

# Cross-Generational Perspectives on Adolescent's Fashion: Changing Perceptions of Clothing Meaning Over Time

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## Abstract

Perceptions about fashion have evolved throughout the years. This paper seeks to understand how meanings associated with clothing transform over time, providing insights into the significance associated with fashion and clothing choices across three pairs, belonging to Traditionalists, Baby boomer, Generation X, Y and Z within the Indian cultural context. Subsequently, the paper also seeks to examine the commonalities and differences in the perceptions of adolescent clothing through a cross-generational study of an Indian family. A structured interview was taken of the family in order to understand the underlying perceptions in accordance within the chosen theme of the paper. Data collected from the interviews, consisting of six members (three males and three females) indicate that variations and commonalities exist in each individual's insights. Through this exploration, the research advances an understanding of the intricate intergenerational dynamics that influenced fashion sensibilities and meanings in the context of an Indian family.

*Keywords:* Adolescent, Inter-Generation, Fashion, Fast Fashion, Sustainability, Family

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## Introduction

There has been a constant exertion of evolution in the field of fashion- shaping styles, following trends and influence of the DIY culture. This exertion of evolution is a response to our surroundings that has perpetually been undergoing drastic changes over time. These changes are influenced by factors such as society, economy, generational perspectives and cultural beliefs. Fashion in a sense is '*contagious*' as its influence can drastically change an individual's perceptions about lifestyle, identity and expression (Kaur, 2016). In particular, children and adolescents' fashion has undergone dynamic changes owing to factors such as societal shifts, changes in perceptions and influence of social media trends. The meaning attributed in terms of clothing for these two categories of lifespan development is different in each generation.

One group that is most conscious about their style of clothing and their choice is the adolescents. The desire to be identified either as a cohort or an individual with a great fashion sense can be seen in adolescents (Maurya & Sharma, 2014). Adolescents begin to see trends surpassing social media as an influential force that helps them 'fit into' the group that shares similar behaviour, qualities and style (Solis, 2021).

Diana Solis, in her article addresses the pressure or the obligation felt by adolescents to conform to the trends on social media so as to fit in a group in order to prevent from being the odd one out or from being bullied (2021). A survey was conducted at the Urbana High School (UHS) with an aim to understand the differing opinions regarding outfits that can be worn in public and school. Results of the survey demonstrate that 16.7% of respondents depend on circumstances, 33.3% are unconcerned, and 50% occasionally worry about their appearance. 8.3% of respondents felt obligated to dress for school, whereas 33.3% view it as situational, 25% agree, and 33.3% refute a duty to dress. Remarkably, 75% of respondents emphasize personal comfort over passing fads and oppose the idea that one must adopt the newest trends in order to fit in. This difference in viewpoints is indicative of how the adolescent fashion is changing, with comfort and individual expression signifying a broader cultural movement.

## Significance

The present-day fashion industry is cyclical and dynamic. By examining trends, influences, and shifts in people's opinions about clothes, cross-generational research helps to clarify consumer behaviour. Comprehending the dynamic importance of attire facilitates disentangling the complex connections among individual expression, societal conventions, and vogue fads. It clarifies how global influences, technical breakthroughs, and cultural values impact fashion choices for all ages. Understanding adolescent fashion is essential as teenagers negotiate peer acceptability, identity construction, and cultural expectations.

In light of changing consumer behaviour and lifestyles, it is imperative to comprehend cross-generational viewpoints in children's fashion. Being a member of Generation Z, the authors lack historical context, and believe that researching children's fashion over time will help one understand the cultural and socioeconomic changes influencing these developments. This method investigates the evolution of children's fashion, offering insights into the relationship between conventional and contemporary shopping behaviours as well as the changing meaning of fashion.

The article "Childhood, Work, and Schooling: Some Reflections," by Vasanta, deepens one's knowledge of how cultural norms have shaped how important clothing is for kids. It shows how children's roles have changed over time, moving from being economic contributors in the past to the emphasis on leisure and education that exists today. Vasanta's research highlights the importance of children's clothing as a representation of their duties and provides insights into their dressing patterns, thanks to the historical context it reveals. The observations also show how contemporary elements like technology, communication, and urbanization interact with established social norms. The complicated environment of today shapes children's clothing choices and meanings through the interaction of historical expectations with modern problems and opportunities (2004).

The dynamics of adolescent fashion have evolved over the years with different generations having their own meanings, perspectives and traditions when it comes to fashion and the term 'clothing'. This paper aims to understand how meanings associated with clothing have transformed over time; across three pairs, each belonging to a different generation within the Indian cultural setting. Additionally, insight can be gained by understanding the commonalities and differences in perceptions of adolescent clothing, thus highlighting the complex relationship between cultural upheavals, societal changes, and wardrobe choices of the current youth.

The study's introduction is centred around a comprehensive understanding of the clothing in India along with the meaning of the term 'clothing'. Furthermore, adolescent clothing within the Indian cultural context is also explained. The different generations being studied are also elucidated within the context of Indian cultural setting.

