

Gender Fluidity A Study on The Impact on Fashion Industry

Dr. Ranjith Somasundaran Chakkambath¹, Prof. Liya Rajesh², Amiya Naushad³

^{1,2}Asst. Prof, Amity Global Business School Kochi, Ernakulam, Kerala, India

³BBA Student, Amity Global Business School Kochi, Ernakulam, Kerala, India.

ABSTRACT

Fashion industry has always been very dynamic with its trends and designs. People of different age groups find interest in this sector especially the youth. Non-binary or gender adaptable fashion is nothing new. Through the ages, cultures, and eras across time and space have experimented with gender expression through clothing, reflecting their own ideas about gender. This research paper investigates the Gender Fluidity in this industry and the factors that lead to its impact on the target population. The sample size was 270 and data collected through structured questionnaire. The target population was from Kerala and Bangalore. Statistical test was done using IBM SPSS. Chi-square test was done to test the association between gender and preference for gender fluid luxury brands. Exploratory factor analysis was used to arrive at two factors.

Keywords: Fashion, Luxury Brands, Chi-square test, Exploratory Factor Analysis, Youth, Gender Fluidity

1. INTRODUCTION

The design and marketing of clothing have long been influenced by gender, a significant factor in the fashion industry. Yet, there has been a rising trend in apparel that is gender neutral or flexible in recent years. To encourage inclusivity and diversity while removing traditional gender barriers in fashion, this has been motivated. When there are no obvious differences between a fashion company's products that are clearly masculine and feminine, this is referred to as fashion androgyny. It is still unclear in the context of fashion androgyny if this refers to a sexual lifestyle alone or also has to do with gender or sexual identity. The popularity of unisex clothing increased along with the number of fashion designers that started incorporating the trend into their line. A look that became popular in the 2000s may be credited to designers like Pierre Cardin, Giorgio Armani, and Helmut Lang. There were advertisements for clothing that strongly embraced this trend, and long hairstyles with various highlights could be found in the catalogues. Moreover, men began donning fancy jewellery, stubble, and cosmetics. It may be said that in the 21st century, it significantly increased in importance in both Asia and the west. In our society, gender is very important, and gender standards have always had a big impact on the fashion business. Luxury companies are continuously altering to meet the shifting demands and preferences of their target consumers in the fiercely competitive fashion business. Luxury manufacturers are looking into the idea of gender neutrality or gender fluidity in clothes as a way to appeal to a wider spectrum of consumers because it has received a lot of attention recently. The luxury apparel sector, which has long been linked to elitism and exclusivity, has been slower to adopt this style. Yet, a few high-end retailers have been experimenting with gender-neutral attire. This study attempts to investigate how gender fuzzification of luxury brand clothing affects the fashion business. Gender fuzzification is the practise of designing clothing that can be worn by anyone, regardless of gender identification, and is not just intended for one gender. The research aims to investigate issues such as the current level of gender fluidity in the luxury fashion sector and the factors impacting this trend in the fashion industry. Many well-known labels have introduced gender-neutral collections in recent years, fueling the trend towards gender fluidity in the fashion industry. The luxury fashion sector, however, has been slower to adopt this trend since they are worried about losing their brand identity and having to appeal to a larger audience. Despite this, a few high-end companies, including Louis Vuitton and Gucci, have begun experimenting with gender-neutral apparel and have had encouraging feedbacks from customers. The research questions for the study will give a thorough grasp of how gender fluidity is influencing the high-end fashion market. Customers of luxury fashion brands will be surveyed to learn more about their attitudes towards gender-neutral clothing, how they view luxury brands that sell it, how they feel about gender fluidity, how luxury brands are addressing this trend, and how gender-neutral clothing has affected the luxury fashion market. The outcome this research sheds some insights into the gender fluidity of luxury brand clothing affects the fashion business is important for understanding how the sector is changing to support inclusivity and diversity. The difficulty premium brands have in adjusting to shifting consumer preferences is shown by the luxury fashion industry's tardy response to this trend and worries about losing their sense of brand identity

2. OBJECTIVES

- To ascertain if fuzzification of clothes is affected by certain demographics.
- To investigate the factors the contribute to gender fuzzification in Fashion industry.

3. HYPOTHESIS

H01: There is no significant relationship between gender and consumption of gender-neutral clothes.

