

Factors that Influence Clothing Selection of Students A Case Study of University of Ghana, Legon

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Abstract

The study aimed at investigating University of Ghana (Legon) campus fashion and factors that influenced clothing selection of students. The proportionate random sampling technique was used to select the respondents. The hand-coded data was analyzed using the statistical package for social science (SPSS). The results were descriptive and were presented using percentage distribution and pie charts. The respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 50 years; about 42% were female and 58% male. The majority of respondents (87%) were Christians; 11% were Moslems and 2%, Agnostic. Devoted female Moslems could readily be identified by their way of dressing. The survey revealed that about 68% of the respondents made their own clothing choices; 23% were influenced by their parents and 9% were influenced by friends. Styles of clothing that were distinctive on campus included jeans trousers, hipsters, denim (jeans) skirts and jackets, tiered skirts, pleated skirts, 'petticoat', sleeveless blouses, halter neck (bare backs), spaghetti tops, buddha shorts(pushers), hot pants and skirts, and Shaba. A case study investigation conducted earlier revealed that majority of the respondents (69%) did not have knowledge about textiles and clothing. Hence, the trend on campus seemed to suggest that many of them did not know how to select clothing to suit their figure types and occasion. This study therefore sought to find out factors that influenced the clothing selection of the respondents. Majority of the respondents (91%) considered both protection and modesty as important in clothing selection, although campus fashion seemed to suggest otherwise; 48% rated adornment as important. Factors that influenced the respondents' clothing selection were grouped into physical, aesthetic, psycho-social, and economic factors. Colour, fashion, affordability, durability and religion were factors that influenced respondents' clothing selection the most. The respondents suggested that the teaching of Textiles and Clothing be introduced in the schools' curricula at the basic level of education to help inculcate in children the knowledge about the right choice of clothing to enable them to make informed clothing decisions in life.

Keywords: Clothing, Fashion, Protection, Adornment, Modesty.

1. Introduction

Many theories have attempted to explain the basic motivations for human beings to cover the body. Modesty, protection and adornment are three such theories behind the wearing of clothes. There is however some disagreement among various theorists as to which is the most important. A study of motivations in clothing could help one understand the dress behaviour of people. Ryan (1966) and Kefgen et al (1986) observed these four theories. The first theory was the biblical one of modesty, that is clothes were worn to cover nakedness and because of shame. However this theory has been disputed on the grounds that modesty is not the same in different cultures. A part of the body covered by those in one culture may be left exposed without any shame by those in a different culture. Whatever amount of clothing is in general use in a given culture seems modest to the people in that culture while any subtraction from the customary amount is felt to be immodest. The second theory to explain the origin of clothes is the opposite of the first theory. According to this theory, clothing were first worn to call attention to the parts of the body covered. A third theory states that man first wore clothes as protection against the elements of insects, beasts and enemies or against harm or supernatural forces. The fourth and final theory of the origin of clothing is that it was one means of aesthetic expression. This theory has been called the decoration or ornamentation theory.

Ryan(1966) quoted Dearborn (1980) as having stated that clothing at one time or another in some people if not in others protects us against various kinds of fear, ridicule, the estimation of poverty, the estimation of inefficiency or stupidity, numerous dermal discomforts, bodily internal discomfort, estimation of immodesty, anxiety, estimation of lack of self respect, estimation of lack of good taste, unobtrusiveness, an underestimation of first impressions, loneliness or lack of the desired beauty.