### **Tapestry of Fashion and Clothing In India**

Apart from being merely functional, clothing also acts as a quiet messenger of one's personality, cultural identity, and social mores. Its importance has changed over time, taking into account various individual perspectives, societal values, and cultural changes. Clothing has evolved beyond its basic necessity as it now integrates with the current trends that reflect broader socio-cultural diversity (Tripathi, 2017).

India's diverse religious landscape, long history, and legacy of handicrafts are the roots of the country's eclectic fashion tradition. In the Vedic era, ladies adorned themselves with belts, pleated garments, shawls, and draped fabrics (Tyagi, 2017). Stitched garments became prominent post the Gupta Kingdom thus refining the clothing and dressing style. Each clothing piece from different regions of the country demonstrated the depth of artistic creativity ingrained in India's cultural tapestry. These works serve as artistic expressions in addition to depicting various historical eras. Both the royal family and the general public in the Mughal empire embraced grandeur and beauty in their clothing throughout Akbar's reign (Choudhary & Rao, 2020).

Traditional clothing such as the sari, ghagra choli, and dhoti continued to be popular in post-independence India alongside contemporary styles as designers experimented with cutting-edge cuts, materials, and decorations. Indian fashion was greatly influenced by the likes of Ritu Kumar and Satya Paul, who skillfully combined traditional craftsmanship with modern trends (IGNOU – The People's University, n.d.). Indian fashion gained international prominence for its distinctive fusion of innovation and legacy thanks to this blending of the old and the new. In the 1980s and 1990s, there was a cultural revolution in cities like Delhi and Mumbai, where people accepted Western ideas while maintaining their Indian traditions (Choudhary & Rao, 2020). This shift was mostly embraced by the adolescents in that particular period as by then the influence from media-Bollywood in particular had begun to set in. Films such as 'Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak'(1988), and 'Dostana' (1980), left a lasting impression on the Indian cinema as well as the fashion industry. Dresses particularly of white colours and floral prints had become popular amongst adolescents at that time. The film 'Dostana' (1980), prominently featured the trend of bell-bottom pants during the disco scenes, capturing adolescents and prompting them to embrace this aesthetic.

Adolescent fashion is changing today due to the combination of global fashion trends and media impact. Adolescents use a more independent approach to style, utilizing their clothing as a vehicle of self-expression, as opposed to following cultural conventions. Inspired by social media, international fashion trends, and influencers, they choose clothes that express their individuality, relationships with their peers, and respect for variety (Badaoui et al., 2016).

As adolescent fashion is explored, it is understood that each generation actively participates in and influences the evolving narrative of fashion. This generational contribution is particularly pronounced during adolescence, due to factors such as social beliefs, economic conditions and familial traditions. Adolescent fashion leads one to such a conclusion as the period is marked by heightened receptivity and expressiveness wherein they try to integrate and re-adapt changes taking place in their environment into their identity and fashion choices.

Fashion continues to be an influential form of communication and expression for the adolescents. Comprehending these transitions offers significant perspectives on the generational intricacies that persistently shape the constantly evolving realm of adolescent fashion.

### **The Generational Framework**

According to Erikson (2009), a generation is made up of people who, at the same age and with similar life experiences, belong to the same historical epoch. Using generational frameworks like Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials (Generation Y), and Generation Z, the population is frequently divided into discrete cohorts. Significant historical occurrences, innovations in technology, changes in culture, and social upheavals that took place during these groups' formative years—particularly in the early stages of adolescence—define them. Prior to the creation of generational frameworks, age groups and life phases were used by society to classify people (McCrindle & Wolfinger, 2010).

National characteristics vary greatly, even though the generational structure is universal. People born in the United States between 1928 and 1945 are referred to as Traditionalists (Cantrell, 2021). On the other hand, Mahatma Gandhi's nonviolent civil disobedience movement for independence, the end of British rule, and Gandhi's killing were all experienced by teenagers in India during this period. Strong feelings of patriotism characterized this period as Indian customs were brought back to life and a democratic republic was established. However, a poor economy, low literacy rates, pervasive poverty, and a stop to industrial progress made living conditions difficult in India. Following traditions was a key to success as one navigated the complexity of this newly developing India (Erickson, 2009).

*The Baby Boomer* generation—those born in 1946 and 1960–1964—saw tremendous shifts in society. Adolescents in the United States were impacted by the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement, while Indira Gandhi's leadership in India ushered in a socialist economy. With few options in a struggling economy, adolescents' decisions were frequently influenced by caste, community, or family. Seeking financial success frequently meant going abroad for work and school in the US, UK, or Middle East (Erickson, 2009).

