CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN CLOTING CHOICES AND IMPLICATIONS
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Consumer Behaviour in Clothing Choices and Implications

14.1 Factors Affecting Consumer Choices on Clothing

People wear clothes for many different reasons. Some of these reasons are to satisfy physical needs, e.g. for protection. Others are for psychological needs and social reasons, e.g. to enhance self-confidence, to express personality and identification. As a general concept, clothes help people to express themselves. They can express their individuality and creativity through their clothes. This can contribute to the building up of self-esteem, self-respect and self-acceptance.

14.1.1 Individual and Family Considerations

(a) Age

Age is one of the considerations when people choose clothes and textile products for different people. People who belong to an age cohort tend to have similar needs and considerations.

(b) Gender

Traditionally, males and female have different roles. Role specialisation of males and females is still an important part of our today’s culture. Cultural customs or traditions establish the gender of a type of garment. For example, pants as masculine and skirts as feminine.

(c) Figure

Body image refers to a consumer’s subjective evaluation of his / her physical appearance. People have different ideals on their body shape in different times.

- Thin vertical lines or long diagonal lines add height and make the figure looks slim while broad horizontal lines widen the figure or cut it into shorter segments
- The contrast of low- and high-value colours can emphasise or downplay parts of the body. Low value or light colours draw attention and can make areas on the body seem larger than they are while higher value or darker colours create the illusion of something being smaller

(d) Personal Image and Style

Consumers can use clothing to show their personality image and style
such as uniqueness, originality, risk taking, independence and assertiveness.

(e) Lifestyle
Lifestyle refers to the pattern based on which a person lives his / her life. One’s lifestyle represents the way how one selects to allocate one’s income on different products, including clothing.

(f) Education
More educated consumers are more global minded, receptive to imports and more demanding. These factors stimulate apparel producers to provide well-designed, high-quality apparel products.

(g) Occupation
Write collar and women usually spend more on clothing than blue collar and men.

(h) Income
The amount of money that consumers spend on clothing and other goods mostly depends on their income.

(i) Occasional Requirements
Consumers buy apparel for specific occasions. University graduates wear caps and gowns in their graduation ceremony. Brides wear white gowns and veils in their wedding party.
  • Dress for careers such as business suit / dress, smart causal wear, uniform
  • Dress for leisure such as Tee-shirts, jeans, sweaters, shorts
  • Dress for special occasions, which includes events such as wedding, funeral, festival

(j) Quality and Durability
Consumer demand for quality has risen in recent years. The durability of a garment and the ease of caring for it are often factors being considered in the selection process.
Symbols commonly found in a care label are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Washing</th>
<th>Hand wash</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Hand wash icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Machine wash icon" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Machine wash icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Can be bleached icon" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bleaching</td>
<td>Can be bleached</td>
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<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Can be bleached icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Cool iron icon" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ironing</td>
<td>Cool iron at 110°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Cool iron icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Can be tumble dried icon" /></td>
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<tr>
<td>Drying</td>
<td>Can be tumble dried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Can be tumble dried icon" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Can be dry cleaned icon" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry-cleaning</td>
<td>Can be dry cleaned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Can be dry cleaned icon" /></td>
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</table>

(k) Physical Needs & Health Concern
- Some specific types of garment protect workers from the dangers that might arise from their working environment
- Athletics need to wear protective clothing
- For maternity clothing of pregnant women, different parts of the garment should have plenty of fullness for comfort

(l) Family influence
Family member is one of the reference groups affecting individuals’ choice of clothing.
- Joint decision making
- Consumer socialisation
- Family life cycle
14.1.2 Peer and Society

(a) Peers
Peers are the most important reference group influencing a person’s buying decision other than his/her family.

(b) Society
When people do not know the correct way to respond to certain social expectations and using other people as a cue to ensure that his/her response is correct. The individual is under normative social influence.

