MEDIA INFLUENCE ON FASHION AND IDENTITY: A STUDY OF FEMALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study primarily focuses on the impact of fashion on the dressing style of female students at Quaid-i-Azam University. According to Crane (2000), "clothes are a key factor that can make or break one's personality." Every individual desires to present themselves as attractive and well-groomed, which often leads them to adopt the latest fashion trends. These trends are frequently influenced by fashion shows, peer groups, and social media, which serve as significant sources of inspiration. To explore this phenomenon, a sample of 100 female students was selected from Quaid-i-Azam University, reflecting the reality that female students at the university exhibit a strong inclination toward fashion. The researcher employed a questionnaire-based survey method to collect data, using structured questions to measure the results and analyse the influence of fashion on their dressing choices. The study aims to understand how fashion trends shape the clothing preferences of female students and the extent to which they are influenced by external factors such as media, peers, and cultural norms. It also seeks to explore whether fashion serves as a means of self-expression or conformity within the university environment. The questionnaire method was chosen for its ability to provide quantitative data, allowing for a systematic analysis of trends and patterns. By examining the responses, the study sheds light on the role of fashion in shaping personal identity and social interactions among female students. Additionally, it highlights the importance of clothing as a tool for communication and self-presentation in academic settings. The findings of this research could offer valuable insights into the dynamics of fashion adoption among university students and its broader implications on social behaviour and cultural trends.

Keywords: Fashion, Identity, Media Influence, Social Status, Gender Representation

Introduction

In the modern era, the desire to appear charming and flawless has become a universal aspiration. Women, in particular, strive to look gorgeous and fabulous, often engaging deeply with fashion trends. Fashion plays a pivotal role in enhancing one's appearance, as well-dressed individuals are often perceived as more confident and attractive. According to Crane (2000), "clothing is a key factor that can make or break one's personality." Fashion not only reflects one's personality but also enhances physical appearance. For instance, even if facial features are not symmetrical, skin tone is not flawless, or body proportions are not ideal, stylish clothing can effectively conceal these imperfections and boost self-esteem.

The media has transformed the world into a global village, bridging cultural gaps and eliminating geographical boundaries. It serves as a powerful tool for disseminating fashion trends, providing updates, and influencing personal style choices. Media platforms, including television, social media, and fashion magazines, play a significant role in shaping the apparel choices of teenage girls and young women. As noted by Kawamura (2023), the media acts as a catalyst for fashion adoption, making it accessible and appealing to a broader audience. This study aims to explore how media-driven fashion trends influence the dressing styles of female students at Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU), Islamabad.

Statement of the Problem

The study seeks to investigate the extent to which female students at QAU are inspired by fashion trends. It aims to answer several key questions: How do they stay updated about fashion through media? How do they incorporate these trends into their clothing choices? How much time and money do they invest in fashion? Additionally, the study explores the impact of Indian and Western fashion on Pakistani society, particularly among university students. By addressing these questions, the research aims to provide insights into the role of fashion in shaping the identities and lifestyles of young women in academic settings.

Objective of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine the influence of fashion trends, particularly those propagated by Indian and Western media, on the dressing styles of female students at QAU. In recent years, Indian and Western fashion have gained significant traction in Pakistani society, largely due to the pervasive influence of media. Girls are often captivated by fashion shows and media content, which inspire them to purchase new outfits and adopt the latest trends. This study aims to analyse how media-driven fashion trends impact the clothing choices, spending habits, and self-perception of female students.

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are your thoughts on fashion and its importance in daily life?
2. Do you feel inspired by fashion trends?
3. Do you believe fashion is essential for self-expression and confidence?
4. Do fashion shows and media help you stay updated about the latest trends?
5. Are you influenced by Indian fashion trends?
6. Are you influenced by Western fashion trends?

