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**INFLUENTIAL FACTORS OF RESIDENTIAL AREA ON TERTIARY FEMALE
STUDENTS' DRESS CODE**

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ABSTRACT

Dress codes vary widely, and many cultures have different and strong "modesty codes". Many people have certain clothing expectations and, or thoughts about what is reasonable or justified for people to wear. When the majority of people share the same expectations in a society, standards form, and standards are guidelines and principles that set forth what's appropriate, or suitable to wear. Dress is seen as a visible symbol for fundamental beliefs that can be influenced by several factors, therefore, resulting in various types of clothing styles that are worn. Swaziland media has published stories on girls deemed to be inappropriately dressed with concerns expressed on female students' dress code at the University of Swaziland (UNISWA) graduation ceremonies. This descriptive study therefore, attempted to ascertain factors that influenced female students' dress-code; and, also to determine types of clothes students perceived as modest. A closed-ended questionnaire was validated and thereafter pilot-tested with UNISWA students, at Mbabane Campus and a reliability coefficient of 0.881 obtained. Questionnaires were distributed to ninety six 3rd and 4th year female students resident at Luyengo Campus, UNISWA. SPSS version 17.0 was used for data analysis. From results, students' dress code was mostly influenced by self (64.4%), media (59.4%) while relying on trends (always) was least influential (26%). With reference to pants, a majority of respondents perceived wearing pants as proper (76.0%) with close-fitting pants highly preferred (93.8%); and, close-fitting skirts (83.3%) highly favoured. Results further showed that students' perceptions on clothing depended on their residential area e.g. urban, suburban, or rural; with region having little influence, while location of the residential area in the region had a significant influence on respondents' perception of modesty and immodesty. Thus, it can be concluded that environments of upbringing played a significant role in respondents' perceptions of modest and immodest clothing.

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INTRODUCTION

Dress Codes

On doors of businesses there are sometimes signs that warn "No shirt, no shoes, no service". This statement is a simple dress code, a set of rules that describe acceptable or required clothing. Many restaurants require customers to wear shoes and shirts because of health laws; many schools and offices have dress codes for students and employees. Many people have certain clothing expectations and, or thoughts about what is reasonable or justified for people to wear at different places and for different occasions. When the majority of people share the same expectations in a society, standards form, and standards are guidelines and principles that set forth what's

appropriate or suitable to wear but standards can change over time (Weber, 2008, 42-43). Dress codes vary widely, and many cultures have different and strong "modesty codes" (NHS Trust, n.d. p.10). In schools and colleges, homogeneity is important; also, wearing the same clothes brings a sense of unity among the students. College is considered as a real place where people from various religions, cultures and different backgrounds come to make their future, and don't need moral policing; and thus, discrimination on the basis of one's looks or brand of clothes they wear shouldn't be condoned. People should have the freedom to be a little trendy and fashionable, as well as of choosing their dress code which allows them to mix and match with whatever they want. While wearing costly clothes may sow seeds of hurt and jealousy amongst the other students at college, it is important to note that students go to college for studying it doesn't matter what they wear. But a balance should be struck between wearing their identity and maintaining a social décor (Singh, 2012).

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Modesty versus Immodesty

According to Gregston (2014) although some high school girls may fully understand the need for modesty, but because of peer pressure, they are challenged to “fit in” to a culture that doesn't exactly affirm the values they know to be true; thus these girls are torn between doing what is acceptable by their peer group so as to “fit in” and doing what is taught them by their families and the church. The definition of modesty has changed for them, not so much because of the lack of values taught by parents, but because of the overwhelming exposure given to seductive lifestyles. Furthermore, the author (2014) blames teenage girls' seductive dressing on the culture which has become so pervasive resulting in today's teens being shaped by a world of sexual innuendoes where outward packaging and presentation is very important. While dressing seductively may just be a fad that soon passes, but at that particular time teens would be engaged in playing out a role on the stage of adolescence. This fad can be a challenge for parents to manage, since the internet, coupled with books, television, music videos and movies have all inundated the youth with seductive images and inappropriate suggestions. Highly sexualised lifestyles are touted as normal, so girls face extreme social pressure to look and act seductively as well. Parents have to make sure that they impress to the girl child that modesty is an important part of their family values and an area they would not allow to be compromised, no matter what the current culture or fad says.

