

# The effect of gender on consumer behaviour

[Business](#), [Marketing](#)



## Introduction

Consumer behaviour patterns are influenced by the culture, the psychology, the social and financial status of the person making a shopping excursion.

The success or failure of the venture is affected by when, where, how and why people make the decision to go shopping.

This report investigates the differences between the genders when fashion buying decisions are made. It seeks to determine if there are basic influences affecting choice. Are they persuaded by advertising in magazines or on television? Do their friends or celebrities have an influence on their decision? Does their social life play a part?

Consumer behaviour is the study of why, when, where, and how people either do or do not buy products. It blends fundamentals of psychology, sociology, cultural experience and economics. This report covers an investigation into understanding the gender related buying decision making process. It seeks to find an answer to the question, why do ladies enjoy shopping and spending money and men do not? The survey also sought to confirm that women make more shopping visits than men and spend more money than men at that shopping.

There are a number of additional factors which could also affect consumer behaviour, shopping enjoyment and spending, these could not all be included in the questionnaire, due to size and time constraints.

Brand loyalty and advertising psychology, peer pressure relating to fashion and design, competition between brands and shops, and price, are all factors which affect the choice of fashion eventually made. Does a pair of jeans

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bought from the local market, against a pair of designer jeans from a designer boutique; really make any difference when all you are doing is studying.

The other main factor is the internet and the numerous ways of perusing the latest design fashions and the ease of buying them. Historically men have had a dislike of buying trips[1], since emancipation women have taken on the purchasing role [2], buying the clothes, toiletries etc. For the man. The fashion explosion of the 60's, 70's and 80's with rock and roll, punk and boy bands moved that shopping trend back to the male. The substantially increased numbers of the female university population over the same time frame held the balance. However the internet, releasing the man from shopping trips and making available a whole and constantly changing choice of fashion products could well now have quite a different result if this survey was repeated in 3 to 5 years.

## **Literature Review**

This report examines the effect of gender on consumer behaviour and the consequence those influences has on fashion choices. It analyses data from questionnaires to determine the influence of free time activities and the role of celebrities in the decision making process.

In an article published in 2001 Otnes C.[3] States that she believes “ Shopping is also increasingly recognized as contributing to the creation of self-identity of men and women and that it is possible for a man to simultaneously engage in consumer behaviour and maintain his masculine identity.”

Otnes's theory is that shopping for fashion is no longer seen as a female prerogative, there is no longer a stigma involved in men choosing fashions. She believes that this behaviour improves the self esteem, self expression and confidence of men.

The feminist view of consumer behaviour and fashion is explored by De Grazia, Victoria. & Furlough, Ellen. (1996) they write that; " Fashion codes and beauty standards are denounced as akin to purdah, footbinding or the veil – public sexual impositions on women, which, beyond domesticating women's drive towards liberation, constrain them physically and violate their authentic selves. The other side argues that mass consumption liberates women by freeing them from the constraints of domesticity."

They hypothesise that pre emancipation, men controlled the finances and determined the shopping list. Since emancipation, this has changed, along with the greater numbers of women seeking university education and equality in employment and financial control.

In a paper on gender related advertising published in Academy of Marketing Science Review, Putrevu S[4]. (2001) argues that wide advertising implications follow from the differences between genders. He believes, after observation that men, through pictures and music, benefit from nonverbal reinforcement of the verbal product message built into an advertisement. He believes that direct verbally descriptive messages carry more impact for the female.

He goes on to suggest that “ The rather strongly held gender identities suggest that appropriately targeted gender advertisements might be quite effective” This author believes that this marketing philosophy is very apparent in the design and targeting of fashion retail marketing and the role celebrities play in those adverts.

In a wide ranging study on gender behaviour titled in 2007, “ Men Buy, Women Shop,” researchers at Wharton’s Jay H. Baker Retail Initiative[5] and the Verde Group[6], a Toronto consulting firm, determined that women responded more positively than men to personal communication with sales associates. Men were more likely to react to more practical aspects of the experience, such as good parking, the length of the checkout line whether the item they came for was in stock.

Some quite emotive phrases are used throughout the literature available on consumer behaviour

Jennifer Waters[7], in an article in MarketWatch (2006) believes that “ Men are on a mission, women on an adventure when shopping.”

Paula Courtney[8], president of the Verde Group talks about “ hunters vs. gatherers” this phrase was published in a paper titled “ Men buy, Women Shop” (2007)

According to Wharton marketing professor Stephen J. Hoch, gender behaviour when shopping, reflects differences throughout many aspects of life. “ Women think of shopping in an interpersonal, human fashion and men treat it as more instrumental. It’s a job to get done,” he believes that the

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data available has implications for retailers marketing policies so they can design and develop a more segmented approach to building and maintaining loyalty among male and female customers.

Recognising the large numbers of potential buyers involved based at universities[9], Cosmopolitan Magazine has devoted a whole section to influence students fashion decisions and purchases.

Their February 2011 edition offers discounts for students, 20% off specific lingerie items, a student shopping soiree, 10 ways to save money at university and 30 days of Fashion and Beauty to come. The Cosmopolitan magazine is totally female orientated, covering fashion in clothing and toiletries. The Sunday Times however caters for all genders in their weekly fashion section. Their February issue has an article headline “ Combine cut-price student fashion with cool”, this offers tips for obtaining bargain outfits without damaging your credibility.

The OK magazine takes the use of celebrity marketing to the extreme; the whole content is built around celebrity fashion and influences, mainly female but with the odd male celebrity article inserted.

The shelves of magazine shops are literally full of female biased fashion periodicals with basically no male orientated publications, except for ‘ pin up’ magazines. Confirming the results of the questionnaire and the gender which is most influenced by celebrity marketing.

