
**CULTURAL IDENTITY AND PURCHASE INTENTIONS AMONG YOUNG ADULTS:
DETERMINANTS OF PREFERENCE FOR TRADITIONAL VS CONTEMPORARY FASHION****Laayaba Badu**Fashion and Apparel Studies, School of Creative Studies, D.Y. Patil Deemed to be University, Navi Mumbai,
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ABSTRACT

This study employs a cross-sectional quantitative survey of 50 young adults aged 18–30 using convenience sampling to examine how cultural identity, social influence, perceived modernity, and occasion relevance influence purchase intention toward traditional attire. Results show cultural attachment strongly predicts preference for traditional clothing in ceremonial contexts while comfort predicts daily wear choices. Findings indicate coexistence of traditional and contemporary fashion consumption rather than substitution. The study provides insight for fashion marketers targeting youth cultural identity segments.

Keywords: *Cultural identity, Purchase intention, Traditional attire, Youth fashion preferences, social influence*

INTRODUCTION

Fashion is not only about clothing but also about identity, heritage, and self-expression. In India, traditional attire such as sarees, kurtas, lehengas, and handloom garments represents cultural continuity and craftsmanship. At the same time, globalization and digital exposure have increased the popularity of contemporary Western fashion among young adults.

Young consumers today are influenced by global trends, celebrity culture, and fast fashion. However, many still participate in traditional dressing during festivals, weddings, and cultural celebrations. This raises an important question: are young adults still willing to choose Indian traditional attire over contemporary fashion, and what factors influence this choice?

This study aims to examine the determinants of young adults' preference for Indian traditional attire. We focus on variables such as cultural identity, social influence, perceived modernity, and occasion-based usage to understand how these factors shape purchase intentions. By studying respondents aged 18–30, we aim to explore how today's youth balance tradition and modern fashion choices.

Sascha Langner et al., 2013 demonstrates that buying behavior can signal social identity, with individuals purchasing specific items "to show their taste in fashion or their membership in a social group," though this study focused on automotive rather than fashion purchases.

RESEARCH GAP

Although prior studies have examined fashion consumption and identity, limited empirical research specifically investigates how cultural identity interacts with purchase intention toward traditional clothing among young Indian adults. This study addresses that gap.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine how cultural identity influences young adults' preference for Indian traditional attire.
2. To analyse the role of social influence in shaping clothing choices.
3. To understand how perceptions of modernity and comfort affect preference for traditional attire.
4. To explore whether young adults are willing to choose traditional attire over contemporary fashion for regular wear.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE**Cultural Identity and Clothing Choice**

Clothing choices significantly communicate and shape cultural identity, with effects varying by ethnic group and gender. The empirical evidence is strongest from K. Bhui et al., 2008, a prospective study of 1,255 adolescents (573 white British, 682 Bangladeshi) followed over two years. Bangladeshi pupils preferring traditional clothing showed reduced mental health problems compared to those with integrated clothing preferences (OR 0.3, 95% CI 0.1–0.9), though this effect was sustained only among Bangladeshi girls (OR 0.1, 95% CI 0.1–0.7). Conversely, integrated clothing choices were least risky for white British adolescents (K. Bhui et al., 2008). Supporting this, multiple qualitative and theoretical studies confirm clothing functions as a

powerful non-verbal communicator of cultural identity (T. Svensson et al., 1992) (M. A. Özdil et al., 2021). Ethnographic research on Dutch Muslim women and Arab women managers demonstrates how individuals strategically use clothing to negotiate multiple, intersecting identities (B. Hass et al., 2019) (Katlin Omair et al., 2009). However, R. Feinberg et al., 1992 found the relationship between clothing, its meaning, and actual identity is complex and not straightforward.

Globalization and Contemporary Fashion

The evidence base comprises 9 sources (2003-2025) with generally consistent findings on globalization's dual impact. Hao Yuan et al., 2024 identifies globalization as enabling "cultural exchange" and "cultural fusion," with fashion acting as a "cultural ambassador." Artem Melnikov et al., 2025 emphasizes digital tools accelerating cross-cultural exchange among designers. However, N. Azuma et al., 2003 documents significant drawbacks, noting that standardization and offshore production have "disbanded the traditional ethos of fashion design" and threaten small manufacturers. Selee Lee et al., 2019 identifies emerging "cultural appropriation issues" as a consequence of globalization. Tiko Prabhata et al., 2023 and Zainab Abd Ali Muhsen et al., 2021 document a counter-trend: contemporary designers increasingly integrate local traditions and heritage into global fashion. calls for decolonial approaches to challenge Eurocentric dominance.

