

International Journal of Fashion and Design (IJFD)

**INFLUENCE OF FEMINISM ON FASHION IN UNITED STATES OF
AMERICA**

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Influence of Feminism on Fashion in United States of America



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Article History

Received 7th January 2023

Received in Revised Form 14th February 2023

Accepted 21st March 2023



Abstract

Purpose: The study sought to analyze the influence of feminism on fashion in United States of America

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The results show that recent fashion history is intertwined with women's empowerment through the progressive decrease of sexual double standards, which still prevailed at the beginning of the 20th Century. The evolution of fashion has accompanied women's empowerment, first through functionalizing women's clothes, then through feminizing the power symbol represented by the male suit. Throughout history, women were not given the autonomy to decide their clothing choices. They were made to wear tight corsets and uncomfortable garments that quite literally put a curb on their movement and symbolically on their freedom.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practices and Policies: The Feminist theory and Tickles-across theory may be used to anchor future studies in the fashion sector. The study results will also benefit other stakeholders such as the policy makers as well as researchers and scholars from different parts of the world. The top management of the fashion industries in the country will also use the study findings to improve sociology and ensure high and stable performance in all their activities and programs. The study recommends that the adoption of effective fashion development policies in feminism will help to improve efficiency in their major operations and activities.

Keywords: *Influence, Feminism, Fashion, United States of America.*

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INTRODUCTION

Fashion is an exploitative empire which artificially manufactures and sells desire. Fabric is cut, shaped and sold. Fashion industry is exploitative and profiting from the oppressive labor structures of capitalism and the profound alienation of the laboring garment industry workers who cannot themselves afford to purchase the clothing that they make (Lavergne,2015). Clothes can speak a thousand words and the fashion industry is home to many powerhouse designers using their garments to speak out against injustice. Being a feminist means that you believe everyone is entitled to freedom and equality and that gender doesn't define who you are. In the late nineteenth century, women began to make the change they believed that it was time to take a stand and get rid of gender roles and ideals that were forced on women and that which were reflected in their clothing. Originally women were seen as inferior to men and it wasn't until women started to fight for their rights that things started to change (Titton, 2019). Today women have come a long way and are no longer controlled by men but there is still not equality. It is often thought that being feminist means you are against men, but this is not the case, feminism effects both men and women. Neither man nor woman has equality. No one should feel pressured to act or feel a certain way. Both men and women should be free to be whoever they want if a man wants to be sensitive and a woman wants to be strong they should be able to do so without being discriminated (Lamartine,2022). Traditionally women were seen as the housewives and look after the children. This resulted in the creation of the women's first suit, also known as the Suffragette Suit.

A new type of woman was born, one who was bolder, more active, more out-and-about in the world and more outspoken than her mother's generation. These women called themselves the Suffragettes who marched and protested for women's rights. The suit they wore consisted of a blouse and jacket with an ankle-length divided skirt that allowed the wearer to take larger strides (Khan, 2016). This was worn in order to fight legislation that forced women to wear corsets and dresses that had to be a minimum of one inch off the ground. This was a response to the hobble skirt, which was hemmed tight at the ankles and therefore restricted movement. Suffragettes displayed the colors of green, white and purple. Purple represented dignity, white represented purity and green represented hope. These colors were exhibited on ribbons and badges which meant that anybody could join the movement allowing for accessibility of the cause. Prior to the 1800s, women wore restrictive corsets with heavy boning and tight lacing. (Lahiri, 2014). However, feminist Amelia Bloomer sought to change women's fashion with the invention of the bloomers which was the first female trousers, the garment was quickly adopted by feminists who sought independence in their lives and in their closets. As bloomers became a symbol of the feminist movement they were met with many negative reactions (Hearn, 2015). The narrative began to focus on the controversial fashion piece rather than the mission of the women themselves. Because of this, bloomers were retired and traded back in for traditional female dress. During the Industrial Revolution, women had been encouraged to work in factories but by the 1840s, they were forced back into their homes.

In the mid-1800s, women wore bulky, heavy dresses that were difficult to take on and off. But as we reached the 1900s, women joined the workforce as secretaries and began to participate in sports, making these dresses no longer feasible. Matching suits were worn for cycling and horseback riding and they trickled into the movement, becoming typical attire for women's matches (Bain, 2016). Third-wave feminine dressing deviates from prior movements. Women can

be feminists and embrace feminine ways of dress and beauty or choose not to participate in feminine styles at all. Women can decide for themselves which pieces make them feel best and there is less debate over what women should be wearing. Just as in the movement itself, feminist fashion champions the idea of choice. Currently, feminism's fourth wave is well underway and fashion continues to play a big role. When Ruth Bader Ginsburg was sworn in as a female justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, attention turns to what she would choose to wear with the traditional black robe. While men on the court paired theirs with a shirt and tie, Ginsburg chose to wear lacy collars and jabots, collecting them from all over the world and even using them to make political statements that she has both a dissent and major opinion collar that she wears when she makes statements (Favaro, 2017). Meanwhile Hillary Clinton wore pantsuits all throughout her presidential campaign in 2016. While paying homage to suffragettes by wearing white to the Democratic National Convention. Her pantsuits have since come to symbolize power, equality and feminism. Although as a candidate, Clinton also received flack for her lack of feminine dress and the rare occasions in which she chose to go out in public without a full face of makeup (Medina, 2018). In 2019, renowned progressive member of the House, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez chose to wear all-white whilst been sworn in, writing on Twitter that this choice was to honor the women who paved the path before me.