This is affirmed by Gregston's (2014) quote from Martin Luther's saying “...*have(ing) righteous principles in the first place...they will not fail to perform virtuous actions*”. Monique (1997), a Jamaican's view on modesty dressing affirmed by observations from the visitors: Deb, Shala and Marie, and many others who had made several trips to Jamaica, stressed the importance of being culturally correct and to dress conservatively considering that local women wore skirts and blouses or dresses; thus, tight and revealing clothing, and parading around in shorts especially in restaurants or in the countryside (except on the beach) was not advisable. This was believed to encourage and attract propositions from men and at the same time invite glares and ridicule from local women. Further advice from Monique (1997) suggested being moderate in dressing and more covered up for less attraction of unwanted attention. Special reference was made to women in Kingston who were noted for their pride in wearing dresses and suit-dresses mostly to visit, and suits for going to work; thus, wearing of jeans in those instances would not be acceptable resulting in locals looking at the individual as a “bad girl from downtown” therefore its important and advisable to be moderate in dressing.

Factors Influencing Clothing Selection

Peer and Familial Influences in Clothing Selection

How people relate to clothing is determined by several factors, amongst them being peer groups, family, media, one's age and body size. A peer group consists of people with similar backgrounds, social status, and age; that is, one's friends and classmates for the young, while an adult's peers would be friends and job associates. A peer group can have great influence on how people dress and act. Problems arise though,

when the group's idea of “right” conflicts with the individual's beliefs as well as the family's (Weber, 2008, p.28). Many teens like the feeling of security and belonging that comes with conformity and wearing similar clothing. “One possible explanation for adolescents' tendency to belong to homogeneous peer groups is that they select individuals who are already similar to themselves. Another explanation could be, when an individual socialises with a particular group of people, he or she tends to adopt the behaviours or traits they have” (Prinstein and Dodge (2009). According to Sancheti (2009, p.35), study results showed that clothing behaviour played an important role in conformity-individuality conflict for students, and girls with extreme clothing behaviour were reported to be ignored by their peers. Also, girls were more influenced by their peers while boys were more influenced by their families. It is also noted that girls showed a tendency to use clothing as a means of self-expression and also approval from their friends (2009, p.62). A study by Wilson and MacGillivray (1998) indicated that older students paid greater attention to friends' opinions and less to parents'. During adolescence, the desire to belong to an identifiable peer group is often expressed through clothing, hairstyle and behaviour.

Such is the importance and the need for conformity to avoid provoking ridicule and social isolation. Clothing that doesn't fit the groups' standards may be criticised; as the person can be talked about, laughed at, or teased. The peer group's push to conform is called peer pressure, and group members can benefit from positive peer pressure (e.g. conforming to school community customs can bolster a teen's self-confidence). Through conformity many teens like the feeling of security and belonging that comes with wearing of similar clothing. From the four-year longitudinal study by Kelley and Eicher (1970) cited by Sancheti (2009, p.34) it was concluded that ‘appearance and clothing was an important factor for teenagers in their choice of friendship’. With awareness of and conformity to clothing being highly related to peer acceptance, ‘the relationship between clothing awareness and conformity to clothing was significant and influenced by environmental factors such as income level, differing views and freedom in selection’ (Sancheti, 2009, p. 34). When imposing a dress code, a peer group can be highly critical, sometimes thoughtlessly so, of anyone who fails to meet the code; thus, name-calling, labelling, and exclusion from the group and its activities can follow.

To resist negative peer pressure, confidence that comes from a clear understanding of one's own self-concept and values is needed. Almost everyone has a strong desire to be part of a group, yet on the other hand people feel the need to be original in some way. As a teen's self-confidence grows, the need to express individuality increases. This desire to express individuality can conflict with the desire to conform, for example, one may want to dress like peers in order to belong; and yet at the same time, may want their own clothes to represent self, not everybody else (Weber, 2008, pp. 66-67). ‘Throughout their lifespan, children are influenced by their family members’, and clothing choices are no exception, as family activities often influence those choices. Mothers usually have the most influence, but this influence weakens with children's growth and that of peers increases; therefore, peer conformity becomes more important during adolescence years (Sancheti, pp.22, 28, 70). Furthermore, through their

daily interactions, daughters learn values related to attraction, self-image, body issues and clothing from their mothers, who also contribute to the relationships those adolescents have with their peers (2009, p.22).

