Research Article

Investigation of South Indian teen gal consumer interpretation of fashion values

Abstract

Gen Z consumers are the most unpredictable of all consumer age groups in India. There is no sufficient data about south Indian teen gal consumer's capability to interpret symbolic values and visual attributes of fashion clothing. This condition leaves the categorization of south Indian teen gal consumers on the lines of McCracken's levels of interpretation unanswered. South Indian teen gal consumer's interpretation of fashion values is studied by organizing a questionnaire survey focusing on the set of fashion values. The responses were grouped as per the ranks stated in the self explicate method. The accumulated responses were also compared with conjoint analysis utility values worked on regression model.

Keywords: fashion values, South Indian teen gals, fashion, style, self concept, symbolic values, cultural stars, fashion movement

Nithyaprakash V, Nandhini R, Santhiya R
Department of Fashion Technology, Bannari Amman Institute of Technology, India

Correspondence: Nithyaprakash V, Assistant Professor, Department of Fashion Technology, Bannari Amman Institute of Technology, Sathyamangalam-638401, India, Tel 9952497366, Email nithyaprakash.v@gmail.com

Introduction

Urbanization of India is happening at a dramatic pace and is influencing the life style and buying behavior of the consumers. Most of the youngsters today buy apparels for special events or occasions.[1] The question why not fashion can help them in proving their identity through the process of establishing or describing who they are and what they wish to be is worthy to ponder. Meanwhile the Younger generation's option to use fashion as a vehicle in communicating their values has been increasing day by day since the advent of selfie concept and image sharing social networking sites. Comparatively women recognize more readily a "look" and are more sensitive to fashion cues than men.[2] Particularly the Indian women's buying behavior during the purchase of their apparel is based on the factors like age, group, occupation, culture, tradition and occasions.[3] Call center boomers, IT enabled service centers, ERP solution providers spanning over the metro landscapes of Chennai, Bengaluru and Thiruvanthapuram are populated by youngsters who just passed out of college and drawing lucrative offers unheard before. In this changing scenario, the perception about young South Indian women's stereotype image of conforming to an acceptable style and social standard stays challenged and worthy of investigation. These developments have opened up the minds of south Indian teen gals segment of Gen Z who witness their brothers and sisters enjoy these scenarios. Hence we study their capability to interpret the symbolic values visualized in fashion clothing. Today's youth (15 to 20years) of Gen Z given their predictable audacity, the tendency to shop, venture out, try, experiment is high, it is they who decide the life time of a fashion trend. In a globalized world well connected by web technologies, geographical distance is no more a constraint to reach and witness the experience. The lines between buying behaviors are no more significant among young people (youth) indeed it has been blurring out as the common urge is get hooked on to social networks, interact across a wide section of people with shared interests and get appreciated. In fact even companies hiring potential job seekers are verifying their social networks and appraising them.

Literature review

Semantic attributes of clothing: Clothing attributes can be classified into two types, fashion attributes and visual attributes. Visual attributes pertains to the purely visual, non-fashion specific characteristics such as color, brightness, vividness, and pattern. Fashion attributes pertain to particular characteristics of clothes in terms of shape or cut for example sleeve length, dress style, heel type etc.[4] Fashion is the custom or style of dressing that prevails among any group of persons.[5] It is the style of the present, which may last for a year or two or a number of years. A high fashion style is the look of the moment. If a look or trend persists long enough it becomes a classic. A classic style is a look that is always available in some form that is appropriate for many occasions, and acceptable to many consumer groups.[6] Hence fashion attributes help to define the fashion clothing as chic or classic. They are defined as styles since they claim commitment to a set of social expectations in the matter of dressing. In other words-at a certain time or at a certain place, for both sexes or while performing certain activities and last but not least, while performing social roles at occupational or private occasions-for example playing golf or visiting the opera, taking on the role of a bank clerk, a policeman, a wedding couple, or mourners. People are, so to speak, obliged to clothe in a codified manner or at least in a way that society deems appropriate at that occasion. The mutual dependencies between various clothing attributes capture the Rules of Style. For example, neckties are rarely worn with T-shirt; rather they are only worn with dress shirts.[7] In fact, clothing concepts referencing appropriateness of some silhouettes made with certain characteristics for a specific place and attitude at particular Time in the world deems it a preferred choice of style. For example dressing style for women in western countries is "high skin exposure, no sleeves, dress, other neckline shapes (i.e. neither v-shape nor round), white, 2 colors, floral pattern". Thus each end user occasion has its own list of Semantic attributes considering the emotions and ethos related to it.

