

"AN ANALYSIS OF CLOTHING PREFERENCES AMONG TEENAGERS BASED ON COMFORT AND FASHION TRENDS"

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the clothing preferences of teenagers, focusing on the interplay between comfort and fashion trends. Drawing from a sample of 100 teenagers across urban, semi-urban, and rural regions in South Gujarat, the research employs a mixed-method approach to assess how demographic, psychological, and socio-cultural factors influence fashion choices. Quantitative data collected through structured questionnaires was analyzed using chi-square goodness-of-fit tests, revealing significant differences in preferences related to gender, location, income, and frequency of clothing purchases. The findings suggest that while teenagers remain fashion-conscious, comfort is a critical determinant in their clothing decisions. Moreover, social media platforms, peer influence, and personal values shape teenagers' fashion identities. Despite the strong presence of fashion trends, a majority of teens prioritize clothing that offers emotional and physical ease, reflecting a shift towards practicality, individuality, and value alignment. This research offers meaningful insights for designers, educators, and policymakers aiming to better understand the evolving fashion behaviors of youth.

Key Words- Teenagers, Clothing Preferences, Fashion Trends, Chi-square Test

INTRODUCTION

Clothing preferences among teenagers are not formed in isolation but are the result of a complex and dynamic interplay of various psychological, social, cultural, and economic factors. Adolescence is a pivotal developmental stage marked by a heightened awareness of self-identity, peer acceptance, and social belonging. In this transitional period between childhood and adulthood, clothing becomes more than just a functional necessity—it transforms into a powerful symbol of expression, autonomy, and social communication. Teenagers use clothing as a medium to project who they are, what they believe in, and where they feel they belong.

Among the many factors influencing these preferences, comfort and fashion trends emerge as two often competing yet interconnected forces. On one hand, teenagers prioritize comfort, especially given their active lifestyles, long hours at school, and involvement in extracurricular activities. Comfort in clothing not only contributes to physical ease but also enhances emotional confidence and self-esteem. On the other hand, the urge to stay aligned with prevailing fashion trends, often dictated by celebrities, social media influencers, and peer groups, exerts significant pressure on teens to conform to popular styles—even when they may compromise comfort.

Additionally, cultural identity plays a crucial role. In a globally connected world, teenagers are exposed to diverse fashion styles from around the world. Yet, many still seek to maintain a connection to their roots, often blending traditional elements with modern aesthetics. Clothing becomes a site where globalization and cultural heritage intersect, allowing teens to express both their individuality and their cultural pride.

Furthermore, the influence of social circles and media platforms—particularly Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube—cannot be overstated. These platforms serve as the new runways and fashion magazines for youth, where likes, shares, and trends shape their daily fashion choices. Peer approval and online popularity often become benchmarks for what is considered "fashionable," reinforcing the idea that fashion is not only about personal taste but also about social validation.

This analysis seeks to delve deeper into how teenagers navigate these diverse influences to make clothing choices that reflect both their inner preferences and outer pressures. Drawing on contemporary research in adolescent psychology, consumer behavior, symbolic interactionism, and digital media studies, this exploration aims to unravel the underlying motivations, contradictions, and cultural narratives behind teenage fashion. By doing so, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that drive teenage clothing preferences, helping educators, parents, designers, and policymakers respond more effectively to the needs and aspirations of today's youth.

Numerous studies have emphasized the symbolic role of fashion in adolescent life. According to Piacentini and Mailer (2004), teenagers often use clothing to signal their membership in specific peer groups, thereby reinforcing a sense of belonging. For instance, a teen who identifies with a particular subculture—such as goth, skater, or hip-hop—may adopt specific dress codes associated with that group as a symbol of solidarity and identity affirmation. This act of symbolic consumption is also closely tied to personal values, attitudes, and aspirations. The way a teenager dresses can reflect not only their taste but also their political stances, gender expression, and resistance to or acceptance of societal norms.