Clothing Factors Influencing Clothing Selection

Clothing was initially used as a means of protection for the primitive man although now it has grown to be an inseparable part of individuals, and referred to as a “second skin” in establishing the physical boundaries of the self (Horn and Gurel, 1981). As an extension of the body, clothing can affect body image perception and functions to strengthen or weaken the body-image boundary. Theorists indicated four reasons as explanation for why people began to wear clothes which were as follows: “First is the *modesty theory* that explained modesty as a basic function of clothing. The second theory explained the use of clothing to *attract attention*. A third theory is related to the *protection and utility* aspect of clothing. And finally, the fourth theory included such aesthetic functions as: *a sexual lure; indicator of status, bravery and skill; a means of identification of group membership; and as an extension to self*” (Sancheti, 2009, p.64). Brock’s (2007) study indicates eight emerging themes, which were brand, colour, comfort, fit, labelled size, quality, store-preference and style for apparel preferences of tween girls, with fit as the most supported by content analysis. In a study by deKlerk and Tselepis (2007, p.418) both intrinsic (fabric, style, size, ease) and extrinsic (peer group opinion, fashion, brand name, feeling good, feel in control, feeling of fit-in) factors played a role in the evaluation and expectation of fit in a study of 13-year old girls.

Technological Influences

Media exposure and clothing choices

The authors Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) cited by Sancheti (2009, p.13) indicated that media exposure has been defined as the number of hours spent by an individual watching television as well as reading magazines. New technological advancements, and advent of many latest machinery has led to availability of cost effective, quick, ready-to-wear, easy to care and easy to handle garments; and, thus greatly affecting the choices of women by giving them a range of new fabrics and garments and therefore, easily capturing the customers’ attention. Modern day women tend to use the latest technology, searching the internet for the latest styles, designs and cuts that suit their personality, rather than wasting their time in designing and choosing a new style. An added advantage being that, internet also provides information on finding a location for the particular store or a designer outlet; and, also websites. The easy provision of internet to the common man helps individuals to be in touch with latest happenings in the fashion world with many more websites giving useful information regarding the upcoming trends (Ijaz, 2012). “Today’s youth live in a technologically savvy world”, are empowered with technology and therefore more connected with the world through media influence; and thereby being better at using computer technology than the previous generations. With about two-thirds of them having easy access to cable television in their bedrooms; thus television has become their number one influence (Siegel, Coffey, and Livingston, 2004; Sancheti, 2009, p.55) and source of brand information (Lindstrom and Seybold, 2003) with approximately 85% of these tweens having television as their

source of brand information. Branding and marketing have been noted for bringing great changes in the field of textiles and clothing (Ijaz, 2012). The media in the forms of movies, television, radio, and print exerts an enormous, almost a normative influence, over the lives of men, women, adolescents and children; and, particularly among teenagers, the ways in which individuals and groups dress, talk, behave, and think. In support of this, Siegel *et al.*, (2004) indicated that today’s tweens are also influenced by taped shows, videos, movies, music videos, internet and digital cable in addition to the old media (television, radio, magazines). Weber (2008, p.320-323), affirms the previous author by indicating that youth learn about fashion through advertising media such as newspapers, radio, and television infomercials, the internet and catalogues. Furthermore, contemporary U.S. media images portray unrealistically thin bodies that are seen as attractive characteristics of cultural standards of beauty; it’s no wonder therefore, that adolescents use these media images to learn about self-expression and self-image (Damhorst *et al.*, 2005; Jung and Lennon, 2003). Media is such a powerful tool that it literally governs the direction of our society today. It is the propeller as well as the direction provider of the society. Opinions can change overnight and celebrities can become infamous with just one wave by the media. The mass media is considered to be the backbone of democracy that influences socio-political developments (dreath26, 2013). The new electronic communications medium of the internet helps to connect individuals to one another and to the world; given that teenagers are often highly impressionable and subject to such influences, invariably, this powerful influence shapes the ways in which viewers or participants perceive the world and their own place within that world (nbhvreddi, 2010).