Symbolic ingredients of fashion clothing: Fashion clothing is built on its concept or intuition of the designer that serves to fulfill the craving of the target customer. Fashion designers make use of signs, icons and elements of symbolic nature borrowed from an inspiration in portraying the Fashion values. Fashion semiotic domain is fed, nurtured and developed in order to create and sustain the fashion values. In this perspective, Fashion symbolic contents are one of the most

effective means of communicating the style traits, principles and processes of cherished socio cultural values. Symbols also help to interpret the conceptions of a period style or various partial styles. Since symbols are based on cultural and social conventions and traditions, knowledge of cultural norms and context is crucial for understanding the message and meaning of a product. Symbolic functions evoke associations like cold or warm, male or female etc. It is the symbolic meaning first of all that provokes emotional reactions and on whose account we love, desire or dislike products.[8] Materials like silk, tailoring techniques of ateliers in France, pattern cutting techniques of Italians, Japanese pattern magic, Indian psychedelic color patterns, etc are few of the symbolic entities that exist in fashion.

According to Langer the meanings of fashion symbols are not fixed rather comprises of several connotations and associations that reminds about some object when the consumers look at them. And symbolic transformation is the essential activity of human minds and it penetrates all profound issues of a culture.[9] McCracken exemplifies fashion symbols can communicate impressions or illusions such as physical attractiveness, femininity and masculinity, power and dominance, and self-confidence and assurance. In other words they reflect the clothing attitude of the person. McCracken further states, the perceiver examines a fashion statement "not for a new message, but for an old one fixed by convention".[10]

Interpretation of fashion symbols in reality has three levels:[17]

a. The first level of interpretation is a social salience category in which individuals interpreted the symbols in a general stereotypic manner. Single-word descriptions such as "housewife", "hippie", "wealthy" were common.

b. In the next level, when cues were not easily associated with a stereotypic image, individuals had difficulty interpreting the cues and often relied on the most salient feature from which they drew meaning (e.g., most evident color or style detail).

c. In the third level of interpretation, cues were presented in new and unique ways. Because of this, the cues were perceived as ambiguous in meaning and difficult to interpret.

The meaning of symbols has far reaching roots and designers have to be familiar with them because the choice of materials, form, shapes and colors for clothing and fashion is not arbitrary but is meant to evoke particular associations within a certain culture and time. Partial looks such as Ethno-Look, Retro-Look, and New Romantic etc. distinguish themselves from style, since they exploit and adopt significant signs of another culture or epoch in a playful and not binding manner. They too serve as symbolic elements of fashion clothing.[11]

Fashion clothing values: As per the study conducted by Sun young Ko, Pamela Norum, Jana M. Hawley, Consumer values reflected in clothing ads are identified as functional, social, emotional and epistemic. Functional value dominated throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, but started witnessing decreasing trend henceforth. By the 2000s, emotional value had overtaken functional value in emphasis. Of all the consumer consequences, high quality was connected most frequently with functional value. At the same time, high quality served as an intermediary qualifier for symbols of social status, a consequence of social value. Fabric was the attribute linked most frequently to functional and social consequences.[12] In the realms of fashion, hedonic values encompass aesthetic, pleasure and experiential values. Symbolic value is reflected in self expressive and social values.[13]

Vieria[2] states: 'Fashion may be conceptualized both as an object and as a behavioral process'. Clothing helps in enhancing the self-image of the individuals, and for the Indian youth it may signify global values and lifestyle. Clothing serves to help individuals with low self-esteem adapt in the social setting and for those with high self-esteem it acts as an expressive function.[14] Fashion products are positioned to improve the social image of the consumers.[15] Fashions are supposed to communicate the values of the society[9] and the involvement of the consumers in their clothes provides a deeper understanding of the consumer behavior and consumption predispositions.