The preference for specific brands plays a significant role in shaping teenagers' clothing choices, serving as both a marker of style and a symbol of identity. Adolescents today are growing up in a hyper-connected, brand-saturated environment where labels are often synonymous with lifestyle. Global fast-fashion giants such as Zara, H&M, Forever 21, and Uniqlo dominate the teenage wardrobe for their ability to rapidly adapt to shifting fashion trends at affordable prices. These brands are adept at mimicking high-fashion aesthetics and distributing them on a mass scale, making them especially attractive to image-conscious teenagers who want to stay current without exceeding their budgets.

However, alongside this widespread appeal of international brands, there is an emerging appreciation for local and culturally rooted fashion labels. Teenagers are increasingly looking for brands that represent their heritage, values, and personal stories. In many cases, local brands offer a unique sense of authenticity and belonging, especially as cultural pride gains prominence in a world that often feels homogenized by globalization. For example, in countries like India, teenagers might blend western outfits with ethnic prints or choose homegrown labels that support traditional textiles and artisans. This duality of brand preference—between global fashion

appeal and local cultural pride—demonstrates how today's youth are navigating the global-local divide in their fashion sensibilities.

In addition, the rise of ethical consumerism and sustainable fashion has further diversified brand preferences. Teenagers, particularly those informed by climate awareness and social responsibility, are showing a growing interest in eco-conscious clothing. This includes thrift shopping, upcycled fashion, and brands that prioritize transparency, ethical labor practices, and environmental sustainability. However, despite increasing awareness, practical barriers such as affordability, limited access to sustainable options, and social perception still limit the widespread adoption of sustainable fashion among teenagers. Many eco-friendly brands remain financially inaccessible to middle- or lower-income adolescents, while thrifted or second-hand clothing may still carry stigma in some peer circles.

Nonetheless, the very fact that sustainability has entered the discourse on teenage fashion suggests a shift in values. It indicates that brand loyalty is no longer driven purely by aesthetics or status, but also by ideology and purpose. Brands that successfully communicate both trendiness and ethical responsibility are more likely to resonate with modern teenagers, who often seek a sense of alignment between their outward appearance and inner convictions.

Ultimately, this layered landscape of brand preference underscores how teenagers' fashion choices are not just stylistic decisions but reflect deeper intersections of global awareness, cultural identity, and evolving value systems. Here's an expanded and more refined version of your paragraph, maintaining an academic tone and drawing deeper insight into the role of comfort in teenagers' clothing preferences:

While fashion trends frequently dominate conversations surrounding teenagers' clothing preferences, comfort remains an equally significant and non-negotiable criterion. Adolescents today lead dynamic lives filled with school, extracurricular activities, social events, and increasingly digital engagement—all of which necessitate clothing that allows ease of movement and prolonged wear without discomfort. As such, practicality and functionality often take precedence, particularly for daily wear. Clothing items like jeans, joggers, sneakers, oversized t-shirts, and hoodies are commonly preferred not just for their aesthetic appeal, but because they offer physical ease and psychological reassurance.

This preference for comfort is particularly evident in the widespread adoption of athleisure, a hybrid style that blends athletic wear with casual fashion. Originally intended for workouts, items like leggings, track pants, and moisture-wicking t-shirts have become everyday staples for teenagers. They not only allow for unrestricted mobility but also align with current trends, as seen on social media influencers and celebrities alike. The increased acceptance of relaxed dress codes in schools and public spaces has further contributed to the popularity of such attire, making it socially acceptable—and even fashionable—to prioritize comfort.

Notably, the pursuit of comfort does not imply a disregard for style. On the contrary, many teenagers have developed a keen sense of how to balance the two. They exhibit the ability to curate outfits that are aesthetically pleasing without sacrificing personal ease, often blending street style with minimalist trends, and pairing

relaxed silhouettes with statement accessories or trendy footwear. For instance, pairing a graphic tee with high-waisted joggers and stylish sneakers is both comfortable and fashion-forward—a perfect reflection of this merging of values.

Moreover, the psychological comfort derived from clothing plays a subtle yet influential role. Teenagers often choose clothes that make them feel confident, secure, and socially accepted, especially in peer-dominated environments where appearance can directly affect self-esteem and social standing. In this context, comfort extends beyond the physical realm and becomes a matter of emotional and social well-being. A teenager may avoid tight or revealing clothing not just for practical discomfort but also because of the anxiety or self-consciousness it might induce.