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine whether there were basic differences in the gender behaviour of students, when choosing items of fashion. It also looked at the influences of celebrities in fashion advertising and whether this had a bearing on the choices made by the students.

To obtain the information from which to draw conclusions, a questionnaire was designed and given to the 10 male and 10 female students, all in a relatively small age group, to eliminate any age influences. The procedure involved the right to withdraw and confidentiality related to the data was explained to each participant.

It was decided to use questionnaires rather than aural interviews to gather the data, because this author felt that the data would be easier to obtain and collate and then be easier to represent in graphical format. Interviews are normally held at a pre-determined time and place, with the interviewer completing a form based on what the respondent says. Questionnaires usually consist of short closed ended questions, whilst interviews are often broad open ended ones.

Questions 1 and 2 were age and gender identification. The gender split had been pre-determined and the age range was chosen to narrow the attitudes and fashion parameters of the participants. In a small sample of this size the input of an older student, with different fashion perceptions, could have serious effects on the data integrity.

Question 3 asks how often the students were inspired in their fashion choices by a celebrity look. This question was the first related to the influence of celebrities in both a passive i. e. Advertising and non-passive role i. e. Television shows. Question 4 examines the free time activities of the two genders. Did they mirror each other or were there marked differences and could the responses to this question be significant in consumer behaviour.

Questions 5, 7 and 8 were all celebrity biased. What influence did the participants think a celebrity had on them? If they had money to spend, would that be affected by the influence of a celebrity and how did they get in touch with the world of the celebrity. Question 6 asked the question, where did they get their fashion tips from?

## **Results and Discussion**

The results of this survey [10] illustrate some quite interesting deviations between gender

Behaviour and their attitudes to fashion purchasing. The age ranges were almost identical, 18 out of the 20 students questioned being between 18 and 23 years old. It can be assumed therefore that these students are spending time away from home for the first occasion, preparing for their adult life, living without help, making their own budget decisions but having the community and peer pressure of their fellow undergraduates. The answers to question 3 [11] in that 70 % of the men surveyed seldom or never were inspired by a celebrity look, whereas 90 % of the ladies were, sum up the basic differences in consumer behaviour as highlighted by Wharton [12] that



“ Men buy, Women Shop” and that women visit shops, not only to purchase goods but equally to enjoy the experience.

From question 4, it can be seen that one third of the ladies spent their spare time shopping, against one third of the men being involved in some sporting activity. It is also interesting that none of the ladies listed, used their computer as a free time activity but 40% of them, answered later, that they kept in touch with the celebrity world online and 60% of them got their fashion tips online.

Questions 7 and 8 relate to favourite celebrity influences with a substantial majority of ladies saying they were positively influenced, whilst the men were the opposite. This was mirrored in a question relating to having ? 1000 to spend, would they spend the money on a celebrity’s product. The majority of ladies saying yes, the majority of men, answered no.

In hindsight there were a few more questions which would have improved the data information. A question on their fashion definition would have been useful; was it clothing, footwear or toiletries. How was the shopping done; physical visits, catalogues, television, charity shops, the internet. How often did they go. How much money, as a percentage of their income did they spend?

## Conclusion

The data from the questionnaires confirmed a number of things relating to the original hypothesis, which was to determine whether there was a

difference in consumer behaviour relating to fashion, between the genders and if so what were the influences?

The differences were quite specific and at different ends of the available answers. Female students were very inspired by a celebrity look whereas men were not. In today's enlightened society where all sexes took an interest in fashion, cosmetics and appearance, this cannot be attributed just to a basic desire to look and smell nice. This author believes the main influence in this area is the ease of use of internet shopping, where access to the latest designs, bargains, outlets of female fashion is instantly available at any time of the day or night and with, in most cases, next day delivery. From the questionnaire responses 75% of the women replied that they got fashion information from the television or the internet as against 35% for men. This is quite surprising when it is set alongside the results that show 35% of the men get their fashion tips from magazines but only 10% of the women did. However the answer to this apparent anomaly is the availability and design of online magazines which are as colourful and full of adverts, articles and photographs as the paper version. They are mainly free to access with but as in the case of Cosmopolitan magazine some months out of date.

A more traditional response was that 70 % of the women would spend ? 1000, if they had it, on a celebrity's product, against 80% of the men who would not. Considering that this author believes there are few fashion items available, for both genders, which are not celebrity endorsed, then it would be interesting to determine where the male ? 1000 would be spent.

This report is about consumer behaviour and the influences of celebrities on the fashion perceptions of different genders. In a report issued in 2004 Bakewell, C. Mitchell, VW[13] stated that they believed that: “ The neglect of men in consumer decision making research is lamentable”.

They point out that men make up a significant shopping group and will make dissimilar shopping decisions to women. They argue that retailers should appeal to their male customers, by improving the competence of the processes and value perceptions, associated with the shopping experience. In other words ‘ overcome traditional male hostility’. Once again the results of the questionnaire confirm this. Men do not like shopping trips ‘ per se’ and see them as a chore and an experience to be avoided. Only 10% of the men responded that they went shopping in their free time.

In conclusion the evidence obtained from the survey showed quite different consumer behaviour between the genders especially relating to the influence of celebrities. Men had different communication avenues to fashion tips and celebrities, allowing those celebrities to have little or no influence on their consumer decisions. Women took far more interest in celebrity influences and were prepared to be persuaded by the celebrities’ attitude. The role of the internet is interesting, the results showing far more interaction between online uses by women than men. Equally the past relationship with parents was interesting, showing that neither gender was influenced at all, as far as fashion tips, by their parents. The conclusions are that celebrity involvement, either by magazine, online, advertising, television shows or shop fronts does

influence the consumer behaviour of women in relation to fashion but not men.