



“Exploring The Influence Of Fashion Trends On Collegiate Youth Social Dynamics: A Case Study In Darjeeling”

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of fashion trends and consumption patterns on the youth of Darjeeling, specifically focusing on women aged 16-24. Employing qualitative methodology, including case studies and telephone interviews, the research delves into how fashion influences social relations and peer group selection. The significance lies in understanding how fashion shapes social identity and interactions among youths. Analysis reveals that fashion trends serve as a means of self-expression and social belonging, with consumption patterns contributing to the construction of social identity. Findings highlight the role of in-groups and out-groups in fashion choices and social interactions, with peers exerting significant influence. The study underscores the importance of considering fashion as a social phenomenon that impacts youth culture and societal dynamics.

Keywords: Fashion Trends; Fashion Consumption; Consumption Pattern; Role of Fashion; Social Interaction; Social Identity; Peer Group Selection; Social Significance; Identity Construction; Symbolic Consumption; Brand Consciousness.

Introduction: The term fashion is defined initially as the social systemic production, consumption and institutionalization of novelty is a cultural phenomenon that integrates culture, the individual and the economy. It is both an idea and an ideal. In simple sociological definition fashion is ‘being first with the latest’. The word ‘fashion’ is derived from the Latin word *facere* which means ‘to make’ and in European languages it is derived from the word ‘modus’ which means ‘to measure’. (Ann-Mari, Sellerberg & Aspers, Patrik. (2015) Fashion, *Sociology of International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*).

The role of fashion in the society increased with recent growth of prosperity and the increased importance of consumption, mass markets, urbanization, density and atleast some social mobility (Slater 1997). Even Marshall (1923, p. 260) noted that, "Until a little while ago it was only the rich who could change their clothing at the capricious order of their dressmakers: but now all classes do it." Thus we can see that fashion is now available to all and not restricted to a particular class group. Fashion is also significant to culture because it offers artistic appearances not only in areas including clothing and dress but also in habits, cultural customs and religious acts through which people identify with or differentiate from various communities. Allen Lowery, sociology professor of Kent State, says that “fashion plays a major role in the conformity

within a cultural group and the act of identifying as an individual within that group". Social interaction has a dynamic nature in the fashion context (Hackley, 2005). Consumers make social statements through their clothing; especially in terms who they are and who they are not (Moynagh & Worsley, 2002; Banister & Hogg, 2007). Consumers use clothing as a means of communicating membership or separation from social groups (Auty & Elliott, 1998).

Fashion has a significant role in the modern society wherein it has become an important social aspect of an individual. It not only has economic implications but also provides social identity to an individual in the society. Especially among the youths, fashion plays an important role as it provides means of self-expression and identity within their social group and environment. Not only fashion but even the fashion consumption pattern plays a significant role in understanding the importance of fashion among the collegiate youth and the social meaning they attach to these consumption patterns. Fashion not only implies to the way and individuals dresses but it also carries symbolic and ideological meanings to it. Hence it is important to study the role of fashion and its impact among the youth which in turn affect their social groupings and interactions.

Fashion serves as more than just clothing; it embodies a cultural phenomenon that influences social interactions, self-expression, and identity construction, especially among the collegiate youth. Despite its pervasive influence, limited research has explored the intricate relationship between fashion trends, consumption patterns, and social dynamics among youths, particularly in regions like Darjeeling. This study aims to bridge this gap by examining how fashion impacts social relations and peer group selection among young women in Darjeeling.

The research area of this study is Darjeeling, the part of West Bengal. It is important to note that the area had been under the influence of the Britishers during the British rule in India hence it had earlier influence of the modernization process. However in the contemporary times there has been a radical change especially among the youths in regard to the fashion trend and styles. Thus in this study the researcher tries to analyze the fashion trend among the collegiate youths of Darjeeling and how its impact the social interaction and relation among the youths. The youths from the age of 16-24.

Methodology: Adopting a qualitative approach, this study employs case studies and telephone interviews to gather insights into the experiences and perspectives of young women aged 16-24 in Darjeeling. A purposive sampling technique is utilized to select 15 respondents, focusing on students in schools. Data collection involves semi-structured telephone interviews recorded with consent. The analysis explores the influence of fashion trends and consumption patterns on social identity and interactions among youths.

The methodology of this study is based on the objectives. Objectives being:

- To understand the impact of fashion trend among the youths in Darjeeling
- To understand the role of consumption pattern in creation of a social identity among the youths
- To understand the influence of fashion on their social group and social interaction.

Adopting a qualitative approach the study will focus on the fashion trend and consumption pattern among the collegiate youth of Darjeeling and its impact on social relation and peer group selection, with special category of women from age 16-24. In this study the researchers tries to determine the impact of consumption pattern of the individuals and also understand its impact on their selection of their immediate social group (peer groups) a purposive sampling technique is utilized to select 15 respondents, focusing on students in colleges, i.e., St. Joseph College, Southfield College and Government College, Darjeeling respectively. Data collection for the study involves semi-structured telephone interviews recorded with consent. The analysis explores the influence of fashion trends and consumption patterns on social identity and interactions among youths.