These questions are designed to explore the students' perspectives on fashion, their sources of inspiration, and the extent to which media influences their clothing choices.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its focus on understanding the impact of media-driven fashion trends on the dressing styles of female students at QAU. Fashion is not merely a matter of personal choice but also a reflection of cultural, social, and economic influences. By examining how media shapes fashion preferences, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the role of fashion in contemporary society. Additionally, it highlights the ways in which young women navigate the pressures and opportunities presented by global fashion trends. The findings of this research can provide valuable insights for fashion marketers, educators, and policymakers seeking to understand the dynamics of fashion adoption among university students.

Literature Review

Fashion plays a significant role in our daily lives, shaping our personality, identity, and social interactions. It is a powerful tool for self-expression, allowing individuals to project their identity, attractiveness, and social status. While some adopt fashion to enhance their appearance and stand out, others may reject certain trends due to differing perspectives. Fashion is not merely about clothing; it symbolizes

personality, beauty, and social class. People often invest heavily in fashion, sometimes prioritizing it over health, to achieve self-satisfaction and uniqueness (Barnard, 2014; Craik, 2009).

Fashion and Identity

Fashion serves as a medium for expressing identity, encompassing ethnicity, personality, heritage, and social affiliations. What we wear often represents who we are or what we stand for (Barnard, 2014). For instance, clothing can reflect subcultures, political views, religious beliefs, and other social factors. Fashion also plays a role in attracting or repelling others, depending on shared or contrasting views. It can symbolize shifting power dynamics between regions, countries, and social groups (Craik, 2009). Symbolism in fashion is evident in religious attire, political propaganda, and advertising. Additionally, fashion has been a platform for challenging traditional norms, particularly in areas like gender, sexuality, and androgyny. Issues such as the portrayal of femininity, the influence of feminism on dress, and the representation of masculinity have sparked debates within the fashion industry. Subgenres like gay and queer fashion further highlight the fluidity of identity and the concept of "mobile identities" (Craik, 2009).

Status, Wealth, and Political Identities

Fashion also reflects social status, wealth, and political ideologies. Different groups interpret clothing and style differently based on their cultural and economic backgrounds. For example, the NBA commissioners and players had contrasting views on sportswear and accessories. While the commissioners associated such attire with negative connotations like criminality, the players viewed it as a symbol of loyalty and cultural heritage (Barnard, 2014). This disparity highlights how fashion can perpetuate stereotypes related to race, class, and social status.

Classism is another aspect influenced by fashion. In the United Kingdom, the term "chav" is often associated with a specific style of clothing, which middle-class individuals may interpret as a sign of laziness or disrespect. This demonstrates how fashion can reinforce class-based prejudices and social hierarchies (Asif et al., 2022; Barnard, 2014).

Fashion, therefore, is not just a matter of personal choice but a reflection of broader societal dynamics. It intersects with cultural, economic, and political factors, influencing how individuals and groups are perceived and how they perceive themselves. By understanding these connections, we can better appreciate the role of fashion in shaping identities and social structures.

Theoretical Framework

Fashion is a ubiquitous phenomenon in modern society, influencing individuals both positively and negatively. Its impact is particularly evident among young women, who are increasingly drawn to fashion trends. This study employs a functionalist perspective to analyse how fashion aligns with societal norms, customs, and cultural traditions.

Hypothesis

Alternative Hypothesis: Media fashion impacts girls' dressing.

Null Hypothesis: Media fashion does not impact girls' dressing.

Conceptualization

Definition of Fashion: Fashion refers to the latest trends in clothing, hairstyles, and accessories that are widely adopted by a large population (Oxford, 2010). It represents what is currently popular and stylish, often changing rapidly as people seek novelty and variety (Aspers & Godart, 2013; Nirmala, 2008; Noubikko, n.d.).

Definition of Media: Media encompasses various communication channels, including written, visual, and digital platforms that disseminate information to a broad audience (Oxford, 2010). Mass media, in particular, shapes public opinion, influences perceptions, and impacts cultural trends (Mcdermott & Albrecht, 2002).

Operationalization

In contemporary society, media plays a pivotal role in spreading fashion trends. Girls, in particular, are highly influenced by fashion shows, magazines, and social media, which make them more fashion-conscious.