Born between 1961/1965 and 1979, *Generation X* experienced profound shifts in worldwide society. Teenagers had to deal with economic hardships in the United States and political unrest in India after the assassination of Indira Gandhi. Amidst economic uncertainty and rapid changes in the surrounding, individuals born in this era in India were the first group to experience a digital revolution (Warren, 2022). For instance, early economic liberalization policies began to occur leading to implementation of digital adoption, providing new employment opportunities. Breaking down obstacles based on gender and caste, accessible education started (Erickson, 2009).

The generation commonly referred to as *Millennials or Generation Y* was born between 1980/1981 and 1995/1996, during which time technology became widely available, making them the most globally comparable generation to date. This generation's increased awareness of terrorism inspired them to live life to the fullest. Teenagers in the US benefited from a robust economy and a pro-child culture that encouraged positivity and goal-oriented conduct. Adolescents in India gained an understanding of global significance in the meantime due to the growing middle class, rising consumer demand, and greater production (Erickson, 2009).

Born between the middle of the 1990s and the middle of the 2010s, *Generation Z* has been greatly impacted by technology, especially social media and the internet. This has influenced their viewpoints and fostered a strong feeling of individualism in both India and the United States. This generation has witnessed the swift growth of the digital world in India, characterized by pervasive smartphone and internet usage. This expansion has been greatly aided by Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL), especially in the areas of internet and telecommunications innovation (Erickson, 2009).

Born from the mid-2010 onwards are referred to as *Generation Alpha*. This generation both in the United States and in India are expected to be more technologically adept than Generation Z. This is also owing to the fact that Artificial Intelligence has come into the limelight, thus impacting their interpersonal relationships as well as their perspectives on their surroundings (Erickson, 2009). Additionally, the mindset of this generation with respect to fashion is different from generational groups. Gen Z is leading the way in the transition to sustainable practices and mindful consumption. This trend is best exemplified by upcycling old sarees into chic, contemporary clothing that emphasizes originality, ingenuity, and environmental responsibility. Redefining wardrobes to promote a more ethical and environmentally conscious world, young generations are adopting repurposed clothes and sustainable behaviours (R, 2024).

### **The Intergenerational Influence**

Intergenerational influence refers to the influence of a generation on another in terms of skills, preferences, values. Chadha (2004), in his paper elaborates the status and function of the elderly within family and community institutions as providers of wisdom and information. The support that families once provided for their elderly has diminished as Asian nations and regions grow economically and urbanize. These transitory changes have also been witnessed on the Indian subcontinent. Families maintain cultural traditions and ways of life while upholding social hierarchy rules where the elderly play a major role, even in the face of changes in the structures and functions of Indian society. Furthermore, because they are revered as stores of knowledge and experience, the elderly continue to be respected and have a significant role in both family and community settings.

This influence can be seen through the way of exercising parental control over the other members of the family. According to Mittal and Royne, intergenerational influence (IGI) outcomes are highly moderated by the quality of family relationships. In contrast to families with low family relationship quality, those with high family relationship quality experience stronger IGI consequences. These results, which support and expand on the body of knowledge already available on IGI and offer fresh avenues for future investigation, are important for theory as well as practice. They stress the significance of family dynamics in forming these patterns and the long-lasting effects of early parental influence on consumption behaviours (2010).

A general overview of the literature suggests that a varying proportion of the generations have conflicting ideas and views about fashion. This study explores how meanings associated with clothing transform over time along with examining the commonalities/differences that come across for adolescent clothing. To completely understand the ideas of adolescent clothing across several generations, this literature review is focused on generational influence on fashion, influence through digital media and frugality emerging in the cultural context.

Generational stratification is often defined in the context of socio-cultural and historical framework particularly to gain insights from individuals about their formative years (Warren & Hauser, 1997). In the context of clothing, generational stratification helps in highlighting factors that may have affected their clothing consumption during their formative years. Additionally, it also helps in understanding traits that may eventually be carried forward in further generations. Furthermore, cultural influences via the means of colours also affect the clothing choices across generations. A study conducted in 2017, aimed at understanding the perception of colours in fashion through comparison across generational cohorts – Baby Boomers and Generation Y. The study employed a quasi-experimental survey method using a seven-point Likert scale. Eight colours were added to the sample clothing image: four cool colours (white, teal, blue, and black) and four warm colours (red, yellow, orange, and brown). Results from the study revealed that both the generational cohorts displayed similar perceptions of colours in terms of warm-cold, soft-hard, young-old and fashionable-unfashionable scales. However, the perceptions of colour differed significantly, while testing the first hypothesis (H1). For example, Baby Boomers preferred orange-coloured apparel more than Generation Y, and there was a significant difference in the two groups' preferences for the colour orange. The two generations had differing perceptions about brown apparel, with Generation Y considering it to be outdated and out of style. The second hypothesis (H2)'s multiple regression analysis results showed that colour preferences were substantially correlated with self-esteem and fashion engagement. Preference for red apparel related to higher degrees of fashion participation and self-esteem. Although a generational cohort may prefer a particular clothing item of a certain colour, it may always not be perceived as fashionable and vice-versa. However, the findings of this study may differ across a country like India due to the diversity and versatility of cultures and colours. For instance,

clothing that has the colour brown may be perceived as dull and old; however, monks and ascetics wear clothing apparels consisting of brown and saffron robes (Chang & Shin, 2017).