HA1: There is a significant relationship between gender and consumption of gender-neutral clothes.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature suggests that achieving the apt brand identity involves creation of brand salience with customers (Keller, 2003). Social media gives businesses the opportunity to engage with customers on a deep level, strengthening their relationship with them. Social media also makes it possible for customers who do not know much about a company to research it and learn about its personality and guiding principles. This might play a role in persuading a first-time buyer to become a client. Using visual pictures and material to encourage or inspire browsing or product sourcing, brand social media activity persuades customers to move from a pre/post-buy experience into a purchase experience. Previous literature has found that companies can use social media marketing activities to improve brand awareness and increase purchase intention among potential customers (Cleo, 2021). According to literature, social media provides marketers with a greater opportunity to connect with potential customers than other marketing platforms (Gautam & Sharma, 2017). Other related studies suggest that marketing and brand managers should effectively exploit the opportunities presented by Online business communities to improve their business (Stefano et al, 2013). Studies show that Social media marketing is a powerful marketing tool that has the ability to help brands and their target customers develop meaningful relationships. Retailers use social media platforms to promote their brands because they can share their identities and beliefs, which can reinforce the brand's personality and increase the perception of it as a person. The term "social media" describes a variety of online groups and networks that let people interact with online material. They also encourage brand-customer interaction on social media platforms as a way to win over the trust of their audience. They claim that if customers can contact brands on social media and are encouraged to do so, it gives them a chance to provide excellent customer service in front of a big audience. Recent studies have shown that social fashion brand engagement is socially generated passion through social media platforms (Naeem & Ozuem, 2021). Published literature has suggested that gender fluidity and nonbinary gender identities are increasingly being recognized and accepted among children and adolescents (Lisa, 2020). People who are struggling to find the confidence to express who they are given a sense of normalcy by the representations of gender fluidity in fashion (Akdemir, 2018). Individuals with liberal gender norms are more likely to favour gender fluid marketing, while conservatives favour binary gendered advertising (Frieling, 2022). Although the fashion industry promotes erasing gender barriers and has been actively supporting the gender-fluid movement in Western nations in recent years, some people are still hesitant to confidently show and express their true selves in fashion, such as men who still feel uncomfortable shopping in cosmetic retail stores (Stylus, 2021). The feminization of male behaviour may still be gaining acceptance, despite the fact that more people now tend to view the masculinization of women in fashion as a common occurrence (Bishop, 2021). Schmitt (2009) found that consumers who identify with a particular brand community frequently form a cohesive group that may identify with the company's identity and reflect its key values. They also realised that there needed to be means for customers to participate in open brand experiences in order to create brand communities. Good customer experiences establish a connection between the business and the consumers' lifestyles; they also inspire emotional values that supersede and replace functional ones. Marketers strive to turn consumers into brand enthusiasts by fostering great consumer experiences and strongly articulating brand identity and values to appeal to an audience. An important feature of consumer culture, according to research by McGoldrick (2002), is the emphasis on lifestyle. For many people, consumption is a measure of social status, with the acquisition of material items assisting in achieving a certain degree of happiness and fulfilment. According to research, consumers develop and convey their self-identity through the brands, products, and services they choose to purchase. They contend that because brand perceptions are as varied as consumers' self-perceptions, targeting an audience based on lifestyle rather than demographics allows for more effective differentiation. Customers choose brands and goods that reflect their identities in an effort to express their "selves". Holbrook (1986) found that consumer marketers can enhance market share, brand awareness, and profitability if they can harness the power of consumers' emotional costs and rewards of consumption. Tauber (1972) conducted research and discovered that the theory that shopping has far more complex ramifications than is just dependent upon our practical demands has been backed by consumer behaviour research. He noted that brands are now concentrating on consumer behaviour, looking to understand what motivates consumers' purchases and discover their shopping motivations. Shopping motives explain the underlying causes of particular behaviours. It's critical to understand shopping motives in the context of both the satisfaction that shopping itself might produce and the utility of the goods that are purchased.