According to Frings (1991) buying motives vary from consumer to consumer and from day to day. They include the desire to be fashionable, attractive, impress others, be accepted by friends, peer groups or colleagues and fulfill an emotional need- new clothes often give a feeling of security and confidence. In his view, criteria used by consumers for fashion selection include: colour which is usually the first aspect of a garment or accessory to which consumers respond; texture the surface interest of a garment or accessory and style-the

elements that define a style include lines, silhouette and details. Practical considerations include: Price- the consumer evaluates the total worth of all the fashion appeal aspects of a garment or accessory and their relationship to retail price and their own budget. Fit- the try-on is a crucial step in consumer selection of a garment. Comfort- to keep the wearer at ease, warm or cool. Appropriateness – suitability or acceptability for a specific occasion or need, fabric performance, care and workmanship - quality of construction, stitching, or finishing (Frings, 1991). Frings (1991) further states that brands are a manufacturer's means of product identification. Fabric performance of clothes is the opposite of the first theory. According to this theory clothing were first worn to call attention to the parts of the body covered. A third theory states that man first wore clothes as protection against the elements of insects, beasts and enemies or against harm or supernatural forces. The fourth and final theory of the origin of clothing is that it was one means of aesthetic expression. This theory has been called the decoration or ornamentation theory.

Williams and Rowold (2002) remarked that centuries ago campus fashion was more formal. Students dressed in a manner that would not be worn today. Male students went to class looking more like today's students headed toward job interview- trousers, shirts, ties and jackets. Women too wore more fancy or formal clothes. The female student of the twenty-first century is said to possess a new fashion consciousness in which clothes fulfill a more important role than simply providing warmth and covering their modesty. Choosing outfits for the day is now a vital part of the females early morning routine. Reid (2005) remarked that the fashions on campus are ever changing and varied. In general, dress on campus is now very informal and encompasses all types of fashion. Bruce (2005) also reported that college life has many special benefits including the informality of dress pervasive on most campuses. Almost any outfit is acceptable so long as it is clean, fashionable and reasonably covers parts of the body. In terms of acceptable dress the prevalent philosophy on most campuses is "it's your thing do what you want".

The fashion change process consists of several stages including change in clothing and appearance of styles, introduction (diffusion) of the style, acceptance and decline. Scholars have tried to explain fashion change and fashion acceptance by referring to fashion cycles (Frings, 1991). The fashion cycle is usually depicted as a bell-shaped curve encompassing three phases, namely: introduction, acceptance, and rejection phases. Custom or tradition establishes the sex of a garment. In the western world people have learnt to think of pants (trousers) as masculine and skirts as feminine. Traditional roles for men and women in society was largely defined on the bases of life patterns developed in its non industrial past when women's energies were directed toward nurturing children they had borne and caring for their homes and men's to sustenance and protection activities requiring physical strength. The dress of each sex tended to be more or less useful in fulfilling these types of roles- at least not so hindering as to prevent role performance. During World War II women marched off to salaried work for the first time. Teenage girls of this time adopted the jeans and shorts, their fathers, brothers or boyfriends had shed as uniform. Pants (trousers) were formally considered appropriate work and play garments in women. They were not however considered appropriate for street wear or most social function for both classroom and campus. However, today men's wear could be worn by women to almost any function without reproach. The reverse would be considered abnormal (Kefgen and Touchie-Specht, 1986).

2.0 Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design

Two basic methods of research designs were used in undertaking the study; these were quantitative which used numbers in describing observation of materials or characteristics rather than words and the qualitative methods which used words and pictures more than numbers (Best, 1981)

2.2 Population of the Study

A population is a particular area or setting with common observable characteristics and a sample is a smaller group selected from a larger group or population (Nkpa,1997). Out of the total population of resident students a sample size of 268 was used to undertake the study. The population of this study was all resident students of the five traditional halls.

The proportionate random sampling technique was used to select the respondents from the five halls of residence. This technique made it possible to select a representative number of respondents for the study.

2.3 Data Collection Technique

A questionnaire uses a series of written questions on a particular topic about which a respondent's opinion is sought and it could be open or close ended (Best,1981). In this study both open and close-ended questions were used to collect data.

Since all the respondents were literate, the questionnaire was self-administered by respondents to save time and make analysis easier.

Casual observation was done to support information gathered. Photographs of various fashion styles were also taken of some students on campus to illustrate information.