Apart from family, an important relationship exists between motherhood and fashion. Mothers play a significant role in their adolescents' clothing choices and consumer socialization (Appleford, 2015). As suggested by Corrigan (1989) and Klepp and Storm-Mathisen (2005), this relationship comes to its testing period during adolescence. Social groups and peers are often known as an 'influential source' of decision making for adolescents. This influence further leads to either conflicts or shifts in preferences of clothing choices. Despite these hurdles, the bond between mothers and daughters with regard to clothing choices resurfaces in adulthood. Research by Woodward (2007) and Clarke and Miller (2002) revealed that adult daughters often turn to their mothers for guidance and encouragement when it comes to fashion decisions. This relationship demonstrates how moms continue to have an impact on their daughters' fashion choices long after the rebellious adolescent years (Appleford, 2015).

Adolescent fashion for the youth belonging to the current generation is heavily influenced by social media and its platforms. A major factor that contributes to influencing the Gen Z youth is 'influencer marketing'. Often thought of as role models, influencers lure the adolescents into wearing clothing items that may often be against the family or society's ideals (Letko, 2019). A study conducted in Haryana investigated a similar issue – how social media and technology are influencing the quick growth of Indian youth fashion. The study examined how young people's fashion choices are influenced by internet platforms and globalization, specifically in relation to the Indian film industry, through qualitative research. It exposed disagreements about fashion choices inside families, which are caused by attitudes that differ between parents and children. Parents who uphold traditional values place a premium on modesty and traditional clothes, frequently choosing for their daughters to wear traditional Indian garb. Young people, on the other hand, are motivated to express themselves and are impacted by global fashion trends; they consider looks like markers of modernity. Parents struggle to strike a balance between upholding traditional values and fostering their children's individuality because of these divergent points of view. Indian adolescents continue to look to their families for approval despite the adoption of global styles, underscoring the complex relationship that exists between cultural norms, family relationships, and individual choices (Gill et al., 2023).

Passing down clothes from one generation to another has always been a tradition of families across the world. While some call it the act of preservation or sustainability, others may label it as a frugal action. Although fashion may remain the same, the methods through which the consumption and purchase is done by each generation may slightly differ from each other (Fowler et al., 2014). A study conducted in 2020 aimed at identifying the purchase and consumption behaviour of vintage products of the Baby Boomer Generations and the Gen Z. Face to face interviews, through a semi-structured questionnaire, were employed for this study.

The study outlines the lifestyle and consumption behaviour of both the generations through traits such as individualistic, tech-savvy, workaholics etc. The subject of the study was vintage products. Results reveal that Baby Boomers reason out their consumption and behaviour patterns via the authenticity, quality and durability of the products. In contrast to baby boomers, Generation Z places importance on the image – consuming products to enhance their style and individuality. Although the study may not have direct relevance to the current objectives of this paper, this study highlights characteristics and conditions that influenced both the generations in their consumption and behaviour patterns (Leovaridis et al., 2020).

A research conducted at Hamburg University of Technology examined India's role as a pioneer in frugal innovation—a notion that is becoming more popular in academia because of its connection to India. In several industries, India is known for valuing price over quality, which is consistent with the “lead market” notion. India's economic and cultural tendency to solve everyday issues using resource-efficient techniques creates an atmosphere that is favourable for frugal solutions. In order to comprehend India's dominance in affordable inventions, this study explores the lead market hypothesis, emphasizing the interplay between economic variables and cultural values. Empirical observations from Indian students highlight the role that culture plays in the adoption of frugal innovation, demonstrating how India's distinct economic and cultural fusion positions it as a leader in the global market for low-cost solutions (Tiwari, 2016a).

Generational disparities are a crucial aspect for organisations and lawmakers to take into account, from retail choices to sustainability concerns.

### **Research Question and Objectives of the Study**

Having gained insight into adolescent fashion as well as the generational framework in the Indian cultural context, this study aims to understand the commonalities and differences in perceptions of clothing through cross-generational comparisons. Additionally, the paper also seeks to understand how the meaning of clothing changed across generations in the Indian cultural setting. The study employs interviews as its primary research method. The qualitative nature of this methodology aims to achieve the study's objective by a thorough case analysis. By employing interviews as its research method, the author aims to gain insights as to how perspectives across generations relate to the evolving meaning of clothing in the context of adolescent fashion in India. Furthermore, the themes identified are comprehended in light of the conclusions of existing literature, that includes journals, articles and research papers.