5. METHODOLOGY

Research Design : This research has followed a descriptive research approach in order to understand the impact of gender fuzzification of clothes by luxury brands. The study uses convenience sampling with the help of a structured self-administered questionnaire. **Population Of the Study:** The target population was individuals in India, specifically from Kerala and Bangalore, who shops clothes from luxury brands. The data was gathered in accordance with the responses of 270 candidates who received an online questionnaire and provided a sample size. **Data Collection:** Data for this study included both primary and secondary sources. A questionnaire was used to collect the essential information that was distributed to respondents via social media channels like Instagram, WhatsApp, and E-mail. Google forms was used for data collection. The first part of the questionnaire focused on demographic and general information related to the Gender Fluidity concept and its awareness among the target group. The second part focused on the investigation related to factors that impacted Gender Fluidity in Fashion industry. **LIKERT scale** was used for this part of the questionnaire. The information gathered from websites, journals, and earlier study papers makes up the secondary data. **Statistical Tools And Techniques Used For Analysis:** The statistical techniques and tools employed in this study's analysis consists of Google forms, Microsoft Excel and the software used to analyse and interpret Chi-square and factor analysis was done with the help of IBM SPSS.

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Demographics:

Data was collected through google forms from the target population. The initial part of the questionnaire had collected data related to demographics of the respondents. The summary of the data is given below in table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Demographic characteristic	Percentage of Respondents (%)
Gender	
Male	38.9
Female	28.9
Prefer not to say	20
Age Group	
Under 18 years	26.7
18 to 25 years	39.3
25 to 45 years	21.5
Above 45 years	12.6
Level of Education	
SSLC/10th	0.7
High school graduate	25.9
College student	39.3
Graduate	20.7
Post Graduate	13.3
Occupation	
Employed	21.5
Unemployed	0.7
Self employed	26.7
Student	39.6
Retired	11.5
Monthly Family Income (Rs.)	

Below 50,000	40
50,000 – 1,00,000	27.8
1,00,000 – 2,00,000	20
Above 2,00,000	12.2

In the survey, majority of the respondents were Males while some participants were not keen to share their gender details. The study also had a sizeable chunk of youth from under 18 years to 25 years showing the impact that Fashion industry has on this age groups. School and College students were more interested in responding to the survey cementing the dominance of fashion among this category similar to the previous generations of the same category. Students were the many respondents as stated earlier along with self-employed respondents. The Monthly income of the family are more between below Rs 50,000 to Rs 1,00,000 which is the normal range in the present economic scenario of the region.

6.2 Familiarity with the concept of gender fluidity in fashion.

The survey found that more than half of the respondents were familiar with the Gender Fluidity and its relevance in fashion sector. This shows the sense of awareness among the target population. However, there are also groups have not heard of this term specifically though they are knowing about fashion industry.

Table 2: Familiarity with the concept of gender fluidity in fashion

OPTIONS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Not familiar	47.4
Somewhat familiar	29.6
Very familiar	23

6.3 Motivation for luxury brands to embrace gender fluidity in their clothing lines

Table 3: Motivation for luxury brands to embrace gender fluidity in their clothing lines

OPTIONS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Genuine commitment to inclusivity and breaking down gender norms	35.6
To appeal to a new market of consumers	26.7
To appear trendy and progressive	20.7
All the above	17

The research shows that the major share of the target population believe that the motivation for luxury brands to take up Gender Fluidity is genuine commitment to break down the traditional norms popular in the fashion industry. Some favour that the major motivation is to attract new consumers to this sector.

6.4 Increase in the number of luxury brands embracing gender fluidity in their clothing lines in recent years

Table 4: Increase in the number of luxury brands embracing gender fluidity in their clothing lines in recent years

OPTIONS	PERCENTAGE (%)
Yes	53
No	26.3
Maybe	20.7

From the survey, it was found that majority of the respondents felt that the luxury brands are embracing the concept of gender fluidity in the recent years.

6.5 CHI-SQUARE: Relationship Between Gender* And Consumption Of Gender-Neutral Clothes.

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between gender and consumption of gender-neutral clothes.

H_{A1} : There is a significant relationship between gender and consumption of gender-neutral clothes.

Table 5: What is your gender? * Would you be more likely to purchase clothing from a luxury brand that markets itself as gender-fluid and non-binary? Crosstabulation

Gender	Would you be more likely to purchase clothing from a luxury brand that markets itself as gender-fluid and non-binary?			Total
	Maybe	No	Yes	
Female	2	71	5	78
Male	6	1	98	105
Prefer not to say	51	0	33	87
Total	59	72	139	270

Table 6: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	969.311 ^a	12	.000
Likelihood Ratio	850.357	12	.000
N of Valid Cases	270		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.26.