Drivers of fashion clothing involvement: Five consumer involvement types were identified based on four dimensions of involvement: challenged moderate, know ledged enthusiast, indifferent moderate, challenged enthusiast, and cautious moderate. This study found that values could be used to further explain differences between the enthusiast and moderate consumer types. All nine value items showed significant relationships with dimensions perceived/sign and pleasure interest. Knowledge enthusiast and challenged enthusiast types perceived many values to be significantly more important than challenged moderate types.[16] Among the different motives Materialism and symbolic motives were found to have a significant effect on the consumer's level of involvement in fashion clothing. As per the study by Kinra, Indian consumers prefer western brands as these connote luxury and status.[17] Lindridge and Dibb in their research suggest that India demonstrates high levels of materialistic values and these are related with spirituality.[18]

Consumers 'involvement with a product relates to their identification with the product and the personality of an individual determines his/her involvement with products. If involvement was dependent upon internal drives and motivations, it would differ from individual to individual and should satisfy certain individual goals.[19] Consumers' involvement with clothing may be perceived in the light of the value the consumer places on acquiring clothes to improve their social and self-image. Research for many years has recognized apparel as a high involvement product category because of its capability to be linked with individual's personality and communicating his/her attitude. The involvement of the consumer is dependent upon their value system and their belief that the given product class will satisfy their needs.[20] Consumer involvement is a motivational state that may be used to comprehend and predict consumers 'attitudes towards products. The consumer behavioral process of accultured individuality is influenced by his/her concept, personality, lifestyle and motivation. Brand Personality is a specific mix of human traits attributable to a particular brand Consumers choose brands which have a personality similar to that of their own.[21]

A. Self concept

i. Actual self concept: how he/she views him/herself

ii. Ideal self-concept: how she/he likes to view her/himself

iii. Others self concept: how he/she thinks others see him/her

Materialistic values influence the need for goods in terms of identity search, self-presentation, and aesthetic consumption and for the marking of special occasions.[21]

Indian women consumer's purchase behavior: Consumer mainly focus only on brand does not care about whether it is green or bad ethical. Women buying behavior during the purchase of their apparel is based on these factors like age, group, occupation, culture, tradition

and occasions. Urbanization is taking place in India at a dramatic pace and is influencing the life style and buying behavior of the consumers.[3] Recent trends in marketing strategies applicable among Indian consumer include:

a. Celebrity influence

b. Online shopping

c. Freebies

d. Popularity of eco-friendly products

e. Quality oriented outlet

Indian fashion industry is highly segmented into various categories and different target segments deeply divided by Demographic and Psychographic differences. Irrespective of the differences, women's Social and Cultural feelings were by a large similar reflecting their Functional and expressive needs. Sriparna Guha postulates that Price consciousness, brand consciousness, quality consciousness as the significant dimensions of the buying behavior of women.[22]

Consumer's decision making process is driven by these stages:

i. Problem/Need Recognition

ii. Information Search

iii. Evaluation of alternatives (perception)

iv. Purchase decision (Preference)

v. Post-Purchase behavior[23]

Materials and methods

Research problem

There is no sufficient data about south Indian teen gal consumer's capability to interpret symbolic values and visual attributes of fashion clothing and there are unanswered queries on which of the levels of interpretation stated by McCracken do south Indian teen gal consumer will be subsumed. This problem statement assumes importance on the grounds of the theory defined by belk in O 'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy that materialistic values influence the need for goods in terms of identity search, self-presentation, and aesthetic consumption and for the marking of special occasions.

Research methodology

To investigate the Indian teen gal consumer's capability to interpret symbolic values of fashion clothing, primary research tool-survey was employed. The survey was conducted to identify the level of interpretation which the south Indian teen gal consumer exercised when it came to understanding the fashion clothing values. Survey was conducted for Indian women teens across two South Indian metros: Bengaluru and Chennai as they are the most exposed to club events, parties and other city life associations in the whole of southern part of India. The respondents were marked by the characteristics of Sex: Woman and Age: 16 to 20 years old. Around 350 Indian teen gals in the south Indian metros were surveyed to collect data.

Hypothesis 1: South Indian teen gals are curious to espouse new lifestyle activity.

Hypothesis 2: South Indian teen gals appreciated visual aesthetic effects of fashion clothing.

Hypothesis 3: Cultural stars influence on South Indian teen gals is high when they prefer new fashion clothing values in spite of their interest in espousing new lifestyle activity.

