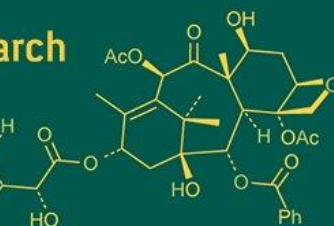
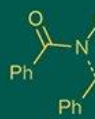


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Socio-psychological drivers of clothing behavior: A comprehensive review

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Abstract

Clothing is a vital means to convey one's identity, personality, background, culture, social status and behavior traits. Clothes protect the human body against environmental conditions. The fashion of human beings is influenced by psychological social and cultural aspect like self-esteem, motivation, culture and traditions, religious beliefs, profession, age, gender and social norms of the people. As such, clothing influences not only personal appearance, but also the individual's first impression and interpersonal relations, social acceptance and psychological well-being. Today, the importance of clothing is extended by sustainability, inclusivity, adaptive clothing design, health related applications, functional textiles and smart clothing technologies. Recent advancement showed that the garments contribute towards environmental responsibility, physical comfort, self-worth and betterment of life. Clothing is a powerful symbol that conveys self-expression and social belonging, where individuals negotiate individual identity while conforming to cultural and professional expectations. This review paper examines the socio-psychological factors that influence clothing behavior including personality, self-concept, cultural identity, conformity, religion, occupation, gender, uniforms, traditional attire, adaptive clothing, and health-related aspects of clothing. Understanding these socio-psychological influences can support the development of clothing systems that are functional, inclusive, culturally appropriate, psychologically beneficial and environmentally sustainable although encouraging innovation, enhancing consumer well-being, and contributing to the sustainable growth of the textile and apparel industry.

Keywords: Clothing, socio-psychological factors, personality, self-expression, conformity, identity

Introduction

Clothing is an important part of daily life influences how individuals adjust to their surroundings and with other people. Clothing was initially designed for protection against climatic conditions and modesty. According to Kaiser, 1997^[17]; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992^[26] clothing is a socio-cultural medium which helps people to communicate and express their individuality, values, beliefs, social status, and personal preferences. Clothing is a medium of self-expression, impression management, and social communication (Kaiser, 1983; Johnson *et al.*, 2014; Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993)^[16, 14, 25] and is a non-verbal communication, which helps individuals create impressions, relationships, and to communicate social identity influencing their self-perception and the perceptions formed by others (Kaiser, 1997; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992; Hester & Hehman, 2023)^[17, 26, 12].

Niinimäki, 2010^[23]; Kabel *et al.* 2016^[15] explained that in today's time, clothing is much more than its looks or utility. Issues like sustainability, adaptive apparel, inclusion, health, hygiene, and mental well-being have become central to clothing research. Recent developments in psychology, sociology, consumer behavior, and fashion studies have shown that concepts such as enclothed cognition, self-congruity, sustainable fashion consumption, and adaptive clothing are strongly associated with the process of identity formation, social inclusion, and quality of life (Adam & Galinsky, 2012; Sirgy, 1986; Kabel *et al.*, 2016; Johnson *et al.*, 2014)^[1, 29, 15, 14]. Therefore, clothing is a multidimensional aspect of life, formed by social, cultural, and health-related factors. Anything considered suitable, stylish, or appealing in one society can be different in another cultural background. These differences shows that decisions about clothing are influenced by society and culture, not just by personal preference but also by psychology, sociology, anthropology, consumer studies, and textile science perspective (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992; Kaiser, 1997)^[26, 17].

By taking a view on clothing from different perspectives, we can better explain how clothing influences individuality, social relationships, self-esteem, social acceptance by others (Damhorst, 1990; Johnson *et al.*, 2014; Haster & Hehman, 2023) ^[5, 14, 12]. To understand the impact of clothing on our lives, it's important to understand the social and psychological aspects regarding clothing behaviors within different contexts.