Now, Kamala Harris has made history being the first female Vice President-elect, as well as being the first woman of color, being the daughter of Jamaican and Indian immigrants. By wearing a white pantsuit at her first public appearance as the Vice President-elect, the wearing of all-white by political figures represents not only the ambition to reach the heights of the White House, but now stands for having reached this goal (Choi,2020). Another win for women in fashion occurred when major design houses appointed their first female creative directors, like Clare Waight Keller for Givenchy in 2017 and Maria Grazia Chiuri for Dior in 2016, who famously stamped the statement "We Should All Be Feminists" on a T-shirt for her debut collection during the Spring/Summer 2017 season. Since then, she's continued to celebrate women through artistic runway collaborations, like her partnership with Judy Chicago for the Haute Couture Spring/Summer 2020 show (White, 2022). It is safe to say though that the current fashion has been affected by the waves of feminism that have allowed women to wear such items as Trousers, Mini Skirts, and Suits without the shame or ridicule that was imposed upon first wave feminists.

Statement of the Problem

Women's rights movements have been aided by the use of fashion and fashion pieces have subsequently become symbolic. Wearing all-white and paying ode to the suffragette movement has been a frequent choice for Democratic women in the House of Representatives. Although fashion allows individual women to make powerful political statements in this way, big fashion brands don't always engage with feminism in a convincing way. The current generation is dramatically better off than the struggles the suffragettes experienced over 100 years ago. The current fashions and freedom of choice presents a freedom not experienced by any previous generation, at least in the Western world.

How fashion and feminism interlink is also vastly different. As stated in the introduction, one of the current debates is whether you can be a feminist and be fashionable at the same time, but there are also much deeper and more important debates raised by feminism that affect women all over

the world. The issue of judging a rape victim by what she was wearing or whether her sexual assault was warranted through her choice of dress, as well as the strict dress codes and devaluing of female education evident in schools attributed to the belief that inappropriate dress will distract male students are all vitally important issues. Perhaps more recently, is the debate that has arisen when certain celebrities choose to publish nudes of themselves, and if this is proposing body positivity or a sense of irony as small minded groups seem to believe. Studies have been done on scope of feminism and fashions, Barasa (2016) conducted study to discuss the social economic factors that influence maternity wear selection among these young expectant women and determine dress features that influence maternity wear selection among these young expectant women in Kenya. Kaindi (2016) conducted a study to assess the usage of 'real' fabric in draping by teachers in public institutions of higher learning and fashion designers in Nairobi County, Kenya, and assesses the competencies of fashion design teachers in Nairobi County, Kenya. Kitheka (2014) conducted a study to investigate the psychological, social and economic factors that influence the choice of clothing by professional women in Machakos Town. This studies presented a geographical and conceptual gap that our study to fill by shedding light on influence of feminism on fashion in United States of America.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

This study will benefit from the feminist theory which was proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft (1797), the tickles across theory by Dwight E. Robinson in (1958) and Charles W. King in (1963).

Feminist Theory

The feminist theory was proposed by Mary Wollstonecraft (1797). Feminist theory focus on gender inequality recognize that women's location in and experience of social situations are not only different but also unequal to men's. Women have the same capacity as men for moral reasoning and agency, but that patriarchy, particularly the sexist division of labor, has historically denied women the opportunity to express and practice this reasoning (Titton, 2019). The theory urges that married women have higher levels of stress than unmarried women and married men. Therefore, the sexual division of labor in both the public and private spheres needs to be altered for women to achieve equality in marriage. Feminist theory often focuses on analyzing gender inequality themes that include discrimination, objectification especially sexual objectification), oppression, patriarchy and stereotyping of women. This theory has been used to provide insights on gender equality

Trickle-Across Theory

The tickles across theory was proposed by Dwight E. Robinson in (1958) and Charles W. King in (1963). According to this theory, fashion moves across horizontally across all the social classes and people of different strata accept or adopt a new fashion design at the same time. Independent fashion designers and in-house design teams and export companies play significant roles which are supported by manufacturers, retailers, and media, who decide on mass production and marketing styles. In fact, because of the media attention and advertisements, a new fashion design reaches remote people in a short span of time (Khan, 2016). Furthermore, mass production processes began and were marketed to the local market in remote areas through large fancy

shopping malls. This sped up process made it possible for a new fashion style to trickle across for wider acceptance at the same time. In today's world, there are many influences and simultaneous ways in which modern communications bring fashion and styles from around the world into the homes almost instantly. Various different markets have developed to deal with different ages, lifestyles and tastes. Designers and brands reach out to their respective target market segments, each with its specific price points and offer them customization in garment (Barasa, 2016).