Environmental Factors Influencing Clothing Selection

Environment as defined in the American Heritage Dictionary (2001) means “the totality of circumstances or conditions surrounding an organism or a group of organisms”; and, with regards to the complexity of social and cultural conditions affecting the nature of an individual or community. Environment could therefore, be considered as a sum total of surrounding things, place and cultural norms. Sancheti (2009, p.54) noted that Roach-Higgins, Eicher and Johnson’s (1995) study, investigated on cultural, time and place constructs that influence dress and identity. According to them, cultural constructs include technological resources, moral standards, health and hygiene, aesthetic expression and rituals. Time and place constructs included fashion, ethnic groups as well as a cosmopolitan dress defined as one worn across national boundaries.

Cultural and Demographic Factors Influencing Clothing Selection

Different objects at different points in time provide meaning to cultural perspectives and clothing is one such perspective (Kaiser, 1997). Clothing, when viewed through the cultural perspective, is a product of cultural norms and values that transform one’s identity to create a picture and provide meaning to social life. Cultural and demographic factors such as ethnicity, place of residence and income of family may also affect the clothing behaviour of adolescents (MacGillivray and Wilson, 1997; Kaiser, 1997; and Sancheti, 2009, p.66, 70). Other researchers found that strong ethnic identification leads

to particular choices of apparel and these choices are matched by strong feelings (Chattaraman and Lennon, 2008). Society influences what people wear, and people share certain traditions, institutions and interests, with each society having its own culture, collected ideas, skills, beliefs and institutions of that society at a particular time in history. Cultural differences are what set societies apart from one another with every culture having something special and unique about its clothing. Distinctive clothing styles and national costumes have been developed by many.....Chek source and various cultures over the centuries (Weber, 2008, p.30-37).

Residence's influence on clothing selection

Area and cultural norms associated with clothing affect the way individuals respond to each other as well as their attitude towards dress. The geographic location and climate often determine the type of clothing, with the assumption being that urban dwellers have a better and more extensive wardrobe than rural dwellers. Sancheti's (2009, p. 67) study results showed significant differences between urban and rural adolescents on all factors with reference to use of clothing except for economic factors. Rural adolescents were less likely to use clothing for social approval and distinction than their urban counterparts, and were more into conforming clothing use. More homogeneity in rural populations makes them somewhat different than urban dwellers.

Problem Statement

Dress is seen as a visible symbol for fundamental beliefs that can be influenced by several factors; the same applies to (University of Swaziland) UNISWA female students' dress code which seems to have been influenced by these factors resulting in preferred clothing styles worn. Similarly, the culture of a society expresses its ideas and values about appearance and fashion. In Swaziland, the wearing of mini-skirts, crop and skimpy tops or other dress codes exposing suggestive parts of their bodies have been discouraged in the exception of "indlamu" a tiny beaded belt worn during the traditional cultural reed dance. Failure to oblige could lead to a risk of being arrested and thus face a six-month jail term; a directive by Swazi police in reaction to a march through Manzini city by young women, some wearing mini-skirts, in their plight of seeking equal rights, safety and freedom of choice in their dress codes. The ban also applied to low-slung jeans and tank tops (Anonymous, 2012a & b). To further support these sentiments, a speaker at a UNISWA student gathering indicated that the general dress code of women was important and called for females to make sure that their bodies were not exposed (Dlamini, 2009). Thus, with regard to these sentiments, the Swazi newspapers have published a number of stories on harassment of girls deemed to be inappropriately dressed especially at bus ranks; and, furthermore concerns have been expressed on female students' dress code, especially with reference to graduation ceremonies.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study therefore, was to ascertain factors that influenced UNISWA's Luyengo Campus female students' dress code with reference to respondents' demographics of region and location of residence; and, to explore students' perception on modest and immodest clothes, so as to get

insight on types of clothes students perceived as proper to be worn. It is envisaged this awareness would be helpful to students' day-to-day choices of clothing, ensuring that what they wear defines who they really are and affirms the values they believe in. The specific objectives addressed in this study were as follows: Identify factors that influence female students' dress code; Determine female students' perception on modesty and immodesty; and, Compare means of selected demographic characteristics with perceptions on modesty and immodesty.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Instrument Development

The descriptive research design study used convenience sampling and targeted all 3rd and 4th year female students, residents of Luyengo Campus, and in the different programmes on offer by UNISWA Faculty of Agriculture. A four-part, closed-ended questionnaire was designed according to the study's objectives, and with illustrations of different outfits for respondents to select their preferences. Validity and reliability of the instrument (Isaac and Michael, 1995) were conducted. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in the subject area and attested to its content and construct validity. For consistency, clarity, suitability and appropriateness of the instrument, Pilot-testing using (n=30) students from UNISWA's Mbabane Campus who were not part of the main study was done. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated on the domains of the questionnaire to test for reliability coefficient. Results for the different domains were as follows: factors influencing dress code (0.831); perception on modesty and immodesty (0.942); and, an overall reliability coefficient of 0.886.