### **Methodology**

The research approach used to get the required primary data is interviews, given the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study. The sample representative for this study was an Indian family,

residing in Pune. The author had prior acquaintance with the family, however preserved objectivity while conducting the interviews. A family was chosen as the sample size for the study of adolescent fashion in order to obtain personal and related viewpoints in a comfortable setting. Families are by their very nature anatomies of generational variation, providing a special perspective on how attitudes toward clothes change as people age in a common family and cultural environment. By looking at families as a whole, it is possible to investigate shared values, traditions, and sartorial preferences and determine whether particular fashion interests have been handed down over the years. This demonstrates how social variables change or repeat throughout time. Examining multigenerational households provides a special chance to examine how clothing meanings have changed throughout time in many socio cultural circumstances. Individual views on fashion are moulded by shared memories and familial ties, resulting in a complex interplay of influences within the family.

Prior consent was taken from the family before they agreed to share their experiences via recorded audio interviews. In total, six members of the family were interviewed for this study. Three female participants whose age was 70, 48 and 20 years respectively and three male participants whose age was 78, 59 and 25 years respectively were interviewed for this research. The participants were born in different cities, with two participants belonging to Generation Z i.e., one male and one female were both born in Pune. Data collected from these participants provided a variety of viewpoints and experiences regarding adolescents' fashion, enabling a more thorough comprehension of how ideas about the meaning of clothes have changed over time in various geographic and generational contexts.

### **Procedure and Analysis**

After understanding about the goals of the study, participants consented to take part in it anonymously. An outline of the subjects to be covered preceded the interview procedure, which was then followed by a structured questionnaire. Data collected was in Konkani and was further translated to English. Common themes were found and gathered after the coded data and recordings were examined. The data was scrutinised in order to construct a main thesis that addressed the study issue.

Secondary data, particularly relevant literature, was used to provide a thorough theoretical framework that supported and complemented the experiences of the respondents.

### **Limitations of the Method**

Conducting interviews within a family setting for a cross-generational study presents certain limitations that should be acknowledged. Family interviews may unintentionally result in social desirability bias, as respondents may feel pressured to give answers that conform to social norms.

This bias may make people reluctant to share information about their experiences pertaining to the study's objectives that deviate from the norm or to voice opposing views, which could affect how reliable the data is gathered. Additionally, it could be difficult to record a variety of viewpoints in family interviews, particularly if there are prevailing voices or a family narrative that might obscure individual experiences.

### Summary of Interviews

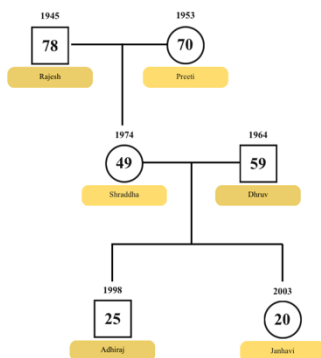
The following analysis involves human-subject research wherein, the results from the six participants' interviews are compiled and subjected to a methodical analysis. Additionally, a detailed analysis and comprehension of the common and unique narratives from the participant's experiences are also mentioned. These elements reveal how their personal experiences have impacted decisions such as purchasing clothes for their children when they reached adolescence.

### *Background of the family*

The grandparents hailed from Karwar, Karnataka who eventually relocated to Pune after the grandfather's retirement from the Indian Police Services. Their twin children were raised in Pune, however they occasionally travelled back to their hometown in Karwar. The second twin, Shraddha got married to Dhruv who was born and raised in Belgaum, Karnataka, and lived in Saudi Arabia at the time of his marriage. Dhruv and his wife reared their children, Adhiraj and Janhavi, in Thane for familial reasons. Adhiraj and Janhavi were born in Pune. Compared to his sibling and cousins, Adhiraj had a greater opportunity to explore as the family's first grandchild.

One can see a shift in demographics of all these individuals which in-turn brings in individual and generational differences owing to clothing styles and significance of clothing. This shift highlights shifting views of clothing that are based in societal, cultural, and individual circumstances in addition to shifts in fashion tastes.

Figure 1: *Family Genogram*



### *Narrative of Male Fashion*

Over the span of three generations, fashion trends have changed dramatically. At first, clothes represented social mobility and continuity and were frequently handed down through family. Despite initial resistance, the appearance of jeans and T-shirts signalled a trend towards freedom and rebellion by progressively adopting Western ideas. Globalisation and social media have given the younger generation more opportunity to showcase their individuality through their wardrobe choices. These days, fashion trends are cyclical, with retro and vintage looks coming back, even in the face of economic hardship. Important cultural icons, such as Bollywood singers and musicians, have a big say in what people wear. This is indicative of a larger trend in culture away from modesty and tradition in fashion and toward individualism and self-expression. Beyond its utilitarian purpose, fashion is a dynamic medium for expressing individuality across generations.