3. Findings and Discussion

Table 1 portrays fashion trend among female students of University of Ghana (Ilegon). Styles of clothing that were distinctive among the female respondents included: pairs of jeans trousers of various kinds-Faded, Dirty and Tatted jeans, among others; hipsters- a type of skimpy pair of trousers with the waist on the hip line; denim skirts and jackets in various lengths; tiered skirts, termed three sisters or sister-sister by students; inverted pleats, termed as Scottish skirt; handkerchief point skirt and top with angular hems; small jackets termed “petticoat”; sleeveless blouses; bare-backs and spaghetti tops; buddha shorts (pushers)-type of long and tight pair of shorts, shaba- type of skirt with a slit in front.

Accessories mentioned by respondents included the following: matching bangles, bracelets, necklace and ear rings, shiny bags, belts and shoes, big sunshades and big belts termed “Akata”, large hand bags anklets, and flashy phones.

Figure 1 shows that the respondents were made up of 58% (157) males and 42% (113) females. Fashion change among females was more rapid on campus than that of their male counterparts. This result is compatible with a report by Law-et-al (2004) that women’s fashion change is so rapid that a 20 or 30 year old dress worn in public would make the wearer an object of universal curiosity and ridicule. On the other hand a male attire of equal age can easily be worn in public without exciting comments.

Table 2 depicts the age distribution of the respondents. The age distribution of the respondents was from the age range of 18-22 years. There were 169 respondents in that age range making 63.3% of the sample. This was because the age range expected of majority of University students was in that range. The study of Gawne and Oerke (1968) as well as Tai and Tam (2005) indicated that young consumers attached greater importance to clothing as a means of gaining acceptance and approval than did mature persons.

From **Table 3** about 67% of the respondents made their own clothing choices. Where parents and friends contributed in clothing selection, respondents themselves were greatly involved. This finding agrees with Tam-et-al (2005) who reported that young people love independence and this is seen in their clothing choices; 23% either chose their clothes with parents or parents chose them for them, 8 % were aided by friends to select their clothes. It was likely that those who chose their clothes with friends depended on peer pressure and did not seek their parents’ consent and were likely to commit fashion errors. Two respondents said they chose their clothes with the consent of their spouse or boyfriend. (Majority of the students were not married because of the age at which they entered University). Six of the respondents gave no responses.

Table 4 depicts the percentage distribution of physical factors that influenced respondents’ clothing selection. It is not surprising that 24% of the respondents indicated that the type of fabric and its texture were the most important physical sub-factor that influenced their clothing selection. Personal observation by the researcher revealed that cotton and linen wear the most frequently worn fabrics. This may be because they are absorbent and cool to the skin and are therefore suitable for the tropical climate in Ghana. Twenty-one percent of the respondents indicated that they considered size, length and fit, while 18% considered style of the clothing item. The weather and environment were considered by 13% of respondents. Comfort and protection were mentioned by 9% of respondents; 7% and 5% each said the label and uniqueness respectively influenced their clothing choice. Surprisingly, only 3% of respondents mentioned care and maintenance as factors that influenced their clothing selection. Cross (1970) pointed out that feeling right in one’s clothes gives one a sense of security and confidence.

Table 5 shows the percentage distribution of aesthetic factors that influenced respondents’ clothing selection. Both Rosencranz (1972) and Frings (1991) reported that colour is one of the most important factors and usually the first aspect of a garment or accessory to which consumers respond. This study revealed of 253 responses, 154 mentioned colour as a major aesthetic factor in their clothing selection; 48 said attractiveness was an important factor in their clothing selection, 22 of them said the designs of the fabric affected their clothing choice, respondents said that second-hand clothes were in unique designs; therefore many of them patronized such clothes. Fifteen and fourteen saw simplicity and how the clothing item matched other accessories as concerns in their clothing choice (respectively). It is interesting to note that among both male and females, blue was the most favourite colour. Kefgen and Touchie-Specht (1986) agreed that colour is part of the fashion mystique. Just as there are fashionable styles there are fashionable colours too. A few semesters ago the colours blue and pink were most popular among female students of the University of Ghana. This is consistent with a fashion trend on campus referred to as ‘colour fashion’ whereby the same colours of accessories are chosen to match clothing