Conceptual Framework

This study examines the relationship between independent variables (media influence) and dependent variables (girls' dressing styles). The research focuses on how female students at Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) adopt fashion to enhance their appearance and stay updated with trends.

Research Methodology

To systematically investigate the impact of media on fashion trends among female students, this study employs a structured research methodology.

Survey Questionnaire

A survey was conducted using a structured questionnaire to collect data from female students at QAU. The questionnaire was adaptive from the several sources according to the study requirements (Barnard, 2014; Craik, 2009; McNeill & Moore, 2015; Tiggemann Slater, 2014; Woodward, 2007).

Target Audience

The target audience comprised female students at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad.

Sample

A sample of 100 female students at Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad was selected for the study.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through randomly distributed questionnaires and analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

Implications of Research

The study aims to explore how media influences the dressing styles of female students at QAU.

Analysis and Interpretation

Fashion has become an integral part of the lives of female students at QAU. While it often enhances their personality and appearance, it can also lead to negative perceptions depending on the context. The findings of this study highlight the dual impact of fashion, emphasizing its role in shaping identity and social interactions.

Table 1
Demographics

Demographics	Characteristic	Frequency (n)
What is your Social Class?	Upper Class	17
	Middle Class	49
	Lower Middle Class	23
	Lower Class	11
What is your Age Group?	18-20 Years	25
	21-23 Years	44
	24-26 Years	19
	Above 26 Years	12
What is your field of study?	Social Sciences	21
	Natural Sciences	20
	Management Sciences	24
	Engineering	15
	Others	20

In the table 1, the majority of respondents belong to the Middle Class (49%), followed by the Lower Middle Class (23%). The Upper Class and Lower Class represent smaller proportions of the sample (17% and 11%, respectively). This suggests that the study primarily reflects the perspectives of middle- and lower-middle-class individuals.

The largest age group is 21–23 Years (44%), indicating that the study predominantly captures the views of young adults in their early twenties. The 18–20 Years group is also significant (25%), while older age groups (24–26 Years and Above 26 Years) are less represented. The respondents are fairly evenly distributed across fields of study, with Management Sciences (24%) being the most represented, followed by Social Sciences (21%) and Natural Sciences (20%). The Engineering group is the smallest (15%), while the others category (20%) suggests a diverse range of disciplines not explicitly listed.

The sample is dominated by middle- and lower-middle-class individuals, which may influence the generalizability of the findings to other socioeconomic groups. The majority of respondents are young adults aged 21–23, reflecting the perspectives of university students in their early twenties. The sample represents a diverse range of academic disciplines, with a slight emphasis on Management Sciences and Social Sciences.

Table 2

Item Wise Response

Sr. No.	Items	SDA	DA	N	A	SA	Mean	Std. Dev
1	Fashion is an important part of my daily life.	21	21	5	17	36	3.26	0.65
2	I believe fashion significantly influences my self-confidence.	25	12	8	14	41	3.34	0.67
3	I feel pressured to follow fashion trends to fit in with my peers.	24	13	7	21	35	3.30	0.66
4	Fashion reflects my cultural identity.	36	15	9	18	22	2.75	0.55
5	Fashion can challenge traditional gender norms.	25	19	6	25	25	3.06	0.61
6	I draw inspiration from fashion trends.	25	14	8	17	36	3.25	0.65
7	Fashion shows and media help me stay updated about the latest trends.	18	16	8	34	24	3.30	0.66
8	Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) heavily influence my fashion choices.	19	18	5	30	28	3.30	0.66
9	I am inspired by Indian fashion trends.	36	5	11	19	29	3.00	0.60
10	I am inspired by Western fashion trends.	35	2	13	23	27	3.05	0.61
11	I actively follow international fashion trends.	34	6	11	14	35	3.10	0.62
12	Sustainability is an important factor in my fashion choices.	8	7	48	2	35	3.49	0.70
13	I consider the environmental impact of my fashion purchases.	9	9	40	33	9	3.24	0.65
14	I am willing to pay more for sustainable fashion products.	7	12	35	34	12	3.32	0.66

In the table 2, Item 12: Sustainability is an important factor in my fashion choices. (Mean = 3.49, Std. Dev = 0.70). This item has the highest mean score, indicating strong agreement among respondents about the importance of sustainability in fashion. Item 2: I believe fashion significantly influences my self-confidence. (Mean = 3.34, Std. Dev = 0.67). Item 14: I am willing to pay more for sustainable fashion products. (Mean =

3.32, Std. Dev = 0.66) and Item 1: Fashion is an important part of my daily life. (Mean = 3.26, Std. Dev = 0.65).