Empirical Review

Gatobu (2018) investigated how digital marketing strategies can improve the performance of the fashion industry in Kenya. The study used descriptive research design. The target population of this study comprised the proprietors of the women-owned SMEs in Nairobi City County who total to 241. Stratified random sampling was used to select the sample size of 73. Primary data was collected using a semi structured questionnaire administered to staff by the researcher and research assistants themselves given the setting and education level of the respondents. The study states a good investment on proper database of the company influences better performance of the company. Website marketing positively influenced performance of fashion industries. This implies that both variables move in tandem. Social media significantly influenced performance of fashion industries. This show that an increase in social media marketing lead to an increase in performance of fashion industries. Therefore, social media accounts have improved of clients with staffs influencing a positive influence on performance. Email marketing significantly influenced performance of the fashion industries. The study established that an increase in email marketing influenced an increase in performance

Barasa (2016) discussed the social economic factors that influence maternity wear selection among these young expectant women and determine dress features that influence maternity wear selection among these young expectant women in Kenya. The researcher adopted a descriptive research design to collect data, analyze and present. Pre-testing was done on a sample of 12 respondents attending ante-natal clinics at KNH to avoid ambiguity of the instruments. Convenience sampling was used to select 96 young expectant women. Interview schedules and questionnaires with open-ended and closed-ended items were used to collect data. The findings indicated that young expectant women experience dramatic changes in their body silhouette, measurement, posture and weight which they viewed either positively or negatively. It was also revealed that the young expectant women experienced psychological changes like anxiety, joy, stress, fear and depression with the outstanding one being anxiety as a result of the changes in their physical body. Most of the respondents were not happy with the psychological changes, which made them select maternity wear that was either ill-fitting or oversized. Furthermore, physiological and psychological changes did not influence the young expectant women when selecting their maternity wear.

Kaindi (2016) assessed the usage of 'real' fabric in draping by teachers in public institutions of higher learning and fashion designers in Nairobi County, Kenya, and assesses the competencies of fashion design teachers in Nairobi County, Kenya. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were used. The results revealed that very few public institutions of higher learning use 'real' fabric draping for design. Majority of the teachers were not trained in the area of fashion design. Chi-square analysis results yielded a fairly strong relationship between use of 'real' fabric draping for design and

pattern development technique taught ($V = 0.646$; $p < 0.0001^*$) and sources of curriculum ($V = 0.623$; $p < 0.0001^*$). Use of 'real' fabric draping for design had a weak association with teachers' area of training ($V = 0.018$; $p < 0.006$). It was concluded that the teacher's area of training was not highly associated with the use of 'real' fabric draping. This may be due to the fact that most fashion design teachers were trained in clothing / garment design and are able to understand the technique.

Kitheka (2014) investigated the psychological, social and economic factors that influence the choice of clothing by professional women in Machakos Town. The research adopted a descriptive research design. Stratified random sampling technique was used, to represent sub groups of women employed in the private and public sector. The study established that skirt suits were the preferred choice of clothing designs for religious functions (26.8%) and office wear (41.9%) respectively. The study established that jeans and tops were preferred for evening wear (26.4%) and casual wear (43%). Vitenge/African attires (47.7%) were highly preferred for weddings/special occasions. The study found that there was a significant association between marital status and choice of clothing, attractive clothing styles and choice of clothing. A significant association between income and choice of clothing was also noted.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

RESULTS

The results were grouped into various research gap categories namely as conceptual, contextual, and geographical.

Conceptual Gaps

Studies by Gatobu (2018), Barasa (2016), Kaidi (2016) and Kitheka (2014) had conceptual framework gap. In addition, all the mentioned studies did not establish the challenges of feminism in the society. The studies did not outline the challenges in a clear manner. Therefore, the current study seeks to address these conceptual gaps.

Contextual Gap and Geographical Gap.

Studies by Gatobu (2018), Barasa (2016), Kaidi (2016) and Kitheka (2014) had geographical gap because they were not conducted in United States of America. This implies that the results Influence of Feminism on Fashion in United States of America may be inapplicable in Kenya since the other countries differ. The current study seeks to address this gap.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

The study found out that the feminism was a process of the industrial revolution that occurred in the 19th century. The current fashions and freedom of choice presents a freedom not experienced by any previous generation, at least in the Western world. Women gradually started working and could now choose the type of clothes they would wear without depending on men decision. Feminism is a great progress to today's women and also men fashion, women have the right to wear clothes of their own choice without the fear of being ridiculed.

Recommendations

The study recommends that government should impose welfare policies that protect gender based fashion abuse especially on women. This will prevent fashion shaming from small minded groups who ridicule women at home, work or social places because of their choice of fashion

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