Table 6 indicates the economic factors that were listed by the respondents. As shown in the table, 51% of the respondents felt that quality and durability were important sub-factors that influenced their clothing selection. This result seems inconsistent with findings by Frings, 1991 that young consumers cared little about quality and were more likely to throw away a garment before it wore out. Almost 38% of the respondents mentioned cost or

affordability as a factor that influenced their clothing selection. Majority indicated that they either sometimes or always bought second hand clothes because they were cheaper. This is a cause of concern raised by numerous Ghanaians because these clothing expose vital parts such as the breasts, midriff and thighs. Students patronize these types of clothes because of their affordability. Also 6% of the respondents mentioned that the clothes should be easily available and the remaining 2% mentioned time involved in maintenance. Again when asked whether they would purchase new clothes to replace old ones which were still serviceable 63% said no because it would be wasteful. The situation in western countries may be different since they may be better off financially and could afford to dispose of serviceable clothes easily.

Table 7 displays the psycho-social sub-factors that influenced respondents clothing selection.

Seventy-four of the respondents who answered this question felt that suitability of the clothes to the occasion for which the clothes were being worn was a major factor in their clothing selection. This is in line with Cross (1970) who found that dress should be appropriate for the occasion. 58 of those who gave responses to this question held the view that every dress should be fashionable. However, almost all the respondents (89) agreed that fashion was important. 36 of the respondents felt that decency or modesty was also an important factor in clothing selection. Only 9 of the respondents sought parental consent and 8 stated that their mood affected their clothing selection. This is consistent with findings by Gawne and Oerke (1969) that mood whether happy or sad disagreeable or optimistic often reflects in one's clothing choice. Bright colours usually make one feel or appear happy and gay while dark or drab colours are likely to reflect a sad mood. Extroverts usually prefer warm and conspicuous colours while introverts are found to prefer colours that are cool.

Table 8a. indicates respondent's responses on purchasing of new clothes. Out of the 165 respondents, (64%) said they would not, while 92 (34%) said they would and 2 (1%) indicated that they would sometimes purchase new clothes to replace old ones which were still serviceable. Table 12a indicates reasons given by respondents for not purchasing new clothes to replace serviceable ones which were outmoded.

Table 8b. shows that of the 173 respondents who indicated that they would not purchase new clothes to replace old ones, 52.0% indicated that it would be wasteful to do so, 29.5% said they did not value fashion that much, 14.5% stated they did not dispose of old serviceable clothes while the remaining 2.3% said their clothes were classic so they never disposed of them. Three respondents gave no responses. This finding contradicts findings by Frings 1991, that young consumers were likely to throw away a garment before it wore out. Majority of the respondents indicated earlier on that they were not working, this might be a reason for their response

As indicated in **figure 2**, eighty five percent of the respondents wore the same clothes at home and on campus. They claimed they could not afford to have two sets of clothes. However about 8% indicated that they wished to preserve campus clothes therefore did not wear them at home. They also were of the view that campus clothes were not suitable enough to be worn at home. This however explained the fact that some of them were aware of the provocative nature of campus fashion and therefore could not wear them at home. Now what about those who wore the same clothes on campus and at home? Was there nothing provocative about such clothes and if there was what were the reactions of parents and guardians to such clothes? This would be worth researching into.