Data Collection and Analysis

Ninety-six questionnaires, hand-delivered to the respondents' rooms were all successfully collected after two days. Data were analysed using SPSS version 17.0 to yield descriptive statistics such as means, standard deviation, frequencies, percentages and correlation. The Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to describe the differences between variables for the study's objectives. Responses were grouped and represented in frequency tables showing the frequencies of responses and percentages. One-Way ANOVA was used for the objective, which was to compare means of selected demographic characteristics with perception on modesty and immodesty.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Demographics

Most of the respondents were in 3rd year (55.2%), with 44.8% being in 4th year and respondents' ages from 20–25 (95.8%). Manzini region had the highest participants (32.3%) and most of the respondents were from rural areas (45.8%). Participants of the study were from ten (10) programmes of study within the Faculty of Agriculture in UNISWA. They were as follows: Consumer Science Education (COSE); Consumer Science (COS); Textiles, Apparel Design and Management (TADM); Food Science, Nutrition and Technology (FSNT); Agricultural

Education and Extension (AEE); Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness Management (AEM); Horticulture (HORT); Agricultural and Biosystems Engineering (ABE); Animal Science (ANISc); and Agronomy (AGRO) (Figure 1).

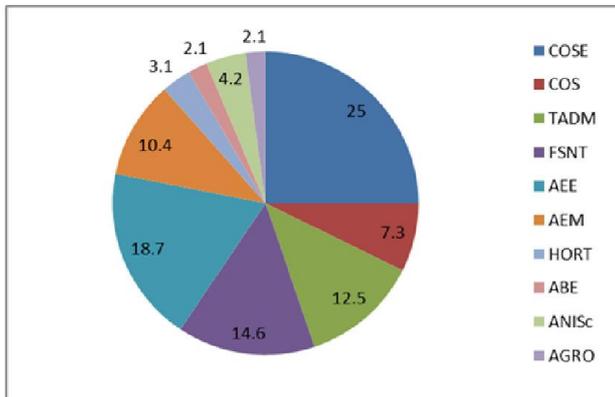


Figure 1. Respondents' Demographics

Factors that Influenced Female Students' Dress Code

Results of the study as shown in Figure 2 indicated that, respondents' preferred dress code was mostly influenced by peers (41.7%) than by celebrities (34%), while 59.4% respondents learnt about new fashion or trends from the media. A majority of the respondents (64.4%) indicated that "no one" influenced their choices of fashion styles. Trends only influenced 26.0% respondents, while 56.3% indicated that trends sometimes had an impact on their choices. Furthermore, friends' complements on respondents' dress-code (49.0%) mattered more than that of the general public (30.2%). Although family is an important influential factor the questionnaire had no provision for respondents to indicate family influence on respondents' clothing selection, given that this age group was more independent and therefore, not relying on family for their clothing choices.

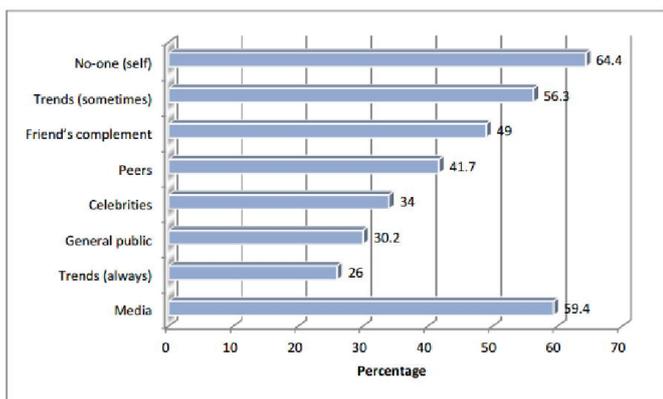


Figure 2. Respondents' perceptions on factors affecting their dress code

Respondents' Perception on Modesty and Immodesty

With reference to Figure 3, a majority of respondents perceived wearing pants as proper (76.0%), with a preference of casual pants (87.5%); and, mostly close-fitting pants (93.8%). Close-fitting skirts were favoured (83.3%) and above-knee length skirts (72. 1%) while 77.1% viewed above-knee skirts as proper, and 70.8% preferring loose-fitting short

summer skirts. With regards to wearing leggings (83.3%) respondents preferred them with a long top than a short top, while 92.7% respondents settled for short summer shorts rather than the very-short ones. Results further indicate that 58.3% chose a conservative summer top.