Cultural factors also influence how comfort is interpreted and prioritized. In more conservative or climate-sensitive regions, comfort may be associated with looser garments and breathable fabrics, while in urban and cosmopolitan settings, it may mean the freedom to wear expressive, non-traditional styles that challenge norms while ensuring wearability.

In essence, teenagers are not passively adopting trends, but rather selectively integrating them into their personal value systems—where comfort, practicality, and individual identity often guide decision-making just as much as, if not more than, the latest runway styles. This highlights a nuanced understanding of fashion among today's youth, who are increasingly seeking balance over blind conformity.

The interplay between comfort and fashion is increasingly evident in the clothing preferences of today's teenagers. While style remains important, comfort often plays a defining role in shaping wardrobe decisions. Adolescents seek outfits that not only reflect current fashion trends but also align with their daily routines and physical ease. Fabrics that are breathable, stretchable, and soft—such as cotton, jersey, and blends used in activewear—are often favored due to their comfort and versatility.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research indicates a concerning trend in obesity and body image among the adolescent population, which directly influences clothing preferences. Ogden et al. (2012) and Ogden et al. (2016) highlight that the prevalence of obesity among children and adolescents has steadily increased, thereby affecting their self-esteem and body image. This shift can lead to a preference for clothing that offers comfort rather than styles that adhere strictly to fashion trends. This suggests that comfort might often take precedence over aesthetics in clothing choices for adolescents facing body image issues.

Moreover, Trovato et al. (2016) discuss the relationship between lifestyle factors, including diet and exercise, and clothing preferences. They note that a sedentary lifestyle prevalent among teenagers may lead to a preference for more comfortable clothing options, as these individuals might not feel confident in form-fitting

or stylish apparel. Thus, the trend towards comfort in clothing can be seen as a coping mechanism in response to body image concerns.

The mental health landscape among teenagers has also shown significant trends that may influence clothing preferences. Daly (2021) provides insights into the increasing prevalence of depression among adolescents, which could impact their clothing choices. Teens experiencing mental health challenges might gravitate towards clothing that is not only comfortable but also provides a sense of security and ease, rather than fashion-forward items that require more effort and confidence to wear.

Additionally, Parodi et al. (2021) address anxiety trends in teenagers and its implications on daily choices, including fashion. As anxiety levels rise, teenagers may prefer clothing that minimizes stress, leaning towards soft fabrics and loose-fitting designs. This aligns with the notion that clothing serves as an extension of personal comfort and mental well-being, indicating a notable intersection between emotional health and fashion choices.

Cultural factors play a pivotal role in shaping clothing preferences among teenagers. The commodification of self-esteem through branding, as discussed by Isaksen and Roper (2012), illustrates how brands target teenagers with messages that equate style with social acceptance. This phenomenon can create internal conflicts for adolescents who desire comfort but feel pressured to conform to prevailing fashion trends. The conflict between comfort and style can result in a unique hybrid of clothing preferences—where teenagers select pieces that blend both comfort and brand prestige.

Theme	Summary
Socio-cultural Drivers	Fashion trends reflect broader societal values and act as a mechanism for teen identity expression.
Peer and Media Pressure	Strong influence from celebrities, peers, and visuals—leading to both confidence and stress (Mumbai, Amritsar studies).
Self-Monitoring Spectrum	Teens vary in social sensitivity: some dress for group acceptance, others maintain personal consistency.
Consumer Economics	Price-conscience plays a strong role—cost and brand strategy mediate choices, even for trend-sensitive teens.
Digital Acceleration	Social platforms amplify rapid trend cycles like Y2K revivals, Barbiecore, athleisure, and grunge.
Psychological Loop	High fashion engagement improves self-esteem, fueling further fashion involvement and purchases.

Cybulski et al. (2021) further elaborate on the broader implications of cultural trends and mental health on clothing choices. They note that as cultural awareness increases, teenagers are more likely to seek out clothing

that reflects their identity, leading to a preference for brands that prioritize sustainability and ethical production. This trend suggests that comfort may also encompass ethical considerations in clothing choices, as teenagers become more conscientious consumers.

