Fashioning Herstory: Unveiling Women's Influence in Retail Apparel Trends

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ABSTRACT

The research investigates the intricacies of women's choices and actions concerning retail fashion clothing. Focused on understanding the complex relationship between women and the retail fashion industry, the study tries to uncover key insights that shape their shopping decisions. By examining the interplay of various factors, the study seeks to contribute to both the academic understanding of consumer behavior and the practical strategies of the retail sector. The implications of the findings extend to both academia and industry, from an academic perspective, the research contributes to the existing literature on consumer behavior, particularly within the domain of fashion retail. The findings offer an understanding of how gender-specific factors influence buying preferences and choices.

Keywords: Fashion Apparel, Fashion Consciousness, Fashion retail Outlets, Fashion Trends, Women.

INTRODUCTION

World is now witnessing a fashion era, where fashion industries are growing at a tremendous rate worldwide. (Business Wire 2021) The worldwide fashion industry is projected to expand from $25.09 billion in 2020 to $30.58 billion in 2021, experiencing a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 21.9%. Anticipated to attain a value of $39.84 billion by 2025, the market is poised to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7%. Globalization has paved the way for the booming of the fashion industry around the globe spreading and reaching out to every corner of the land with innovations, uniqueness, and flexibility. There is a dynamic face of the fashion industry unleashing its potential with innovations along with traditional and modern styles. Due to the ever-increasing fashion consciousness among the people, the fashion industry is experiencing a boom. The growing demand for fashion apparel can be linked to increasing fashion consciousness among people as well as the success of the fashion apparel retail sector. Retailing is one of the oldest trade practices and even now it has seen a tremendous increase with time. With the innovation in the retail sector apparel industries started flourishing, and clearly apparel retailers have taken a lead in the retail revolution.

In the Fashion Industry, (Bhardwaj 2010) the Fashion Apparel Industry has a considerable position in terms of size, growth, and market. The term 'Apparel' refers to clothing and accessories that are produced according to the latest fashion trends and styles. Apparel and fashion products differ from other products since it is characterized by short life cycle and high product turnover. It also differs in relation to brands, innovation, customization, promotion, and so on. (Yash Rathwa et al., 2021) The growing demand for fashion apparel can be linked to increasing fashion consciousness among people as well as the success of the fashion apparel retail sector. Retailing is one of the oldest trade practices in India and even now it has

seen a tremendous increase with time. (Pooja Kunwar, 2017) Weekly fares, fair price shops, and Monthly or festive fares were some of the traditional retail practices in India. But with the onset of the 21st century, there was a huge change in the retail sector. Several organized modern outlets came into existence such as supermarkets, hypermarkets, departmental stores, boutiques, and so on. So, with this innovation in the retail sector apparel industries started flourishing, and clearly, apparel retailers have taken a lead in the retail revolution.

(Puviarasu, 2021) Customers' likes and dislikes are so powerful that they can promote and demote a product. Therefore, studying their preference and behavior regarding any product is important for the success of any market. (Singh Scholar et al., 2016) When it comes to product preferences gender-based differences and perception is evident in all market in the case of any product being it food, drinks, apparel, stationary etc. (Nirbhan Singh, R., 2013) marketers focus on certain attributes being feminine or muscular, they market them by projecting those attributes. For example, the pink color is always associated with females whereas blue is for men. This technique is followed by the famous chocolate company Kinder-Joy. Similarly, video games and armed toys are always advertised as muscular whereas bags, apparel, and cosmetics are considered feminine even though there is a different side. Considering women as the most potential customers of apparel, this study is a women-centric study on retail fashion apparel. Thus, insights from the study will be of further use to marketers in the retail fashion apparel industry.

The fashion Apparel industry tends to have a greater share in terms of growth and innovation among the fashion industry. (Kumar & Author, 2017) This sector is flourishing to date at a tremendous rate since consumers tend to spend more of their savings on these things. Among that women tend to be at the top of the graph. (Werner et. al. 2019) Even with the great online revolution, with different applications and websites for marketing, the retail apparel segment has a separate position in the market. The retail fashion landscape is undergoing a transformation with the advent of e-commerce, sustainable practices, and changing societal norms. Like all other sectors retail apparel sector too was paused during the pandemic, but started reviving out of it slowly from late 2021. People started buying everything that they couldn't buy during the pandemic period. When the world started moving towards the old normal with vaccination going on, offices, schools, and shops opening in many parts of the country, a rise in consumer confidence was seen. This enthusiasm drove people to buy apparel and accessories according to their choice. Notably, the revenge buying seen in Europe and the US. When people started re-living like good old pre-pandemic era, they started consuming more of the apparel and accessories of their choice. Their buying showed how deprived they were sitting at home during the pandemic. This factor drove the consumption of apparel to go up. (Gazzola et. al. 2020) Consequently, women's choices in apparel are influenced not only by style and aesthetics but also by ethical considerations, sustainability, and the overall shopping experience. Considering these aspects, it is necessary to understand the trends of women consumers buying behavior toward Retail Fashion Apparel.

