor includes items 1, 3, 2 and 7. Factor 2 was named dress as a means to show off body curves, which reveals the desire to hide or show body curves and included three items 10, 9 and 11.

Scale 2: Importance of Clothing Scale

In this scale, 6 items were determined to have very low factor loadings from (-. 15) to .37. Thus, these 6 items were excluded. After deleting six items, 14 items remained. From the remaining 14 items, six factors were identified on the basis of component matrix. According to the scree plot diagram and component matrix, only one major factor was found apt for the study. There were 12 items extracted in factor 1. The other 5 factors were very closely related to each other and were extracting one item each. Factors that included only one item were

discarded from the analysis (Merritt, 2010). The factor was named, Importance of Looks and Appearance based on their similarities among the items that made up each factor. Factor 1 included item 22, 29, 26, 16, 24, 17, 21, 15, 27, 12, 20, 25, 23 and 30 and included items which expresses the urge to look good.

Scale 3: Fashion Innovativeness and Leadership Quality Scale

From the 5 items of the scale, two factors were identified. Factor 1 was named leaders in fashion Adaption and included item 33, 35 and 36. These items expressed the desire to become fashion leaders in a group. Factor 2 was named Fashion Awareness and included two items (32 and 34). These items were about the desire to have knowledge and awareness of latest trends and fashion.

Scale 4: Interpersonal Influence and Information Seeking Behaviour Scale

Regarding interpersonal influence and information seeking behavior scale, 2 items, were also excluded

because of their low factor loading of .16 and 0.32. After deleting two items, 9 items remained. From the remaining 9 items, two factors were identified. Factor 1 was named Peer Pressure. The item 48, 45, 41, 46, 40 and 44 were included in first factor and expresses the desire to get approval from others. Factor 2 was named Seeking Advice and included three items 47, 39 and 38. These items express the desire to get advice from others on clothing and fashion.

Scale 5: Leadership Quality & Influence of self on others for clothing selection Scale

From the 6 items, two factors were identified. Factor 1 was named Role of Friends & Neighbors for Advice on Fashion Adaption. The items included in Factor 1 were item 52, 54 and 50. These items expressed the role of friends and neighbors in taking and giving advice regarding clothing. Factor 2 was named My Influence on others to choose Clothes and included three items 49, 53 and 51. These items expressed the desire to have influence of oneself on others choosing and wearing clothes.

Table 2 - Results of Measurement Model Assessing Construct Reliability

Constructs and identified factors	Eigen value [a]	Cronbach's α [b]	KMO [c]	Bartlett's Test of Sphericity [d]
CLOTHING BEHAVIOR SCALE				
Style statement	2.057	0.581	.668	0.00
Choice of dress in relation to body curves	1.440			
IMPORTANCE OF CLOTHING SCALE				
Appearance Importance	4.350	0.740	.819	0.00
FASHION INNOVATIVENESS AND LEADERSHIP QUALITY SCALE				
Leadership in fashion adoption	2.143	0.636	0.674	0.00
Fashion awareness	1.105			
INTERPERSONAL INFLUENCE AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOUR SCALE				
Peer Pressure	3.966	0.818	.851	0.00
Seeking advise	1.106			
LEADERSHIP QUALITY AND INFLUENCE OF SELF ON OTHRES FOR CLOTHING SELECTION SCALE				

Influence of others in clothing selection	2.219	0.656	.637	0.00
Influence of self on others	1.031			

Note. [a] All significant if > 1.0, [b] Reliable if > 0.6, [c] Kaiser–Meyer-Oklin Measure of Sampling is considered valid, if > 0.6,

[d] Bartlett's test of Sphericity is valid, if < 0.5.

DISCUSSION

The major objective of this research was to examine the factors affecting perceptions towards clothing of young college going girls. To identify the factors affecting perceptions towards clothes, 12 focus group discussions were conducted, 8 on under graduate and 4 on post graduate students. Each group comprised 8 – 12, young college going girls. To elicit the responses 10 visuals were shown to them. Many factors were identified from Focus Group discussions. From the identified variables, five variables were selected for further study which was; clothing behavior, importance of clothing, fashion innovativeness & leadership, interpersonal influence & information seeking behaviour and leadership quality & influence of self on others for clothing selection.

Quantitative analysis was done through a 5- point Likert scale questionnaire administered on 253 randomly selected, college going girl students, 200 under graduate and 53 post graduate students of Delhi University. The factors attained from the focus group discussions aided in the development of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by combining and modifying key elements found in the scales identified to quantify the variables. The findings of the study are limited by the convenience nature of the sample, so that estimates of population parameters cannot be made.

Like most studies, results of the present study are also limited to the sample and may differ with change in age and geographical location of sample. Still the results bring out important aspects of the clothing selection process followed by young girls. It was well evident from the results that young girls choose clothes that help them look stylish and trendy. 18-22yrs. is the age when girls are making their own identity. So clothes that reflect wearer's concept of self are given preferences. At the same time clothes are also chosen to camouflage body defects or to enhance best body features. How does one look in a particular type of clothes is the major factor in choice of clothes. Though good and bad in looks may be derived by many other variables like social setup, religion, socio economic conditions etc. But this is the age when most of the young adults are finding their place in already existing social setup.

It emerged from the study that the girls make efforts to gather information regarding latest trends in fashion. There are evident fashion leaders in the groups. These are the individual who are not only aware of latest trends in fashion but also adopt these trends first in the group. These fashion innovators or fashion leaders of the group influence clothing choices of others in the group who look up to them for guidance. Different groups may have their own fashion leaders. But these are very evident and fashion followers make their clothing decisions based on the clothing styles accepted by fashion leaders. Influence is not only flowing vertically down from leaders to followers but also horizontally from fellow fashion followers to make clothing choices in accordance with the group norms. The respondents endorsed that peers, friends and neighbors are the major source of information regarding what to wear and buy. It is very interesting to understand that advising others on clothing selection is not a unidirectional process. Though fashion followers look up to fashion innovators or leaders for fashion advise, fashion followers also

advise one other based on the clues received from the leaders.

Present study brings out important aspects of the clothing selection process of young college going girls, but further studies can be carried out on other aspects, in different geographical conditions as well as on respondents of different age and religion.

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