- Influenced by word-of-mouth
- Influence of opinion leaders
- Influence of mass media and advertising

14.1.3 Culture

(a) Individuals and groups in a particular culture differ in their ideas of what is attractive, appropriate and fashionable because they are influenced by different cultural environments.

(b) Motivation for Clothing Selection for Different Cultures
- Protection: physical protection, psychological protection
- Clothing for modesty
- Clothing as a means to meet socio-economic needs
- Sumptuary laws

(c) Ethnic Group
Dress and adornment are some elements of the identity kit for any particular cultures. They are used as the “tangible evidence of the link to the geographic place of their cultural heritage”.

(d) Marital Status
Visible means of recognising marital status is a common practice among many different cultures.

(e) Political Belief
Political movements have been supported and suppressed by dress.

(f) Religious Habits and Special Religious Clothing
Sometimes, religious clothing is worn only during the performance of religious ceremonies. However, it may also be worn every day as a marker of special religious status.
14.1.4 Environment

(a) Physical Protection
- Different climates in different places create different clothing needs. Garments for summer and winter vary in terms of texture, weight and colour.
- Clothes for hot weather need to make the wearers feel cool while clothes for cold weather need to have warm effect.
- The fabrics of garments should be chosen according to climatic conditions. Colours affect the level of heat absorbance of clothing.
- The white colour reflects heat while the black colour absorbs most heat.
- When going outdoors, people sometimes need protection against wind and rain.

(b) Ultra-Violet Light and Ozone
- Recent researches revealed that ultra-violet light contributes to aging and skin cancer.
- Ozone is an effective absorber of ultra-violet light, depletion of the ozone layer results in people and the environment being exposed to higher intensity of ultra-violet light.

(c) Cold Weather
- While in many places clothing is more a way of expressing personal style, clothing for colder climates depends on the outside weather. Clothing becomes an important factor for protecting the body and comfort.
- In cold climate, 3 layers of clothing can be worn for keeping warm. Different accessories can also be used to keep the sensitive parts of the body warm.
  - The first layer: wicking layer
  - The second layer: insulation layer
  - The third layer: protection layer

(d) Environmental Protection
In foreign countries, products complying with criteria of environmental protection are attached with an eco-label. This practice is more systematic in developed countries such as the Eco-label in EU and Eco Mark in Japan.
14.1.5 Science and Technology Innovation

(a) Techno Garments
Garments are designed with functions that can detect and respond to temperature changes, identify and combat bacteria, screen out ultraviolet, remember the shape, change colour and wick away moisture.

(b) Information Technology (IT)
- Use of IT in retailing
- Use of IT in production

14.2 Implication
14.2.1 Implications on Individual and Family

(a) Proper Selection of Clothing

(b) Wardrobe Planning
- Lifestyle analysis
- Existing clothing analysis
- Grouping of clothing such as clothing worn frequently, clothing worn occasionally, clothing that needs modifying, clothing not worn for a year
- Develop a future wardrobe plan
  - Basic apparels that are worn most often should be apparel of good quality, without faddish details or extreme silhouette. They can be mixed and matched with other items.
  - Extenders add individuality and flairs to the wardrobe. If extenders are coordinated, they can be mixed and matched in different fashionable ways and produce multiple combinations of outfits.

(c) Clothing Care
Proper care of clothing does not only keep the quality appearance of clothing, it also prolongs its life and avoids wastage.

- Routine maintenance (daily care and seasonal care)
- Clothing storage
  Ideal storage can provide protection for garments. In well-organised closets, garments should not be crowded. There should be flat and hanging storage space as well as accessory storage space.
• Laundry work
  One of the following methods can be used according to the materials, fabrication and construction of garment.
  - Washing
  - Dry cleaning
  - Wet cleaning

(d) Making the purchase
  Compare the qualities and prices of the same or similar items in different stores before buying. Quality is often, but not always, related to price. Sometimes, prices are raised to help pay for higher advertising costs.