METHODS

This research is designed to explore the prevailing trends and preferences in fashionable clothing among the female population. The region chosen for this study is Kerala, known for its diverse and varied female demographic, as well as its assortment of fashion retailers ranging from shopping malls and boutiques to outlets on the local streets. The study will specifically focus on formal wear, casual wear, and party wear for women. The research holds substantial potential, aiming to uncover the impact of demographic factors, promotional strategies, and store attributes on women's engagement with the retail fashion sector. The

insights gained from this study would be of considerable importance to marketers in the retail fashion apparel industry, enabling them to align their strategies with current consumer demands, desires, and preferences, thereby securing a prominent position within the market.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The fashion consciousness among women is identified by conducting a correlation analysis based on their demography. The result indicates that age, occupation, and marital status have no relationship with fashion consciousness among the selected group. As education progress, people tend to be more conscious about their apparel, and the rise in income and place of residence also influences their elegance and trendy lifestyle.

H1: There is a relationship between demographic factors and fashion consciousness.

Table 1 Demographic Variables and Fashion Consciousness

	Correlation	H1 (upheld/ not accepted)
Age v/s Fashion Consciousness	-0.418455	Not accepted
Educational Qualification v/s Fashion Consciousness	0.141529	Upheld
Occupation v/s Fashion Consciousness	-0.71825	Not accepted
Annual Income v/s Fashion Consciousness	0.209948	Upheld
Marital status v/s Fashion Consciousness	-0.45707	Not accepted
Place of Residence v/s Fashion Consciousness	0.081191	Upheld

(Source: Own Processing- Primary data)

Preference towards retail store:

(Saluja, D., 2016) The retail store is one of the most popular shopping outlets preferred by many alongside online shopping sites. Retail store preference is influenced by several factors including clothing collections, shopping space, utilities in the outlets including parking facilities, trail room facilities, outlet ambiance etc. The study has focused on the factors influencing retail outlet selection based on their marital status, on the assumption that single women tend to have more self-care time than married.

H1: There is a significant difference between marital status and preference towards store factors.

Table 2 Marital status and preference towards retail store
Test Statistics

	Marital status	[Huge clothing collection]	[Outlet design and layout]	[Availability of branded clothes]	[Parking facility]	[Trail room]	[Shopping space]
Chi-Square	4.267a	12.847b	22.933c	7.300d	19.931e	34.000e	42.000e
Df	1	2	3	2	3	3	3

Asymp. Sig.	.039	.002	.000	.026	.000	.000	.000
H1 (upheld/ not accepted)	upheld	upheld	upheld	Upheld	upheld	Upheld	upheld

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 30.0.

b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 19.7.

c. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 15.0.

d. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 20.0.

e. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 14.5.

(Source: Own processing, Primary data)

Since the p-value is below the significance level, it can be concluded that there is a significant association between marital status and having a huge clothing collection. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H0), which suggests no association, is not accepted. This means that marital status and having a huge clothing collection are likely related. The p-value (Asymp. Sig.) associated with this statistic is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. there is a significant association between marital status and the availability of branded clothes. Similarly, the availability of branded clothes, shopping space, trail room availability, and parking space facility have significant likely associations with marital status.

Education and choice of retail outlet:

Education can shape a woman's choice of retail outlets by influencing her decision-making process, shopping preferences, brand recognition, online-offline balance, and alignment with personal values. Understanding this relationship can be valuable for retail marketers in tailoring their strategies to cater to the preferences and priorities of educated female consumers.

H1: There is a significant difference between education and mode of outlet.

Table 3 Education and choice of outlet

Test Statistics		
	Educational Qualification	Which mode would you choose (retail/online) while shopping for different wears.
Chi-Square	14.833a	32.267b
Df	4	1
Asymp. Sig.	.005	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 12.0.

b. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 30.0.

The p-value (0.005) is less than the standard alpha value (0.05), failed to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is no significant difference between education and mode of outlet.