Identity, Personality and Self Expression

Clothing is a means which reflects individual identity, his character, life style etc. People select cloths as per their choices and the way they want to express themselves. Culture also impacts individual clothing behavior. Traditional outfits preserves cultural heritage and represents customs, beliefs and historical identity. Clothing behavior also influences individual identity. It helps in communicating their personal, social, cultural and professional identities. Therefore it serves as a tool for identity development and is a way for presenting themselves.

Clothing helps to project qualities like competence, self-confidence, professionalism etc. Johnson *et al.* 2014 ^[14] stated that clothing makes a first impression of individual and also enhances confidence, dignity and self worth.

In recent years, sustainable fashion become an important aspect of how people dress. Consumers increasingly use sustainable clothing and such choices are influenced by self-identity, self-expressiveness, and social approval. Overall, clothing behavior is a combination of personal values, cultural and social environments. (Niinimäki, 2010; Kim and Damhorst, 1998) ^[23, 18]. Kaiser 1997 ^[17] and Belk 1988 ^[3] stated that our self-identity is reflected by what we wear and also communicate our lifestyle and status. Individual values shapes clothing preferences like colour of cloths, their design, style etc. It is a bridge between individual identity and perception of self.

First Impression and Clothing

First impressions are formed quickly and are strongly influenced by visual appearance. Clothing helps in formation of concepts and affects perception of others. Various studies has indicated that people make perception about others, within moments of seeing them. Howlett *et al.*, 2013 ^[13] explained in his paper that individuals who are well-presented and properly dressed are the role models for the society and are considered as modest, punctual and successful. People who wear casual or inappropriate outfit have less positive impressions. According to Hester & Hehman, 2023 ^[12]; Lennon & Davis, 1989 ^[20], it is an important visual sign of first impressions in social and professional settings. Therefore, it suggests factors such as values, beliefs, interests etc. affects our clothing choices.

Gender, Desirability and Individuality

Clothing is a noticeable pointer of a gender identity and it aids in communicating features of individual identity and social roles through their appearance. Dress worn by individuals not only reveals personal choices but also the impact of social customs and expectations concerning sexual role. Clothing choices serves as a medium for expressing gender identity and individuality (Kaiser, 1997) ^[17]. Suitable and appropriate outfit enhances interpersonal attraction and social acceptance. Therefore, clothing act as a

communication tool which enables observers to form instant impression about person's identity. (Kaiser, 1997; Damhorst, 1990; Johnson *et al.* 2014) ^[17, 5, 14]. Moreover, it also fulfils functional needs related to safety, protection, and psychological security. Clothing supports individuals in developing social identity and a sense of belonging. Psychological comfort is related with feelings of confidence, self-acceptance, well-being, and appropriateness within social situations. Positive feeling about self-perception and social belonging by clothing enhances overall quality of life and psychological well-being (Matte & Broega, 2017) ^[21]. Although conformity encourages social acceptance and integration within groups but excessive conformity might reduce the creativity and expression of self. Hence, individuals balance the social expectations with the need for maintaining a unique identity. Clothing shows a constant balance between personal self and group belongingness. This is noticed in workplace where dress codes and professional expectations have a great impact on influencing choice of clothing.

Religion, Beliefs, Customs, and Traditions

Religion, beliefs, customs, and traditions greatly influence clothing choices, making a strong first impression by reflecting standards of appearance, modesty and social identity. Among many cultures, clothing symbolically means religious affiliation, culture values, traditional norms (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992) ^[26]. Individuals often choose to dress out specific garments colours, or styles to symbolize their spiritual beliefs, cultural origins, and culture community. Research studies among working women in India showed that regional customs, religious practices, family expectations, conventional values, cultural rituals still affect clothing choices in professional environments. Women often incorporate culturally important garments, traditional weaving, symbolic colours, and customary accessories in their daily clothing to preserve one's cultural identification as the workplace adaptation in professional environments (Pande, S 2021) ^[24]. These clothing choices influence first impression by providing cues about a person's background, values, social roles, and group affiliation. In addition, traditional and religious attire foster a sense of belonging, continuity, and self-expression while reinforcing cultural and social norms (Kaiser, 1997) ^[17]. Thus, clothing serve as both cultural symbol and tool for social communication impacting interpersonal perceptions and interactions (Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, & Michelman, 2005; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992) ^[6, 26]. Religious individuals with strong religious beliefs often choose clothing that reflects religious values, appropriateness, and social behavior. Religious commitment might influence preferences regarding clothing styles, buying decisions, brand preferences, shopping behavior. Thus, religion not only influences the clothing appearance but also consumer behavior associated with apparel (Davis & Jai, 2014; Kaiser, 1997) ^[7, 17]. These cultural and religious influences often lead to conform with to socially acceptable standards of appearance and dressing behavior.