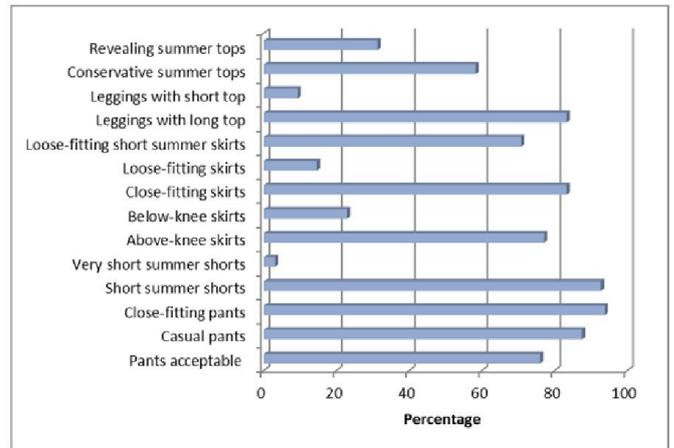


Figure 3. Respondents' perceptions on preferred modest and immodest clothing

One-Way Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine respondents' differences in their residential area and the perception on modesty and immodesty. From Table 1, the significance value (0.304) indicated that region had little influence on respondents' perception on modesty and immodesty; whereas, the significance value (0.001) for the location of respondents' residential area in the region, meant that the residential area had a significant influence on the respondents' perception on modesty and immodesty.

Table 1. Respondents' perceptions on modesty and immodesty based on residential area

Demographics	Freq	%	Mean	SD	F-value	Significance
Region						
Manzini	31	32.3	1.7563	0.12642	1.228	0.304
Hhohho	26	27.1	1.7607	0.14296		
Shiselweni	23	24.0	1.7488	0.17478		
Lubombo	16	16.7	1.8333	0.16229		
Area location						
Urban	31	32.3	1.7921	0.12420	7.899	0.001
Suburbs	21	21.9	1.6614	0.96070		
Rural	44	45.8	1.8030	0.16578		

Significance level=0.05 (n=96)

Conclusion, Implications and Recommendations

Factors that Influence Dress Code

From results, respondents' dress code was influenced more by "self" (64.4%) than by media (59.4%) or trends (56.3%). With reference to pants, a majority of respondents perceived wearing pants as proper with close-fitting pants highly favoured (93.8%). From results clothes viewed as proper by some respondents were considered improper by others, as there is no general definition for modesty (Damhorst *et al*, 2005). It can therefore, be inferred that respondents' paramount concern when dressing was more about pleasing themselves (64.4%) and how comfortable and content they were in their clothing choices. Thus, respondents primarily considered protection as a first priority, among other purposes of clothing.

Difference in Perceptions of Modesty Based on Demographic Characteristics

Results of respondents' responses indicated that region had little influence on their perception on modesty and immodesty; but, the location of the residential area in the region had a significant influence to respondents' perception on modesty and immodesty. Although, respondents may have been from the same region, but their perception on modesty and immodesty diverged, in relation to whether they came from urban, suburban, or rural part of that region. Thus, modesty cannot be generally defined because it is based on beliefs of sub-cultures. What may be considered modest in one society or sub-culture may be perceived as immodest by another (Damhorst et al, 2005). From reviewed literature consumer socialisation theoretical framework describes the interaction of personal and environmental causes on behavioral outcomes; with attitudes or behavioral outcomes being influenced through peer communication, familial communication, and online social networking usage which are seen as the socialisation agents. Therefore, it can be concluded that environments of upbringing played a significant role in respondents' perceptions of modest and immodest clothing. Results of the study could be helpful to the apparel industry; findings related to desired clothing attributes and buying behaviour would be helpful in understanding and thus making available the preferred clothing by the young university level women.

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