Buying Behaviour:

(Nirbhan Singh, R., 2013) dressing plays an important role in building a sense of identity and fame in women's life. Clothing helps them in building self-resilience. Several feminine factors were identified and certain relations were made. These factors help them to choose garments according to their choice, tradition, and culture. (Nagar Karaikal et al., 2014) promotion, store attributes, product attribute, income of respondent and occupation have significant relation between consumer buying behaviour.

H1: Apparel buying behavior among different age groups varies.

Table 4 : Buying Behaviour according to age

Ranks			
	Age	N	Mean Rank
[I buy clothes I like, regardless of the current fashion.]	18 -24	20	29.78
	25-34	17	32.74
	35-44	15	33.40
	45 and above	8	22.13
	Total	60	
[I find that, my size determines what style of clothing I can buy.]	18 -24	20	29.98
	25-34	17	31.18
	35-44	15	29.00
	45 and above	8	33.19
	Total	60	
[I love to add atleast one branded outfit to my collections.]	18 -24	20	31.95
	25-34	17	39.12
	35-44	15	23.97
	45 and above	8	20.81
	Total	60	
[I spent lot of money on clothing and accessories.]	18 -24	20	30.33
	25-34	17	39.65
	35-44	15	24.03
	45 and above	8	23.63
	Total	60	
[I avoid high fashion clothing because, it goes out of style too quickly.]	18 -24	20	33.40
	25-34	17	28.26
	35-44	15	33.97
	45 and above	8	21.50
	Total	60	

(Source: Own processing, primary data)

Test Statistics a,b					
	[I buy clothes I like, regardless of the current fashion.]	[I find that, my size determines what style of clothing I can buy.]	[I love to add at least one branded outfit to my collections.]	[I spent lot of money on clothing and accessories.]	[I avoid high fashion clothing because, it goes out of style too quickly.]
Kruskal-Wallis H	2.912	.384	9.747	8.347	3.824
Df	3	3	3	3	3
Asymp. Sig.	.405	.944	.021	.039	.281
H0 (upheld/ not accepted)	Not accepted	Not accepted	upheld	upheld	Not accepted
a. Kruskal Wallis Test					
b. Grouping Variable: Age					

Purchasing patterns concerning stylish clothing, preferences for apparel sizes, and trends in purchasing high-fashion clothing vary across distinct age groups. Spending substantial amounts on clothing and accessories shows similar patterns across different age groups and the inclination to buy branded clothing among various age groups remains consistent.

Income and choice of location of retail outlets:
Income can significantly influence the choice of retail outlet locations. Higher income levels often lead to preferences for premium products, exclusive brands, and a shopping experience that aligns with their lifestyle and aspirations. This understanding can assist retail marketers in tailoring their offerings and strategies to cater to the preferences and expectations of women with higher incomes.
 H1: The effect of people's income on the choice of location of outlet varies.

Table 5 : Income and Choice of location

Ranks			
	Annual family income	N	Mean Rank
Which is true when choosing location of a retail outlet	less than 1 lakh	36	33.67
	1 lakh to 3 lakh	15	26.00
	3 lakh to 5 lakh	4	19.50
	more than 5 lakh	5	30.00
	Total	60	

Test Statistics a,b	
	Which is true while choosing location of retail outlet
Kruskal-Wallis H	5.315
Df	3

Asymp. Sig.	.150
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: Annual family income	

(Source: Own processing)

The p value (0.150) is greater than the standard alpha value (0.05) the alternative hypothesis is accepted. That is the effect of people's income on the choice of location of outlet varies.

CONCLUSION

Women have different perception towards buying apparel, study pointed out that their age, occupation, and marital status is correlated to fashion consciousness while educational qualification and annual income do not possess any relation with fashion consciousness. The parking facility is the best indicator of a good apparel outlet and the least preferred attribute was outlet design and layout. Further, the study found out that, buying behavior of women in terms of current fashion and size of outfit varies according to age. While too much money was spent on branded apparel, fast fashion had no effect on age. It was evident that most women like retail shopping more than online shopping be it casual wear, formal wear, and party wear. And most of them opt for retail shopping because of the touch and feel factor that they could experience while physical shopping. The family was the most influenced reference group for choosing the outfit followed by friends' recommendations, celebrity endorsements, and expert recommendations respectively. Further, the most preferred promotional strategy was festival offers and the least was clearance sales. Social media was the most influential promotional channel whereas the least preferred was street posters. Respondents were also fond of revisiting the store if they were treated with good customer service. Understanding women's preferences and the factors that shape their choices can enable stakeholders to tailor their offerings, marketing strategies, and sustainability initiatives to better align with the evolving needs and expectations of female consumers in the realm of retail fashion apparel.

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