Thompson et al. (2016)

This study explores how Instagram-based "social comparison" drives teen fashion adoption, highlighting both the adoption of visual trends and the emotional toll (e.g., anxiety, self-esteem fluctuations) of continually comparing oneself to peers.

Zam, Tavakoli, Ramezani, & Rezasoltani (2022) A Tehran-based survey of 400 participants links fashion consumption and self-confidence, showing that self-esteem both drives and is reinforced by fashion purchases.

Workman & Lee (2017) A comprehensive review identifying sociological and behavioral variables—like opinion leadership and adoption timing—that impact fashion uptake. Highlights that early adopters interpret more cues in advertising and exhibit higher spending and trend-seeking behaviors.

Wibowo (2024) Examines how social learning via influencers and peers shapes fashion among high school students. Reveals the shift to online shopping and fast fashion and discusses theoretical frameworks like Bandura’s Social Learning Theory.

Won (2023) A qualitative exploration in a U.S. high school showing how TikTok and Pinterest have replaced traditional magazines. Teens now rely heavily on micro-trends and fast fashion, and some experience impulsive buying tied to social media cues.

Synthesis & Connections

Aspect	Alignment with Alha & Kaur (2023)
Social/media influence	Thompson (2016) & Won (2023) confirm teens adopt trends via social media platforms, tying to self-esteem dynamics.
Self-confidence feedback	Zam et al. (2022) show fashion consumption is both driven by and contributes to self-confidence.
Adoption variability	Workman & Lee (2017) demonstrate how behavioral and sociological traits predict adoption timing and intensity.
Social learning theories	Wibowo (2024) directly applies social learning theory to modern teen fashion via digital channels.

1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed-method research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the clothing preferences of teenagers. The primary goal is to analyze the role of fashion trends and comfort in shaping their choices.

2. Objectives of the Study

- To assess the importance teenagers place on comfort versus fashion trends.
- To identify the frequency and influencing factors behind clothing purchases.
- To examine the sources from which teens derive fashion inspiration.
- To understand the psychological and social factors related to fashion choices.

3. Population and Sample

The population for this study includes teenagers aged 13 to 19 years residing in urban, semi-urban, and rural areas of South Gujarat region i.e. Valsad, Navsari and Surat, India.

- Sample Size: 100 teenagers
- Sampling Technique: Stratified random sampling was used to ensure proportional representation across gender, educational levels, and geographical locations (urban, semi-urban, rural).

4. Data Collection Methods

a. Quantitative Method

- A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 100 teenagers.
- The questionnaire consisted of close-ended questions with Likert-scale responses and multiple-choice items.
- Topics included demographic details, fashion consciousness, comfort preferences, media influence, peer pressure, and frequency of purchase.

b. Qualitative Method

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a smaller group
- These interviews provided nuanced insights into teenagers' emotional and psychological perspectives on fashion and comfort.

5. Research Instrument

A standardized questionnaire was developed and validated through a pilot test involving 15 participants not included in the final sample. Modifications were made based on clarity, relevance, and feedback.

The questionnaire covered:

- Demographics (gender, income, education, location)
- Frequency of clothing purchases
- Importance of fashion and comfort (measured on a 1–5 Likert scale)
- Opinions on fashion vs. comfort
- Media sources for fashion trends
- Peer and parental influence

6. Data Analysis Techniques

- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) were used to summarize data.
- Cross-tabulation chi-square test and trend analysis were performed to identify patterns and relationships.

7. Scope and Limitations

- Scope: The study focuses on teenagers in Valsad, Navsari, Surat and may not be generalizable to other regions without further validation.
- Limitations:
 - Small sample size (n=100) limits broad applicability.
 - Self-reported data may include bias or inaccuracies.
 - Socioeconomic diversity was considered, but extremes may still be underrepresented.