The sample included 270 respondents which had 78 female and 105 male respondents while the rest did not wish to disclose their gender. Majority of the respondents reported that they would prefer luxury brands that were gender fluid and non-binary. There was significant relationship between gender and preference for luxury brands based on their gender fluidity concept, $\chi^2(12, N = 270) = 969.3$, $p = .000$. So the null hypothesis was rejected.

6.6 FACTOR ANALYSIS: Factors contributing to Gender Fuzzification in Fashion Industry

Table 7: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.920
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square
	10394.852
	df
	45
	Sig.
	.000

The KMO value is .920. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Bartlett, 1950) revealed a statistically significant number of correlations amid the variables. This indicates that factor analysis is permissible with given data.

Table 8: Rotated Component Matrixa

Rate how strongly you agree or disagree with the given statements	Component	
	1	2
[Gender fuzzification of luxury brand clothing items could challenge traditional gender norms in the fashion industry]	.680	.488
[Gender fluidity in fashion is a helpful development for society as a whole]	.627	.504
[Gender fuzzification of luxury brand clothes can help to break down gender stereotypes in the fashion industry]	.601	.496
[Luxury brands have a responsibility to promote inclusivity]	.585	.573
[It is important for luxury brands to feature models of diverse gender identities in their marketing and advertising campaigns]	.554	.507
[Luxury brands promote gender fluidity in fashion to lead the way and set an example for other brands]	.553	.539

[Gender fluidity in fashion will become more mainstream and accepted in the future]	.546	.528
[Luxury brands promote gender fluidity in fashion to provide a wider range of clothing options for all gender identities]	.497	.607
[Luxury brands embracing gender fluidity in their clothing lines is a positive movement]	.550	.607
[Luxury brands promote gender fluidity in fashion to follow current trends and market demands]	.599	.600

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 10 iterations.

Factor 1 was comprised of 7 items reported on a 5-point Likert scale that explained 69% of the variance with factor loadings from .546 to .680. Factor 1 was identified as –“Luxury Brand & Gender Fluidity Factors” included -Gender fuzzification of luxury brand clothing items could challenge traditional gender norms in the fashion industry, Gender fluidity in fashion is a helpful development for society as a whole, Gender fuzzification of luxury brand clothes can help to break down gender stereotypes in the fashion industry, Luxury brands have a responsibility to promote inclusivity, It is important for luxury brands to feature models of diverse gender identities in their marketing and advertising campaigns, Luxury brands promote gender fluidity in fashion to lead the way and set an example for other brands, Gender fluidity in fashion will become more mainstream and accepted in the future, Luxury brands promote gender fluidity in fashion to provide a wider range of clothing options for all gender identities Factor 2 was comprised of 2 items reported on a 5-point Likert scale that explained 31% of the variance with factor loadings from .6 to .607. Factor 2 was identified as “Gender Fluidity Promotion Factors” which included Luxury brands promote gender fluidity in fashion to follow current trends and market demands, Luxury brands embracing gender fluidity in their clothing lines is a positive movement,

7. CONCLUSION

Modern era has seen a lot of changes in different industries. The Fashion industry is an sector where the changes are more agile and consumer trends change very fast. This research tried to investigate the concept of Gender Fluidity of premium brand clothing affects the fashion business emphasizes the significance of adjusting to shifting consumer tastes and adopting gender-neutral fashion. According to the report, there is a rising demand among consumers for gender-neutral clothes, and luxury firms that provide more options may be able to seize a sizable market opportunity. But it's crucial to approach gender fluidity with caution, taking into account how the apparel will fit and appeal to various body shapes. Also, companies should disclose their prices clearly and refrain from overcharging for gender-neutral clothes without justification. Increasing public awareness of gender-neutral clothing and how it can be worn by people of all genders also requires education. The results of this research showed that there is an association between gender and preference for gender fluid luxury brands among customers. The Exploratory factor analysis was able to filter out two variables which were related to Gender Fluidity, namely- “Luxury brands& Gender Fluidity Factors” and “Gender Fluidity PromotionFactors”. Despite the fact that this research was conducted on a modest scale, we may infer that it marks the beginning of a much deeper understanding of consumer response to firms that are engaging gender fluidity gleaned directly from customers of gender-neutral items. This research would certainly serve as a foundation for future studies. In that sense, the study's goals and objectives have been entirely attained.

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