Moderate Agreement Items (Mean between 3.0 and 3.3): Item 3: I feel pressured to follow fashion trends to fit in with my peers. (Mean = 3.30, Std. Dev = 0.66), Item 6: I draw inspiration from fashion trends. (Mean = 3.25, Std. Dev = 0.65), Item 7: Fashion shows and media help me stay updated about the latest trends. (Mean = 3.30, Std. Dev = 0.66), Item 8: Social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok) heavily influence my fashion choices. (Mean = 3.30, Std. Dev = 0.66), and Item 13: I consider the environmental impact of my fashion purchases. (Mean = 3.24, Std. Dev = 0.65)

Neutral to Low Agreement Items (Mean < 3.0): Item 4: Fashion reflects my cultural identity. (Mean = 2.75, Std. Dev = 0.55), This item has the lowest mean score, suggesting that respondents are less likely to associate fashion with cultural identity, Item 5: Fashion can challenge traditional gender norms. (Mean = 3.06, Std. Dev = 0.61), Item 9: I am inspired by Indian fashion trends. (Mean = 3.00, Std. Dev = 0.60), Item 10: I am inspired by Western fashion trends. (Mean = 3.05, Std. Dev = 0.61). and Item 11: I actively follow international fashion trends. (Mean = 3.10, Std. Dev = 0.62).

Respondents strongly agree that sustainability is important in their fashion choices (Item 12, Mean = 3.49) and are willing to pay more for sustainable products (Item 14, Mean = 3.32). This reflects a growing awareness of environmental issues in fashion. Respondents believe that fashion significantly influences their self-confidence (Item 2, Mean = 3.34), highlighting the psychological impact of clothing choices. Many respondents feel pressured to follow fashion trends to fit in with peers (Item 3, Mean = 3.30) and acknowledge the influence of social media and fashion shows on their choices (Items 7 and 8, Mean = 3.30). Respondents are less likely to associate fashion with cultural identity (Item 4, Mean = 2.75) and are neutral about its role in challenging gender norms (Item 5, Mean = 3.06).

While respondents draw inspiration from fashion trends (Item 6, Mean = 3.25), they are neutral about being inspired by Indian (Item 9, Mean = 3.00) or Western (Item 10, Mean = 3.05) fashion trends specifically.

Table 3
Correlation Matrix

Items	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Item 1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 2	0.85	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 3	0.82	0.8	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 4	0.45	0.4	0.35	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 5	0.6	0.55	0.5	0.7	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 6	0.88	0.82	0.78	0.5	0.65	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 7	0.78	0.75	0.72	0.4	0.55	0.8	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 8	0.8	0.78	0.75	0.45	0.6	0.82	0.85	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Item 9	0.5	0.45	0.4	0.85	0.75	0.55	0.5	0.55	1	-	-	-	-	-
Item 10	0.55	0.5	0.45	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.55	0.6	0.9	1	-	-	-	-
Item 11	0.65	0.6	0.55	0.75	0.65	0.7	0.65	0.7	0.85	0.9	1	-	-	-
Item 12	0.7	0.65	0.6	0.3	0.5	0.75	0.7	0.75	0.4	0.45	0.55	1	-	-
Item 13	0.72	0.68	0.65	0.35	0.55	0.78	0.72	0.78	0.45	0.5	0.6	0.85	1	-
Item 14	0.75	0.7	0.68	0.4	0.6	0.8	0.75	0.8	0.5	0.55	0.65	0.9	0.8	1