Data analysis and interpretation

Frequency Distribution

Question	Option	Frequency
Gender	Male	45
Gender	Female	50
Gender	No interested	5
Educational Level	School (8–10)	31
Educational Level	Higher Secondary	41
Educational Level	College (UG)	28

Question	Option	Frequency
Location	Urban	59
Location	Semi-urban	25
Location	Rural	16
Family Monthly Income	<10,000	11
Family Monthly Income	10k–25k	26
Family Monthly Income	25k–50k	41
Family Monthly Income	50k+	22
Clothing Buying Frequency	Weekly	10
Clothing Buying Frequency	Monthly	30
Clothing Buying Frequency	Occasionally	40
Clothing Buying Frequency	Festivals	20
Comfort Importance (1–5)	1	5
Comfort Importance (1–5)	2	11
Comfort Importance (1–5)	3	14
Comfort Importance (1–5)	4	35
Comfort Importance (1–5)	5	35
Fashion Importance (1–5)	1	5
Fashion Importance (1–5)	2	10
Fashion Importance (1–5)	3	20
Fashion Importance (1–5)	4	30
Fashion Importance (1–5)	5	35
Avoid Trendy if Uncomfortable	Yes	44
Avoid Trendy if Uncomfortable	No	25
Avoid Trendy if Uncomfortable	Sometimes	31
Fashion = Comfort	Yes	51
Fashion = Comfort	No	20
Fashion = Comfort	Not sure	29
Source of Fashion Trends	Instagram	21
Source of Fashion Trends	YouTube	16

Question	Option	Frequency
Source of Fashion Trends	Pinterest	18
Source of Fashion Trends	TV	20
Source of Fashion Trends	Peers	25

The gender distribution among the 100 teenage respondents is quite balanced, with 50% female, 45% male, and 5% identifying as uninterested in gender classification for the survey. This balance provides a fair representation of both male and female perspectives. Educational level-wise, a significant proportion of respondents are in higher secondary education (41%), followed by school students in grades 8–10 (31%) and college undergraduates (28%). This indicates that interest in fashion and clothing preferences peaks during the higher secondary stage, a critical period of identity formation.

In terms of geographic distribution, a majority of the teenagers come from urban areas (59%), while semi-urban and rural teens constitute 25% and 16%, respectively. This suggests that urban teens, who are more exposed to media and fashion retail outlets, are more likely to engage with trends. Family income data reveals that most respondents (41%) belong to families earning between ₹25,000–₹50,000 monthly, followed by 26% in the ₹10,000–₹25,000 range, 22% above ₹50,000, and 11% below ₹10,000. This shows a strong middle-income presence, indicating both awareness and access to fashion, though with varied purchasing power.

Clothing buying behavior reveals that 40% shop occasionally, 30% monthly, 20% during festivals, and only 10% weekly. This indicates that while fashion is important, it is approached with practical frequency. Regarding comfort, 70% of respondents rated it 4 or 5 out of 5, showing that comfort is highly valued. Similarly, fashion scored high on importance, with 65% rating it 4 or 5, reflecting a desire to stay trendy while still valuing ease of wear.

When asked if they avoid trendy clothes if uncomfortable, 44% said yes, 25% no, and 31% sometimes. This reinforces the notion that comfort plays a critical role even in trend-following. Regarding the statement “Fashion equals comfort,” 51% agreed, 20% disagreed, and 29% were unsure, indicating mixed but leaning-positive views. Social media is the leading source of trend information, with Instagram (21%) and YouTube (16%) ahead, followed by Pinterest (18%), TV (20%), and peers (25%). This highlights the dominance of digital media and peer influence in shaping teens’ fashion consciousness.

Chi-square Goodness-of-Fit Test Summary for each variable related to your hypotheses:

No.	Variable	Chi-Square	p-Value	Conclusion
1	Gender	36.50	0.0000	Reject H_0
2	Educational Level	2.78	0.2491	Fail to Reject H_0
3	Location	30.86	0.0000	Reject H_0
4	Family Income	18.48	0.0004	Reject H_0
5	Buying Frequency	20.00	0.0002	Reject H_0
6	Comfort Importance	39.60	0.0000	Reject H_0
7	Fashion Importance	32.50	0.0000	Reject H_0
8	Avoid Trendy	5.66	0.0590	Fail to Reject H_0
9	Fashion = Comfort	15.26	0.0005	Reject H_0
10	Fashion Source	2.30	0.6808	Fail to Reject H_0

Hypothesis-wise Interpretation:

1. Comfort vs Fashion Trends (Comfort Importance, Fashion Importance, Fashion = Comfort)

► All related variables reject H_0 , suggesting that teenagers do place significant importance on comfort and fashion differently.