Professional Identity and safety

Clothing and occupation have a strong influence on clothing choices as professional attire serves as a practical and a social role which affects workplace occupation. Professional clothing, including uniforms, formal wear, and role-specific

garments, communicates professional role, competence, authority, and affiliation with an organization (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993) ^[25]. In social interactions, people often use clothing cues to evaluate somebody's credibility, expertise, and status. Individuals choose occupational clothing to meet professional expectations and for self expression. Studies among working women in Nagpur revealed that professional attire balances professional dress codes and cultural identity. Women strategically incorporate traditional clothing elements into work wear although maintaining professional competence and cultural authenticity (Pande, 2021) ^[24]. Appropriate occupational outfits improves confidence, personal self-perception, and professional behaviour, while inappropriately clothing can impact assessments of suitability and competency (Johnson *et al*, 2014) ^[14]. Thus, clothing links the connections of one's occupation, social expectations, and impression management to how one is seen and presented as part of professional workspaces (Kaiser, 1997; Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993; Johnson, Lennon, & Rudd, 2014) ^[17, 25, 14].

Individual select apparel for its physical protection, comfort, safety and to send a communication message about the level of accountability, competence and situation of particular scenario. Amongst occupational, uniforms and protective clothing such as lab coats, medical scrubs, safety vests, protective equipment ensures not only physical safety but conveys competence, leadership and trust. Apart from physical safety, clothing also plays a role in providing psychological comfort by allowing individuals to feel confident, feel socially accepted, prepared for particular social situations. Thus, clothing satisfies both psychological and psychological safety (Kaiser, 1997; Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, & Michelman, 2005; Johnson, Lennon, & Rudd, 2014) ^[17, 6, 14].

Clothing across Age Groups

The impact of clothes vary across different age groups as clothing choices are influenced by development changes, social responsibilities cultural norms and individual identity formation. During childhood and adolescence, clothing frequently used for self-expression, peer acceptance and identity development. Clothing preferences and dressing style develops during the life span shows changes in psychological development. In every stage of life clothing fulfils different functional, psychological and social purposes and helps in the formation and expression of individuality. Throughout life, individual's clothing choices reflect changing responsibilities, routines, and social expectations. During adulthood, individuals select outfits as per workplace norms and professional expectations. Appropriate clothing not only enhances self-confidence but also influences how others perceive an individual's credibility, leadership, professionalism, and reliability in social and occupational settings. Consequently, clothing becomes an important resource for establishing professional identity and facilitating positive interpersonal interactions.

In later adulthood, clothing preferences moves towards comfort, practicality, functionality, and ease of use. Dress continues to communicate personal values, cultural identity, life experiences, and social participation, allowing older adults to maintain their sense of dignity, independence, and self-expression. Clothing therefore remains an important contributor to psychological well-being and social engagement across the ageing process.

Uniforms and National Costumes

Uniforms and national costume shows a dynamic role in expressing individualism, social roles and cultural values. Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993 ^[25] stated that uniforms signifies institutional identity that states authority, expertise, accountability and recognize roles in different sectors. Likewise, National costumes reflect a community's tradition through distinct cloth materials, colours, embroidery work, motifs and costume styles. It preserve traditional values and strengthen community unity through generations (Roach-Higgins & Joanne B. Eicher, 1992; UNESCO 2022) ^[26, 31]. Traditional attire function as a national pride but also allowing individuals to incorporate modern fashion (Akbarovak A. 2020; Nasriddinov O., 2021) ^[2, 22].