5.0 Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

The aim of the study was to investigate University of Ghana campus fashion and factors that influenced respondents' clothing selection. The proportionate random sampling technique was used to select three hundred resident students from Akuafu, Legon, Mensah-Sarbah, Volta and Commonwealth halls of the University of Ghana. A questionnaire with both open and close-ended questions was used in collecting the data. Two hundred and seventy questionnaires were retrieved and analyzed. The respondents comprised 157 male and 113 female students. They were aged between 18 and 50 with majority within 18 to 22. The researchers' personal observation revealed that, important factors that influenced respondents' clothing selection included colour, fashion, type of fabric, affordability, and religion. Hipsters, budha's shorts, tiered and Scottish skirts, pusher, handkerchief point skirts, tubes, spaghetti strap tops, small tops, large belts and accessories, shiny bags and shoes were among clothing that were in vogue among females.

5.2 Conclusions

Majority of the students wore second-hand clothes since they were affordable and these came in styles that exposed their vital body parts. There was therefore the need to research into the perceptions of students toward campus fashion. Colour, durability, cost, religion and fashion were important factors that influenced respondents' clothing selection.

5.3 Recommendations

1. Teaching of Home Science and for that matter Textiles and Clothing be reintroduced and made compulsory at the basic level to equip children with knowledge and skills that will help them make right clothing choices in life.
2. There is the need to research into the views of students on campus fashion in attempt to tackle the problem of improper and indecent dressing.

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Table1: Fashion Trend among Female Students of University of Ghana (Legon)

Garments	Accessories
Jeans trousers, shorts and skirts	Matching bangles, bracelets, necklace and earrings
Hipsters	Shiny bags, belts and shoes
Budha shorts/pushers	Big sun shades
Hot pants and shorts	Large bags
Scottish skirt	Flashy phones
Sister-sister (three sisters) tiered skirt	
Handkerchief point skirt and top	
Petticoats (small jackets)	
Tubes, bare backs, spaghetti top	

Figure 1: Gender of Respondents

Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age in years	Number	%
18-22	169	63.3
23-27	68	25.4
28-32	19	7.0
33-37	6	2.2
38-42	3	1.1
43-47	2	0.7
48-50	1	0.4
Total	268	100.0

% based on number of responses

Table 3: Respondents' Choice of Clothing

Choice made by	Number	%
Self	180	67.1
Parents/parents and self	64	23.9
Self and friends	22	8.2
Self and spouse	2	0.8
Total	268	100.0

Table 4: Physical Factors that Influenced Respondents' Clothing Selection

Sub- Factors	Number	%
Type of Fabrics and texture	64	24
Size, length and fit	56	21
Style of clothing item	48	18
Weather and environment	34	13
Comfort and protection	25	9
Label, brand or designer name	18	7
Uniqueness of the style	14	5
Care and maintenance	9	3
Total	268	100

Table 5: Aesthetic Factors that Influenced Respondents Clothing Selection

Sub-factors	Number	%
Colour	154	61
Attractiveness/Neatness/Smartness	48	19
Design	22	9
Simplicity/Formality	15	6
How it matches other accessories	14	5
Total	253	100

Table 6: Economic Factors that Influenced Respondents Clothing Selection

Sub-factor	Number	%
Quality/Durability	89	51
Cost/Price	67	38
Availability	14	8
Time	6	3
Total	176	100

Table 7: Psycho-Social Factors that Influenced Respondents' Clothing Selection

Age in Years	Number	%
Suitability for occasion	74	35
Fashion	58	27
Decency/modesty	36	17
Opinion of spouse/girl/boyfriend	12	6
Religious expectation	12	6
Parents approval	9	5
Mood	8	4
Total	214	100

% based on number of responses

Table 8a: Reasons for Purchasing New Clothes to Replace Serviceable Ones

Reason	Number	%
Fashion and confidence	43	44.3
Affordability	35	36.1
Add to wardrobe	16	16.5
Attract the opposite sex	3	3.1
Total	97	100.0

Tab 8b: Reasons given for not Purchasing Clothes to Replace Serviceable Ones

Reason	Number	%
That would be wasteful	90	52
I don't value fashion	51	31
I don't dispose of old clothes	25	15
My clothes are classic	4	2
No response	3	1.7
Total	173	100.0

Fig.2: Respondents' Clothing Behaviour at Home and on Campus

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