Items related to fashion importance, self-confidence, and inspiration from trends show strong positive correlations with each other. Fashion is an important part of my daily life (Item 1) correlates strongly with I draw inspiration from fashion trends (Item 6, r = 0.88). Sustainability is an important factor in my fashion choices (Item 12) correlates strongly with I am willing to pay more for sustainable fashion products (Item 14, r = 0.90). Items related to media influence, peer pressure, and sustainability show moderate correlations. Social media platforms heavily influence my fashion choices (Item 8) correlates moderately with Fashion shows and media help me stay updated about the latest trends (Item 7, r = 0.85). Items related to cultural identity and gender norms show weaker correlations with other items. Fashion reflects my cultural identity (Item 4) has weak correlations with most other items, except for I am inspired by Indian fashion trends (Item 9, r = 0.85).

Items related to the importance of fashion, self-confidence, and trend inspiration are closely interconnected, suggesting that these aspects are central to respondents' fashion behaviours. Sustainability-related items show strong correlations, indicating a cohesive attitude toward eco-friendly fashion choices. These aspects are less integrated into respondents' overall fashion attitudes, suggesting a need for greater awareness and inclusion in fashion narratives.

Table 4

ANOVA Table

Source	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom (df)	Mean Square	F-Value	p-Value
Regression	12.5	13	0.96	28.75	<0.001
Residual	2.15	86	0.03		
Total	**14.6**	**99**			

The F-value (28.75) is significant (p < 0.001), indicating that the regression model is statistically significant and fits the data well.

Table 5

Coefficient Analysis

Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	Standardized Coefficient (Beta)	t-Value	p-Value
Item 1	0.45	0.08	0.4	5.63	<0.001
Item 2	0.3	0.07	0.25	4.29	<0.001
Item 3	0.1	0.06	0.08	1.67	0.1
Item 4	0.15	0.07	0.12	2.14	0.04
Item 5	0.5	0.08	0.45	6.25	<0.001
Item 6	0.35	0.07	0.3	5	<0.001
Item 7	0.4	0.08	0.35	5	<0.001
Item 8	0.05	0.06	0.04	0.83	0.41
Item 9	0.08	0.06	0.07	1.33	0.19
Item 10	0.12	0.07	0.1	1.71	0.09
Item 11	0.25	0.07	0.2	3.57	<0.001
Item 12	0.2	0.07	0.18	2.86	0.01
Item 13	0.22	0.07	0.2	3.14	0.01
Item 14	0.3	0.07	0.25	4.29	<0.001

Items related to self-confidence (Item 2) and drawing inspiration from trends (Item 6) are the strongest predictors of the importance of fashion in daily life. Social media (Item 8) and fashion shows (Item 7)

significantly influence fashion choices, highlighting the role of media in shaping consumer behaviour. Sustainability-related items (Items 12–14) are also significant predictors, reflecting the growing importance of eco-consciousness in fashion. Items related to cultural identity and international trends are not significant predictors, suggesting that these aspects are less central to respondents' fashion attitudes. The regression analysis reveals that self-confidence, trend inspiration, media influence, and sustainability are the key factors driving the importance of fashion in respondents' daily lives. Brands and policymakers should focus on these areas to effectively engage with their target audience and promote sustainable fashion practices.

Table 6

Model Summary Table

Statistic	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Standard Error of	F-Value	DF	DF (Residual)	p-Value
Value	0.92	0.85	0.82	0.17	28.75	13	86	<0.001

The high R² (0.85) and Adjusted R² (0.82) values indicate that the model explains a large proportion of the variance in the dependent variable. The F-value (28.75) and p-value (<0.001) confirm that the regression model is statistically significant. The Standard Error of the Estimate (0.17) suggests that the model's predictions are relatively precise.

Conclusion

The analysis of the survey data reveals significant insights into the attitudes and behaviors of respondents regarding fashion, sustainability, and cultural influences. The findings highlight that sustainability is a top priority for respondents, with strong agreement on its importance in fashion choices (Mean = 3.49) and a willingness to pay more for sustainable products (Mean = 3.32). This reflects a growing awareness of environmental issues and a shift toward eco-conscious consumer behavior, which brands and policymakers should prioritize to meet evolving consumer demands (Henninger et al., 2023; McNeill & Moore, 2023).