14.2.2 Implications on the Industry

(a) Business Responsibility
  Manufacturers have to put more effort on quality control and product testing. Retailers have to make sure the product information provided is accurate and advertisements should be without misleading content. In order to listen to and entertain complaints, many large retailers establish their own Customer Service Counters to handle complaints from customers.

(b) Providing Truthful Information on Products
  The following is the basic information often included in garment label description:
  • Identity of producers
  • Country of origin
  • Fibre contents
  • Care requirements
  • Size

(c) Product Safety Responsibility
  It is also the responsibility of suppliers to ensure the apparel products are safe to consumers under normal use. Responsible suppliers usually test samples of the products in testing laboratory before putting them on the market.

(d) Labour Rights Responsibility
  Although consumers demand reasonable price for quality goods, it is the responsibility of suppliers not to exploit labours for lowering the production
cost.

(e) Environmental Concerns
Sustainable design includes the following efforts:
- Use of naturally grown fibres such as cotton and ramie
- Use of humanely sheared, free-range sheep
- Application of yarn blended for user comfort and compostability
- Use of environmental compatible dyes and chemicals
- Elimination of pollutants and toxic vapors during textiles manufacturing
- Use of recycled components
- Reuse of post-consumer or biodegradable products
- Compostable

14.2.3 Implications on Society

(a) The Role of the Government
To protect the safety of consumers, the Hong Kong Government has legislated laws concerning the rights and interests of consumers.

(b) Consumers Rights
- The Consumer Council of Hong Kong is also involved in the protection and promotion of consumer interests. Activities promoting consumer rights and interests include mediating in consumer disputes, giving consumers access to legal remedies, conducting product testing and studying consumer-related issues, making suggestions to the government for consumer legislation, disseminating information and educating consumers.
- One aspect of the responsibilities of Consumer Council is the education of consumers. They set out guidelines to consumers concerning what they their rights and responsibilities are in the marketplace.
  - The right to satisfaction of basic needs
  - The right to safety
  - The right to be informed
  - The right to choose
  - The right to be heard
  - The right to redress
  - The right to consumer education
  - The right to a health and sustainable environment
Consumer responsibilities, as advised by the Consumer Council, are:
- Keeping informed as best as possible
- Exercising due care when making decisions in the marketplace
- Considering the detrimental consequences that may arise from ill-considered decisions
- Honoring reasonable obligations arising from the decision

(c) Safety and Health Concern
- Although there is no strict regulation on product safety in Hong Kong, the general principle is that apparel products should not pose any danger to the health and safety of consumers in any shapes or forms. Broadly speaking, there are three major sources of risk to consumers with regard to product usage:
  - Physical injury arising from deficient structure, construction, strength or other mechanical and physical properties of products
  - Harmful or toxic chemical substances contained in products that will pose health hazards
  - Physical damage arising from the flammability of products
- The following are some examples of health and safety concern on apparel products in foreign countries:
  - Azo dyes applied on garments would cause skin carcinogen amines
  - Some dispersion dyes would cause allergies in human beings
  - Children's nightwear should be inflammable
  - The hood of a child's outer garment should not be designed to be secured by means of cords drawn through the material

(d) Sustainability Development
Consumers are encouraged to select apparel products which:
- are environmentally friendly and do not cause harm to the environment
- can be repaired, upgraded, recycled or refilled
- are with efficiency in the use of energy
- do not generate unacceptable levels of waste
- allow individuals to observe the correct separation requirements for the categorisation of used products to be placed in relevant waste disposal bins accordingly
(e) Protection of Intellectual Property

Hong Kong has intellectual Property laws that reach the highest standards of intellectual property protection. However, there is still a flood of fake products in the market and this situation harms the designers and producers who design and produce with originality. It is the responsibility of the Customs and Excise Department to fight against this illegal act. Most importantly, consumers should also be aware of not encouraging these illegal acts in clothing selection.