Hypothesis 4: South Indian teen gals espouse new lifestyle activity and audacious in preferring styles appealing to their self concept and symbolic of new socio cultural values.

Below is the list of questions used up in the survey.

Survey questionnaire

My style reflects my:

a. Personality

b. Ability to wear something different and set trends

c. Appreciation for cultural values of the society

d. Ability to espouse new lifestyle activity

What product feature would encourage you to try out new fashion style?

i. Quality attributes

ii. Visual aesthetic effects of clothing

iii. Freshness of fashion design

iv. Green fashion manufacturing concepts

At what point of fashion movement cycle you will buy new fashion look clothing?

A. When the style and concept is beginning to get accepted by icons and cultural stars-rising phase

B. When the style is innovative and appealing to your personal self

C. Others (_____)

If you are given a choice to select between two styles given below, which one would you prefer?

a. A style representing the new socio cultural values of the time

b. A style representing charismatic values exhibited by cultural / sports icons. Ex. Bollywood stars – kareena kapoor, saif Ali khan, M.S. Dhoni, P.V.Sindhu

c. Others (_____)

Self explicate method to study the share of consumer preferences

The aim is to group and count the share of preferences as per the ranks stated for fashion clothing value pairs. The ranks are stated based on self explicate method on the lines of the hypothesis statements stated in the research problem.

The set of fashion values prescribed for rank 1 and rank 2 as per the self explicate method are as given below:

I. Rank 1-{Ability to espouse new lifestyle activity, Freshness of fashion design, Style appealing to personal self, style representing new socio cultural values}

II. Rank 2-{Ability to espouse new lifestyle activity, Visual aesthe-

tics effects of the clothing, style accepted by icons and cultural stars, A style representing charismatic values of exhibited by cultural/sports icons}

Among the four questions asked the respondent's choice of preference conforming to the set of values stated in rank 1 and rank 2 are studied. The value corresponding to choice D; Ability to espouse new lifestyle activity in question no.1, choice C; Freshness of fashion design in question 2, choice B; When the style is appealing to your personal self and choice A; A style representing the new socio cultural values of the time comprise the set of values as per rank 1. The value corresponding to choice D; Ability to espouse new lifestyle activity in question no.1, choice B; Visual aesthetic effects of the clothing, in question no: 2, choice A; When the style and concept is beginning to get accepted by icons and cultural stars– rising phase in question no: 3 and choice B; A style representing charismatic values exhibited by cultural/sports icons. Ex. Bollywood stars-Kareena kapoor, Saif Ali

khan, M.S. Dhoni, P.V.Sindhu in question no: 4 comprise the set of values as per rank 2.

Conjoint analysis method to study the share of consumer preferences

We used conjoint analysis method to compute the degree of importance in other words consumer's share of preferences for set of fashion values. Fractional design and full profile of the defined product features was used and consumer share of preference as per the stated values in each of the ranks were modeled. Among the choices given for each of the questions, dummy variables were introduced to state the mutual exclusivity of the values for preferred set of values that constitute the modeled rank under study. In fact we only need to code one of the two levels for each attribute, not both so 0,0,0,0 is the constant-implicitly if Level 1 is chosen Level 2 cannot be and vice versa so we only need one dummy variable, not two (Table 1) (Table 2).

Table 1 Screen shot of Fashion product profile definition using full profile and full combination (non-fractional) design

A: Text for Levels	Attribute 1 (point of fashion movement)		Attribute 2 (product feature)		Attribute 3 (socio-cultural influence)		Attribute 4 (symbolic of new lifestyle activity)	
	A1 Level 1	A2 Level 2	A2 Level 1	A2 Level 2	A3 Level 1	A3 Level 2	A4 Level 1	A4 Level 2
	Introduction stage and appealing to personal self	Rising phase cultural stars	Freshness of fashion design	Refined variations of existing style	New socio-cultural values	Other cultural influences	Espouse new lifestyle activity	Different trends
	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0
	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	0
	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	0
	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
Dummy variable coding to build the profiles. You can change the text in blue to build different profiles and to do the analysis (But see the note below about dummy variables)	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0
	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	1
	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0
	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0
	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	1
	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1
	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	1
	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1

Hypothesis 3: Cultural stars influence on South Indian teen gals is high when they prefer new fashion clothing values in spite of their interest in espousing new lifestyle activity.