### *Narratives of female fashion*

The participant's responses through three generations of fashion show how cultural changes, societal conventions, and financial limitations have an impact. Early on, wearing Punjabi salwar kameez was restricted due to financial constraints. The conservative societal ideals of traditional values, modesty, and simplicity were mirrored in the requirement for parental consent for unorthodox clothes. The carefree fashions of youth are compared with modern clothes, which emphasizes identity and self-expression. Celebrities and social media have shaped modern trends, which depart from custom. It is said that fashion is ageless, ever-changing, and that every generation adds to a wide-ranging, inclusive mosaic of looks.

### *Modesty and parental role*

One predominant theme that was common across all the generations in terms of purchasing and consumption patterns was modesty and parental control.

When it comes to Rajesh (78) and Preeti (70), their grandparents both underlined the value of modesty and parental guidance when it came to their teenage wardrobe choices. Preeti(70) emphasized modesty by pointing out that clothes had the function of covering the body. She also emphasized the impact of parental direction on her wardrobe choices, stating that they wore whatever their parents gave them without objecting. According to Preeti(70), societal norms also had a big influence on their choice of clothing.

Reiterating the value of modesty, Rajesh(78) characterised it as a kind of tacit endorsement. Silent nods and nonverbal clues were frequently employed in place of spoken words to express acceptance or disapproval of attire choices.

In their memories of their upbringing and parenthood, Shraddha(49) and Dhruv(50) emphasise the value of modesty and parental direction when it comes to fashion choices. Shraddha remembers how her parents, who placed a strong emphasis on modesty, were crucial in deciding what they wore during their teens. Similar to this, Dhruv recalls that he was raised with a subtle instillation of humility because he was taught to wear hand-me-downs from elders rather than having his own wardrobe. But when it came to dressing their own kids, the couple made sure that the clothes they bought were modest and not too exposed.

In the case of Adhiraj(25) and Janhavi(20) i.e., The siblings' modesty and parental role was reflected via their clothes bought for them by their parents. Dhruv mentioned that he would try his luck to convince his parents to buy clothing items such as drawstring pants, flannel shirts and graphic tees, however his parents wouldn't agree for buying such clothes as they radiated a hipster look which according to them was not decent. Janhavi mentioned that she did not have any such demands when it came to clothing and often wore what was purchased by her parents.

#### *Influence of media and entertainment*

Influence from media and entertainment was another theme that came common across the generations.

Preeti(70) had a desire to wear a Punjabi salwar kameez which during her adolescence was not economically feasible and approved by her family members. Punjabi salwar in her youth was considered as a luxurious apparel and the designs were heavily influenced from Bollywood. Rajesh(78) on the other hand had a desire to wear a set of pants and shirt which was again influenced by a Bollywood movie 'Challia' (1960), starring Raj Kapoor and Nutan. This, again, was not an accessible form of clothing due to financial constraints.

Shraddha(49) had a desire to own a white dress worn by the lead actress in the Bollywood film, 'Qayamat se Qayamat Tak' (1988). However, the concept of dresses in a familial background had not set in, resulting in the participant not being able to wear or buy such dresses. Dhruv(59), on the other hand was greatly influenced by the Bollywood celebrity, Amitabh Bachchan and would try to recreate his styles and looks. He recalls a memory wherein he stitched his normal collared shirts into rounded collared shirts as it had become very famous due to Amitabh Bachchan. Additionally, he was very much influenced by Boney M's outfits in the songs 'Daddy Cool' and 'Rasputin'. He would try recreating bell-bottom pants by attaching an extra piece of fabric to create the flamboyant look.

Adhiraj(25) mentioned that he was influenced by music bands such as Pink Floyd and often looked forward to wearing clothes such as flannel shirts, graphic tees. On the other hand Janhavi (20) was influenced by trends on social media platforms such as wearing heavy accessories, wearing chokers etc.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, also impacted Generation Z's clothing styles and aesthetics. This has given them a wide array of choices to choose from rather than sticking to old traditions like passed-down. Social media influencers to an extent have also impacted the purchasing choices of Generation Z.

### *Self-expression and individualism*

Self-expression and Individualism was a theme that became common for Generation Y and Z.

Adhiraj(25), had adopted individuality and self-reliance due to an increasing consciousness of puberty and adolescent patterns. He wanted to expand his wardrobe with flannel shirts, Doc Martens, and tattered pants, all inspired by the grunge era. Comparably, Janhavi (20) admitted that social media, globalisation, and influencer trends had shaped her fashion choices. She also credits these factors to social networking and international pop culture. Comfort and individuality in clothing are important to Generation Z, who express themselves through nonconformist clothing choices.

### *Utilitarianism and frugality across generations*

The debate of clothing as a need vs. want could be seen across the generations.

For Preeti(70) and Rajesh(78), clothes were invented due to its utilitarian nature. Limited clothing selections and hand-me-downs emphasised clothes as a sign of social advancement and continuity of traditions. Tradition, modesty, and financial limitations made a significant impact on fashion choices; individualism and self-expression were subordinated. Individuality or expressive personality was not prioritised; instead, clothing was meant to be useful and long-lasting.