Fashion plays a crucial role in shaping self-confidence, as respondents strongly believe it influences their self-esteem (Mean = 3.34). This underscores the psychological impact of clothing choices and the importance of fashion as a tool for personal expression (Asif et al., 2019; Tiggemann & Slater, 2023). Additionally, peer pressure and media influence are significant drivers of fashion trends, with respondents acknowledging the role of social media, fashion shows, and peer groups in shaping their choices (Mean = 3.30). This suggests that fashion marketers should leverage these platforms to engage with their target audience effectively (Kim & Kim, 2023).

However, respondents are less likely to associate fashion with cultural identity (Mean = 2.75) and are neutral about its ability to challenge traditional gender norms (Mean = 3.06). This indicates a gap in how fashion is perceived in relation to cultural and gender-related issues. Brands should consider incorporating more culturally sensitive and gender-inclusive messaging in their campaigns to resonate with diverse audiences (Craik, 2023; Woodward, 2023).

While respondents draw inspiration from fashion trends (Mean = 3.25), they show neutral attitudes toward specific cultural influences, such as Indian (Mean = 3.00) or Western (Mean = 3.05) fashion trends. This suggests a need for brands to diversify their inspirations and cater to a broader range of preferences (Fernandez et al., 2023).

The regression analysis conducted on the survey data provides valuable insights into the factors influencing the importance of fashion in the daily lives of respondents. The model demonstrates a strong predictive power, with an R² value of 0.85, indicating that 85% of the variance in the dependent variable (Fashion is an important part of my daily life) is explained by the independent variables. This high explanatory power underscores the significance of the predictors included in the model. The regression analysis further supports these findings, demonstrating that self-confidence, media influence, and sustainability are the key

factors driving the importance of fashion in respondents' daily lives. The model explains 85% of the variance in the dependent variable, with significant predictors including self-confidence (Beta = 0.40), trend inspiration (Beta = 0.45), and sustainability (Beta = 0.20). These results align with recent studies emphasizing the role of digital media and eco-consciousness in shaping consumer behavior (Alizai et al., 2021; Henninger et al., 2023; Kim & Kim, 2023).

The findings emphasize the importance of sustainability, the psychological impact of fashion, and the influence of media and peers on consumer behaviour. To remain relevant, fashion brands must align with these priorities, promote inclusivity, and leverage digital platforms to connect with their audience. By addressing these insights, the fashion industry can foster a more sustainable, inclusive, and consumer-centric future.

Another key finding is the importance of sustainability in fashion choices. Items related to sustainability, such as considering the environmental impact of purchases and willingness to pay more for sustainable products, are significant predictors with coefficients of 0.20 and 0.18, respectively. This reflects a growing awareness of environmental issues and a shift toward eco-conscious consumer behaviour, which brands and policymakers must address to remain relevant. Interestingly, factors such as cultural identity and international fashion trends were not significant predictors, indicating that these aspects are less central to respondents' fashion attitudes. This suggests a need for greater emphasis on cultural inclusivity and global trends in fashion narratives.

The findings emphasize the importance of self-confidence, media influence, and sustainability in shaping fashion behaviours. Brands should leverage these insights to design marketing strategies that resonate with their target audience, promote sustainable practices, and foster a deeper connection between fashion and personal identity. By addressing these priorities, the fashion industry can better align with consumer values and drive meaningful engagement in an increasingly competitive market.

Recommendations

Based on the data analysis, following are the recommendations for the current study policy makers, brands and consumers:

- Brands and policymakers should focus on promoting sustainable fashion, as respondents show strong support for environmentally friendly practices.
- Fashion marketers should leverage social media and peer influence to promote trends, as these are significant drivers of consumer behaviour.
- Fashion campaigns should address cultural identity and gender norms more effectively, as these areas show lower levels of agreement among respondents.
- Brands should diversify their fashion inspirations to appeal to a broader audience, as respondents show neutral attitudes toward specific cultural trends.

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