Hypothesis 4: South Indian teen gals espouse new lifestyle activity and audacious in preferring styles appealing to their self concept and symbolic of new socio-cultural values Correspond to rank 10 and rank 1 of conjoint analysis (Table 3) (Table 4).

Table 2 Screen shot of the modeled ranks of conjoint analysis

B: Profiles for the interview (from the dummy vars above). record the respondent's ranking of each to the right	C: rank chosen	Modelledrank
Introduction Stage and Appealing to Personal Self, Freshness of Fashion Design, New Socio-Cultural Values, Epsouse New Lifestyle Activity	1	0.5
Rising Phase Cultural Stars, Freshness of Fashion Design, New Socio-Cultural Values, Epsouse New Lifestyle Activity	2	1.5
Introduction Stage and Appealing to Personal Self, Refined Variations of Existing Style, New Socio-Cultural Values, Epsouse New Lifestyle Activity	3	3.5
Rising Phase Cultural Stars, Refined Variations of Existing Style, New Socio-Cultural Values, Epsouse New Lifestyle Activity	4	4.5
Introduction Stage and Appealing to Personal Self, Freshness of Fashion Design, Other Cultural Influences, Epsouse New Lifestyle Activity	5	5.5
Rising Phase Cultural Stars, Freshness of Fashion Design, Other Cultural Influences, Epsouse New Lifestyle Activity	6	6.5
Introduction Stage and Appealing to Personal Self, Freshness of Fashion Design, New Socio-Cultural Values, Different Trends	7	7.5
Rising Phase Cultural Stars, Freshness of Fashion Design, New Socio-Cultural Values, Different Trends	8	8.5
Introduction Stage and Appealing to Personal Self, Refined Variations of Existing Style, Other Cultural Influences, Epsouse New Lifestyle Activity	9	8.5
Rising Phase Cultural Stars, Refined Variations of Existing Style, Other Cultural Influences, Epsouse New Lifestyle Activity	10	9.5
Introduction Stage and Appealing to Personal Self, Refined Variations of Existing Style, New Socio-Cultural Values, Different Trends	11	10.5
Rising Phase Cultural Stars, Refined Variations of Existing Style, New Socio-Cultural Values, Different Trends	12	11.5
Introduction Stage and Appealing to Personal Self, Freshness of Fashion Design, Other Cultural Influences, Different Trends	13	12.5
Rising Phase Cultural Stars, Freshness of Fashion Design, Other Cultural Influences, Different Trends	14	13.5
Introduction Stage and Appealing to Personal Self, Refined Variations of Existing Style, Other Cultural Influences, Different Trends	15	15.5
Rising Phase Cultural Stars, Refined Variations of Existing Style, Other Cultural Influences, Different Trends	16	16.5

Table 3 the conjoint analysis calculation

D: analysis calculation	Uses regression of the rank chosen against the dummy variables							
Linest	0	-7	0	-5	0	-3	1	0
Utilities (Reversed Linest)	0	1	-3	0	-5	0	-7	0

Table 4 The utilities of fashion values

E: utilities (friendlier style)	Introduction stage and appealing to personal self	Rising phase cultural stars	Freshness of fashion design	Refined variations of existing style	New socio-cultural values	Other cultural influences	Epsouse new lifestyle activity	Different trends
(Higher better)	0	-28.57	85.71	0	142.86	0	200	0

Results and discussion

Recorded responses

My style reflects my:

A) Personality

B) Ability to wear something different and set trends

C) Appreciation for cultural values of the society

D) Ability to espouse new lifestyle activity Responses:

    i. 49 members responded towards A option (14%)

    ii. 70 members responded towards B option (20%)

    iii. 63 members responded towards C option (18%)

    iv. 168 members responded towards D option (48%)

What product feature would encourage you to try out new fashion style?

A) Quality attributes

B) Visual aesthetic effects of the clothing

C) Freshness of fashion design

D) Green fashion manufacturing concepts Responses:

    i. 77 members responded towards A option (22%)

    ii. 170 members responded towards B option (48.6%)

    iii. 103 members responded towards C option (29.4%)

    iv. No members responded towards D option

At what point of fashion movement cycle you will buy new fashion look clothing?