When it comes to their wardrobe selections, Shraddha (49) and Dhruv (59) were perfect examples of utilitarianism, putting utility and practicality above beauty. This viewpoint was indicative of a “need vs. wants” mentality, in which essentials come before wants, particularly in hard times. To demonstrate this, Dhruv (59) tells the story of how, despite being on a tight budget, he had to make do with a piece of flair fabric that looked comparable. This do-it-yourself

method emphasises independence. Shraddha (49), who likewise has budgetary constraints, eschews ostentatious and stylish attire, exhibiting a pragmatic approach to attire.

Adhiraj (20) and Janhavi's (25) wardrobe selections show a trend toward quick fashion and Western influences. Although practicality is still crucial, a new dynamic has been introduced by the influence of Western fashion trends. Their choices are nonetheless influenced by financial limitations. Unlike previous generations, their fashion identities are greatly influenced by technology, especially social media. This represents a careful balancing act between the growing need for personal expression and pragmatism.

Several universal themes remain in opinions about what to wear throughout eras. However, external factors like the media, societal conventions, and cultural standards have a big say in these decisions. Parental approbation and cultural and household standards influence dress choices. Conversations frequently centred on the cyclical nature of styles and changing trends in fashion. While self-expression and individualism are appreciated by younger generations, modesty in attire was treasured by past generations. There is a persistent interest in fashion as a form of self-expression that emphasises individuality despite age differences.

### **Discussion**

The data collected from the interviews have brought out several themes that have impacted adolescent fashion choices across the generations.

The importance of clothes has changed over generations as a result of alterations in societal dynamics, personal views, and cultural standards. At first, clothes were worn for practical reasons, mostly to cover up the body when options were few and money was tight. Dress standards prioritised practicality above individual expression, emphasising modesty and conformity. However, as media impact increased, people started to embrace bright, varied styles as a way to express and identify themselves rather than adhering to rigid utilitarianism. The fashion business was further spurred by globalisation and the widespread influence of digital and social media, which created a more diverse and interconnected environment. In contrast to other generations, the current generation embraces comfort, freedom, and deviance from social standards; this is in line with broader societal trends that highlight individuality and diversity in fashion.

One noticeable tradition that is rooted within Indian families is that of frugality. The acceptance of frugality in India has been influenced by the country's cultural norms that value simplicity. The concept of frugality within the Indian cultural context is more about the preservation and optimum utilisation of resources for future generations. A classic example of this would be the hands-me-down tradition. In the past, the common joint family structure in Indian culture

encouraged family members to share resources, such as clothes (Niranjan et al., 1998). The family manages its wardrobe needs by leveraging the cyclical nature of apparel, especially among siblings, aligning with India's ingrained values of sustainability and modest living. This approach resonates with middle-class consumption patterns. According to Deshpande, the idea of a middle class is subjective, defined by individual intentions rather than purely economic factors (2004). Initially, marketers viewed the middle class solely as a lucrative consumer group, but the reality proved more complex over time. The middle class encompasses diverse economic strata, varied preferences, and a culture emphasizing sustainability and thrift. In India, the tradition of passing down clothes across generations significantly shapes consumption habits, highlighting the importance of sustainability practices like reusing and repurposing clothing. Middle-class dynamics involve a nuanced interplay of sustainability, culture, and economics, challenging simplistic consumer categorisations. This complexity prompts a re-evaluation of marketing strategies, as Indian middle-class households prioritise sustainable practices and modest living.

The concept of frugality in the Indian cultural context can also be viewed through Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory that identifies six cultural dimensions – Power Distance, Individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Normative Orientation, and Indulgence vs. Restraint. This approach evaluates cultural variations according to society ideals, impacting actions and attitudes in a range of contexts, including the workplace, interpersonal relationships, and communication (Tiwari, 2016b). Rajnish Tiwari, in his study "Frugality in Indian Context: What Makes India a Lead Market for Affordable Excellence", applies Hofstede's model to cross-verify the concept of frugality from anecdotal evidence from both ancient India and modern day India. Ancient Indians, as described by the Greek geographer Strabo, valued thriftiness and elegance in dress. This cultural inclination towards the frugal use of clothing continues in modern India. In modern India, the notions of thrift and austerity persist, as noted by veteran British Broadcasting Corporation correspondent Mark Tully (Vittal, 2011); (Tiwari, 2016b). The emphasis on affordable yet elegant clothing emphasises a continuity of ideals, demonstrating how past perceptions of ingenuity in clothing have influenced and continue to influence the fashion sensibilities of succeeding Indian generations.

When it comes to influence from media and its forms, the young culture finds ways to become a part of their favourite band or group. McRobbie in her article, "Fashion Culture: Creative Work, Female Individualization" contends that the fashion industry has changed as a result of globalisation, giving rise to a young culture that is more varied and interconnected (2002). The way that teenagers adopt international fashion trends is a reflection of how much global media and digital platforms have shaped their choices. Cross-generational viewpoints show that globalisation has had a considerable impact on fashion due to the quick flow of cultural ideas. Teenagers today appear to be exposed to a wider range of fashion influences that cut over national and cultural barriers, as evidenced by the more cosmopolitan and diverse attitude

exhibited by Generation Y and Z, in contrast to earlier generations who frequently favour traditional values in their fashion choices.