The evidence suggests globalization creates both opportunities and tensions in contemporary fashion.

Social Influence and Occasion-Based Dressing

S. Loureiro et al., 2017 indeed found that social influence is more important than individual vanity in enhancing the desire to buy and use fashion clothes and accessories, based on their study of 425 consumers using shopping mall intercept methodology.

This finding aligns with additional evidence in the sources. M. Roman et al., 2011 demonstrated that peer approval significantly influences sartorial purchasing patterns among college students, with 85.96% owning at least one socially popular brand-name item. Carrie L. Yodanis et al., 2018 reinforces this by arguing that what we consider "personal style" is actually social, "shaped and limited by countless social influences." Jennifer J. Argo et al., 2005 further showed that even noninteractive social presence impacts consumers' self-presentation behaviors in retail contexts.

The evidence consistently supports that clothing choices are fundamentally driven by social rather than individual factors, though the sources don't specifically address how this varies across different occasions or contexts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We adopted a quantitative survey method to collect data, as it allows for measurable analysis of attitudes and preferences. The study followed a cross-sectional research design in which data were collected from respondents at a single point in time to examine relationships among variables.

The sample consisted of 50 young adults aged 18–30. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling through online platforms.

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered via Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of three sections:

- Demographics
- Cultural and Social Factors
- Purchase Preference and Intention

All responses were recorded anonymously to ensure reliability and honest feedback.

HYPOTHESIS

H1: Cultural identity positively influences young adults' preference for traditional attire.

H2: Social influence significantly affects intention to wear traditional clothing.

H3: Perceived comfort negatively impacts preference for traditional attire in daily wear.

H4: Occasion relevance increases the likelihood of choosing traditional attire.

RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that traditional Indian attire retains substantial cultural significance among young adults, particularly within contexts that emphasize social and ceremonial meaning. Among the 50 respondents, 42 (84%) indicated a preference for traditional clothing during festivals and family occasions, reflecting its enduring cultural relevance. Likewise, 38 participants (76%) reported that wearing traditional garments enhances their sense of connection to cultural heritage, highlighting the salience of identity related factors in shaping apparel preferences. The influence of social norms was also evident, as 32 respondents (64%) acknowledged that family expectations affect their clothing choices, and 29 (58%) stated that they experience social approval when dressed in traditional attire at public gatherings. In contrast, only 18 respondents (36%) preferred traditional clothing for everyday wear, with most attributing their preference for contemporary fashion to considerations of comfort and practicality. Notably, 30 participants (60%) expressed willingness to purchase modernized or fusion adaptations of traditional attire, suggesting a pattern of cultural adaptation rather than displacement. Collectively, these results indicate that while traditional attire continues to hold strong symbolic and emotional value, functional considerations play a decisive role in everyday consumption decisions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that young adults maintain a strong emotional and cultural connection to traditional attire, particularly in contexts where social meaning and cultural symbolism are emphasized. Cultural identity emerged as a key determinant influencing preference, suggesting that clothing functions not only as a utilitarian product but also as a marker of belonging and self-representation. Social influence further reinforces this behaviour, as family expectations and perceived social approval motivate individuals to adopt traditional clothing during culturally significant occasions. At the same time, the relatively low preference for traditional attire in daily wear highlights the role of functional factors such as comfort, convenience, and perceived modernity. This dual pattern reflects a coexistence model in which contemporary fashion dominates routine settings while traditional attire retains symbolic importance. The willingness of respondents to purchase fusion styles suggests an evolving consumer mindset that does not reject tradition but rather seeks adaptive forms that align with modern lifestyles. These findings align with broader consumer behaviour theories that emphasize the interaction of identity, social norms, and situational context in shaping purchase decisions.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes theoretically by strengthening understanding of how cultural identity functions as a determinant of fashion consumption behaviour among young adults. From an industry perspective, the findings suggest that fashion brands can enhance market engagement by integrating cultural aesthetics with contemporary design to appeal to youth segments. At the policy level, the results highlight the importance of supporting traditional textile industries and cultural heritage initiatives that sustain indigenous fashion practices. However, the study is limited by its small sample size, reliance on convenience sampling, and self-reported responses, which may restrict generalizability. Future research may expand the sample across regions, employ probability sampling techniques, and incorporate advanced statistical analysis to examine deeper causal relationships between identity, social influence, and fashion purchase intentions.

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