Findings: The findings reveal that fashion trends play a significant role in shaping social identity and interactions among young women in Darjeeling. Participants view fashion as a means of self-expression and belonging within their social groups. Consumption patterns, primarily consisting of local retailer purchases and occasional online shopping, contribute to the construction of social identity. While some participants exhibit brand consciousness, others prioritize personal style over brands due to limited availability in the region.

The respondents were mostly youth pursuing their studies and few of them were looking for jobs. Youths' have strong recognitions for fashion trends and they use fashion as a means of communication in different personal and social situations. From the study, we find out that the western trends of fashion was prevalent among these youths. It also found that fashion trends played an important role among the youth which influenced their social groups and interactions. The respondents said that though they do keep up with the fashion trends but it was not necessary to follow the latest trend. However, the youth would also dress according to the occasion and these different occasions also influenced the dressing styles. The self is reflexive in nature (Banister & Hogg, 2007), and to fit in with others, participants stated to modify their styles according to different occasions. Dressing the social self according to different occasions is largely influenced by the reference group and this reflects how individuals are more likely to conform to the in-group (social group). The importance of fashion among the youth is due to its geographical area, wherein, in a small town where people know each other personally or through social media in a close knit society, the research found that the youths were concerned and conscious about their outer appearance and how people judged them by their outer looks. The study also found that fashion trend impacted the youth with social pressure to form a social self, wherein an individual had to be presentable in town. Though apart from their social group, the ever increasing fashion blogs and fashion influencers on the internet also tremendously influence the fashion trend among these youths. The youth showed significant interest in the fashion trends which would influence the interaction among its social group and create a social self that is the one's outer appearance in the society.

The second objective of the study was to understand the role of consumption pattern in creation of the social identity. The research found that consumption pattern among these youths were more or less similar wherein all the respondents purchased their clothing once or twice in a month. They mostly purchased in the local retailers shop since Darjeeling does not have much branded shops around, though they at times shopped online. The study also reveals that the consumption of these fashion products contribute to the creation of youth's social identity. The respondents were active fashion consumers with a clear interest in the fashion styles or preferences that they thought to represent their identity, aspirations and lifestyle.

And lastly, the study highlights the importance of in-groups and out-groups in influencing fashion choices and social interactions among youths. Peers and family members emerge as key influencers in shaping fashion preferences and identity construction. Additionally, the impact of societal and peer pressure on fashion choices underscores the complex interplay between individual preferences and social norms.

Conclusion: The youth chose certain fashion trend and style to communicate their personality and showcase their identity to distinguish themselves from others who have different fashion taste or style. Through the consumption of these fashion products they are constructing their sense of self and what they would like to be. The respondents also saw their values and physical view of the self through fashion styles, it also accentuated physical forms were important for some respondents. The consumption of these fashion products have been boosted by the use of internet among the youths, wherein they are exposed to the new fashion products which are not available in these small town retailer shops. Consumption of these fashion possessions are also used to showcase who they wanted to be. The research also found that consumption of these products carry symbolic meanings that are attributed to it by these youths and unknowingly communicates their social identity among them. The consumption pattern also portrays their economic status of the individual, however the study focuses more on the social impact of their purchases wherein, the consumption pattern reveals the social condition created by these fashion trends and the importance attached to the consumption of these fashion products by these youths'. Through consumption of shared symbols, individuals express their group membership (Belk, 1988). Fashion and their consumption are important tools in identity construction, especially in terms of distance communicating and or belongingness to a particular social group. According to McCracken (1988), consumption is a way of realising one's identity in the society e.g. as a man or a woman. Being a woman can be considered as a part of the core sense of self, and respondents stated that their feminine forms had influenced their fashion style and preferences. Respondents also used fashion styles as a means of controlling their social identities and differentiating themselves from others was important, but at the same time, fitting in with others was also important. The respondents were found to construct their identities through the fashion styles and preferences of their friends who had an important role in deciding which fashion styles were or were not popular or acceptable. Thus, respondents

were found to trust on the feedback of their peers, and perhaps family members, on matter of fashion choices or styles. The study also reveals another important aspect of the fashion consumption pattern is fashion brands. Brands also play an important role in the creation of the social self. The brand communicates belongingness to a particular social group with whom the individual feels their social identity to be incorporated (Langner et al., 2013; Reed & Forehand, 2003). The symbolic meanings of possessions are not only used to communicate the identity of self and membership of social groups, social status and social position, but also to perceive others' identity (Dittmar, 1992; Belk, 1988; McCracken 1988; Wattanasuwan, 2005). Some of the respondents were brand conscious whereas the others were not concerned about the fashion brands. However, most of them if given a choice wanted to purchase branded fashion items which would inturn influence their social identity. But due to its small geographical area, much fashion brand outlets were not available wherein few of the respondents still purchased these branded products from the online market available.

In conclusion, this study underscores the significant role of fashion trends and consumption patterns in shaping youth social dynamics in Darjeeling. By understanding the nuanced relationship between fashion, social identity, and interactions, stakeholders can better address the needs and preferences of young individuals. Future research could explore the long-term implications of fashion influence on societal norms and cultural dynamics in similar regions.

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