Additionally, the vocabulary used by artists also has an impact on teenage fashion. For instance, Pink Floyd's distinctive psychedelic soundscapes and provocative lyrics. Teenagers sometimes take cues from the band's unusual and alluring record artwork, adopting these designs into their outfits and accessories. The band's cultural significance is further highlighted by Pink Floyd's lasting influence on fashion, which highlights the complex interplay between style, identity, and music during adolescence (Hebdige, 1995). This is evident in the grandson's clothing style. Bands such as Pink Floyd helped such adolescents often adopt a countercultural aesthetic and forward-thinking musical mood. This pattern is consistent with studies that highlight the symbolic significance of music in forming young people's identities, such as Hebdige's groundbreaking work on subcultures (1995). This choice of clothing reflects a deeper affinity with the values and identity linked with the band's songs and image rather than just following trends.

The increased awareness of puberty and adolescence within social circles and educational institutions highlights the importance of clothes in social integration. The experiences of Adhiraj (25) and Janhavi (20) are relevant to a study that aims to investigate how teenagers' social and personal identities influence their opinions of clothing brands and things. The conceptual framework of this study takes into account both individual characteristics like gender and grade level, as well as conventional variables like family, peers, the media, and celebrities. Results obtained from the analysis of a sample of 1,596 French high school students show that: (i) identity is important in deciding how much value is placed on products and brands; (ii) personal and social identities function as mediators; and (iii) gender and grade level have moderating effects. A summary of theoretical developments, real-world applications, and recommendations for additional study are included in the conclusion (The influence of personal and social identity on the clothing consumption of adolescents: Influence of personal and social identity on clothing consumption of adolescents, 2016). Adolescent fashion and self-expression are closely related, as evidenced by the effect of external sources such as music scenes and media, as well as the desire to belong to a social group. The focus that Generation Z places on comfort and personal style in their clothing selections defies traditional expectations.

However, it should also be noted that not every media personality or influencer or musician would have a similar impact on generational cohorts or an individual as a whole. This can be best illustrated by taking Justin Bieber's laidback style in 2021 (Maoui, 2021). Even if Justin Bieber has won multiple awards in the music business, not all of his admirers will adopt his style, particularly if the apparel is pricey. This conclusion is reinforced by academic studies on the impact of media on fashion decisions. The complex interplay between media and consumer behaviour is revealed by studies in media and fashion sociology. Katz argues that the idea of

“selective exposure” implies that people consciously select the media that they interact with, based on their interests, lifestyle, and financial situation. Because of this, fans might not always copy the fashion sense of a media figure because their wardrobe choices are influenced by a variety of personal and contextual circumstances (1959).

Essentially, the discussion sheds light on the complex fabric of Indian society, where thrift is not just a way of life but also a deeply held cultural ideal that determines how people consume, how they dress, and how long they hold onto their values. The Indian cultural fabric is firmly ingrained with the notion of frugality, which guides teenagers as they manage the complexities of global influences, internet platforms, and changing tastes.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to understand how the meanings associated with clothing have transformed over time, providing insights into the significance associated with fashion and sartorial choices across three generations within the Indian cultural context. The secondary objective of this paper was to examine the commonalities and differences in the perceptions of adolescent clothing through a cross-generational study of an Indian family.

The study emphasises how crucial it is to take historical and contextual elements into account in order to completely understand the complex meanings connected to fashion. Clothing symbolism reveals the complex ways in which clothing changes over time since it is intricately entwined with cultural and social circumstances. The study paradigm that is being provided here provides valuable insights into the dynamic interaction that exists between children’s fashion and generational attitudes.

It draws attention to the multifaceted role that clothing plays in childhood, beyond its utilitarian use as a medium for expressing one’s cultural, societal, and personal identities. Even though the fashion business changes, some things never change. Fashion is cyclical, as seen by the comeback of vintage and retro trends, which show how today’s generation absorbs and adapts past patterns. Fashion continues to be a powerful tool for self-expression for all generations, with a growing focus on individualism. Furthermore, financial limitations still have an impact on fashion choices, highlighting the long-lasting influence of money on apparel choices.

Future studies in this area could examine the effects of shifting views on the significance of clothes on teenagers’ identity formation in light of these cross-generational viewpoints. A more thorough grasp of the intricate dynamics at work in transforming the meaning of clothing throughout time may also be obtained by looking at how global influences and technology improvements affect fashion perceptions across generations. All things considered, this study

establishes the framework for further investigation into the complex interplay among fashion, generational viewpoints, and societal changes.

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are available within the paper itself. Additionally, the names of the family members have been changed to protect their privacy.

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