A) When the style and concept is beginning to get accepted by icons and cultural stars-rising phase

B) When the style is innovative and appealing to your personal self

C) Others (_____)

    i. 145 members responded towards A option (41.4%)

    ii. 205 members responded towards B option (58.6%)

    iii. No members responded towards C option

If you are given a choice to select between two styles given below, which one would you prefer?

A) A style representing the new socio cultural values of the time

B) A style representing charismatic values exhibited by cultural/ sports icons. Ex. Bollywood stars-Kareena kapoor, Saif ali khan, M.S. Dhoni, P.V.Sindhu

C) Others (_____) Responses:

    i. 119 members responded towards A option (34%)

    ii. 231 members responded towards B option (66%)

    iii. No members responded towards C option

Identification of consistency in expression of interest and clarity of interpretation of fashion values defined in rank 1 and rank 2 of self explicate method is derived from the responses they recorded for the determinant questions 1, 2, 3 and 4. In other words finding out how many of the respondents chose the following particular options against the respective questions in the fray as per the set of values stated in rank 1 and rank 2.

Conditions fulfilling rank 1

If they answered option 'D' for question 1, they will also tick out the option 'C' for question 2, choose option 'B' for question 3 and choose option "A' for question 4.

Conditions fulfilling rank 2

If they answered option 'D' for question 1, they will also choose option 'B' for question 2, option 'A' for question 3 and choose option 'B' for question 4.

Total no of respondents who fulfilled the conditions of rank 1 was 78(22%)-Hypothesis 4 Total no of respondents who fulfilled the conditions of rank 2 was 119(34%)-Hypothesis 3 Total no of respondents who preferred to espouse new lifestyle activity was 168(48%)-Hypothesis 1.

Total no of respondents who appreciated visual aesthetics of fashion clothing was 170(48.6%)-Hypothesis 248% of the respondents is curious to espouse new lifestyle activity. While 48.6% of the respondents appreciated visual aesthetic effects of fashion clothing. However the respondents were not outright audacious in choosing innovative product features expressive of new style attributes as only 22% of them displayed an element of clarity and consistency in interpreting the new fashion values that constituted rank 1:{Ability to espouse new lifestyle activity, Freshness of fashion design, Style appealing to personal self, style representing new socio cultural values} of self explicate method. However 34% of the respondents were clear in expressing their preference for visual aesthetic effects of fashion clothing, evincing interest in appreciating charismatic values exhibited by cultural stars and following the clothing choices of the cultural stars in spite of being ready to espouse new lifestyle activity.

The conjoint analysis clearly identified the utility values of the defined set of fashion values (attributes) as per the modeled ranks. Ability to espouse new lifestyle activity (200) is given the highest importance; reference figure 2.3 and matches with Gen Z youth attitude to look for new experiences. The second most important value was representation of new socio-cultural values (142.86); reference figure 2.3. Both these findings match with the Gen Z traits. While the other value: freshness of fashion design (85.71) scored third in the order of importance. But the value: the introduction of fashion movement and style appealing to personal self scored last (0).

However among the 22% of respondents who accounted for rank 1 set of values by self explicate method did actually preferred for these attributes. The attribute 'When the style and concept is beginning to get accepted by icons and cultural stars–rising phase' though scored negatively (28.57) in the order of importance was preferred by 41.4% of the respondents.

Conclusion

Though 48% of respondents preferred to espouse new lifestyle activity, it was overshadowed by the charismatic values exhibited by the cultural stars and icons which accounted for 66%. Hence south

Indian teen gals are more at second level of interpretation as posited by McCracken. That is when cues were presented in new unusual patterns, south Indian teen gals had difficulty interpreting the cues and often relied on charismatic values exhibited by the cultural stars and the visual aesthetic effects of clothing from which they drew meaning (e.g., most evident color or style detail). This could be attributed to the difference in valence level of beliefs in appreciating a particular fashion value and lack of clarity in direct expression. Still the influence of cultural stars on the psyche of the women teen gals is significant and worthy of investigation in trend research forecasting besides studying their traits.[24–29]

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Conflict of interest

Author declares there is no conflict of interest in publishing the article.

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