Furthermore, different design and look of uniforms enhances institutional identification, self-assurance, and optimistic approach among wearers (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993) ^[25]. Thus, uniforms and traditional dress serve as visual indicator of self-identity and cultural values with distinct ease and functionality (Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, & Michelman, 2005) ^[6].

Functional & Health-Related Clothing

Clothing fullfils psychosocial functions linked with conformity, mobility, and aesthetic appearance. Damhorst, 1990 ^[5], Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993 ^[25] explained that clothing enables individuals to adapt with societal, traditional and professional expectations. Clothing helps in facilitating mobility by providing comfort and functional appropriateness for different activities. Clothing aesthetic appearance enables individuals to show their personality, creativity, attractiveness, and personal taste. Damhorst, 1990 ^[5] and Johnson *et al*. 2014 ^[14] described that clothing choices impacts person's identity, capability, self-assurance, and social suitability. Hence, clothing acts as a multidimensional psychosocial tool that connects social acceptance, practical needs, and personal expression in the process of impression management. Clothing designed for individuals with disabilities improves independence, self-esteem, ease, and self-assurance.

Scheier, 2016 ^[27] and Bhandari, 2024 ^[4] indicated that easily adjustable items like velcro fastenings, magnetic closures, adjustable openings etc. helps in daily life and enhances self-confidence, self-esteem, and social involvement (Frith & Gleeson, 2004; Kukielko, 2024) ^[8, 19]. Inclusive clothing, individuality, self-sufficiency and self-respect strengthen psychological comfort (Kaiser, 1997; Zaytseva *et al.*, 2021; Kukielko, 2024) ^[17, 33, 19].

Damhorst *et al*, 2005 ^[6] described that appropriate clothing adjusts temperature and reduces contact with injurious materials. Clean, appropriate, and well-maintained clothing communicates individual care, accountability, and societal consciousness (Johnson *et al*, 2014) ^[14]. In numerous sectors sanitized clothing and uniforms symbolize safety, capability and credibility. Therefore, clothing serves not only as a protective barrier but also an indicator of health awareness, self-control and individuality (Kaiser, 1997; Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, & Michelman, 2005; Johnson, Lennon, & Rudd, 2014) ^[17, 6, 14]. Advancement of textile technology has widened the role of clothing in encouraging health and well-being. Functional textile includes antimicrobial finishing, moisture management property, ultraviolet protection and temperature regulated properties which improves comfort and retain hygiene (Gao & Cranston, 2008; Gupta, 2019;

Scott 2005) [9, 10, 28]. The advent of smart textiles has introduced new opportunities for healthcare application which makes clothing beneficial for protection and aesthetic purposes (Stoppa & Chiolerio, 2014; Heikenfeld *et al.*, 2018) [30, 11]. Wearable textiles prepared with sensors monitor parameters like body temperature, heart rate, movement and other health-related indicators assist in continuous health monitoring and supporting protective healthcare. Fabrics built on phase-change materials and moisture-wicking technologies provide thermal comfort for individuals with sensory impairments (Gupta, 2019; Zaytseva, *et al.*, 2021) [10, 33]. These control perspiration and increases physiological comfort when performing daily activities.

Conclusion

Clothing is a complex part of human life and reveals the communication between individuality, personality, culture, social interaction and psychological environment. Throughout the life, clothing impacts how people observe themselves, communicate with others and are taken within different societal contexts. It is a means of individualism, indicator of identity, a representation of culture and a tool for societal contact. This paper highlights that clothing behaviour is influenced by interconnected factors like personality, self-concept, inspiration, age, gender, cultural traditions, religion, occupation, social norms, and health-related needs. These factors together impact outfit likings, impression management, social behaviour and contributing to psychological well-being. Advances in sustainable fashion, adaptive apparel, inclusive design, functional textiles and smart wearable technologies have a major contribution in health promotion, environmental sustainability, approachability and social inclusion. These inventions explains the rising potential of clothing to address current challenges although improving comfort, safety, independence and overall well-being across varied people.

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