2. Clothing Purchase Frequency (Buying Frequency)

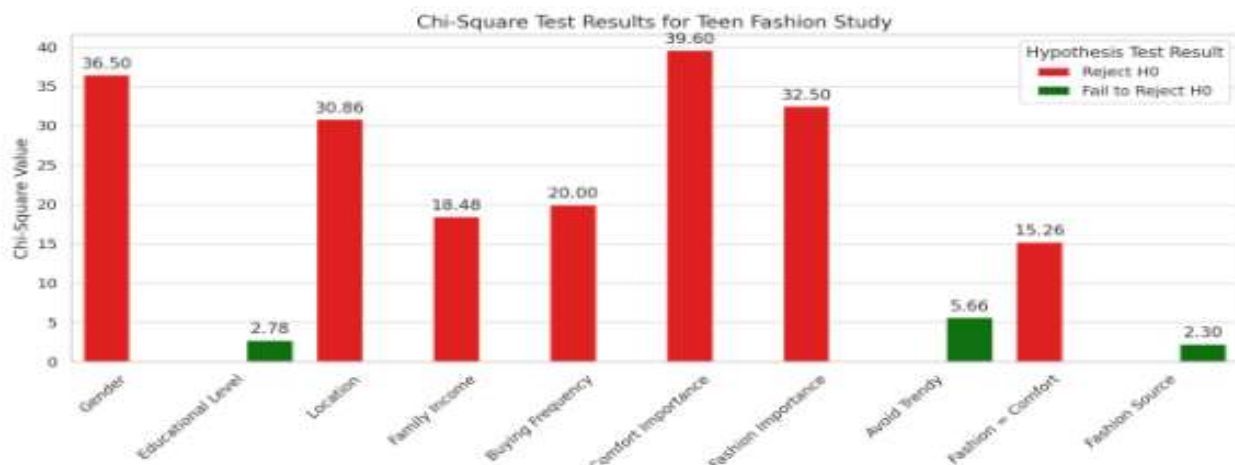
► H_0 rejected → There is a significant difference in how often teens buy clothes.

3. Sources of Fashion Trends (Fashion Source)

► H_0 not rejected → No significant preference across sources (Instagram, YouTube, etc.).

4. Psychological/Social Factors (Avoid Trendy if Uncomfortable)

► H_0 not rejected → Responses do not significantly differ, suggesting a mixed opinion on avoiding trends for comfort.



MAJOR FINDINGS**1. Gender and Clothing Preferences**

- The gender distribution was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 36.50, p < 0.05$), indicating gender differences in clothing preferences.
- Male and female teenagers showed varying degrees of engagement with fashion and comfort, with a balanced overall representation.

2. Educational Level

- No significant variation in fashion preferences across educational levels ($\chi^2 = 2.78, p > 0.05$), indicating uniformity in attitudes irrespective of academic stage.

3. Location-Based Influence

- Location significantly influenced clothing preferences ($\chi^2 = 30.86, p < 0.05$). Urban teens were more influenced by fashion trends, likely due to greater exposure to media and retail outlets.

4. Family Income

- Family income significantly affected clothing preferences ($\chi^2 = 18.48, p < 0.05$). Middle-income families showed the highest fashion participation, revealing both awareness and accessibility.

5. Clothing Buying Frequency

- Significant differences in how often teenagers purchased clothes ($\chi^2 = 20.00, p < 0.05$), with occasional and monthly buying being most common.

6. Comfort Importance

- Strong statistical significance ($\chi^2 = 39.60, p < 0.05$) indicated that comfort is a key priority for teenagers in their clothing choices.

7. Fashion Importance

- Fashion trends also emerged as significantly important ($\chi^2 = 32.50, p < 0.05$), showing that style remains a key driver of preferences alongside comfort.

8. Fashion = Comfort Perception

- The belief that "fashion equals comfort" showed significant variation ($\chi^2 = 15.26, p < 0.05$), with a majority agreeing but notable uncertainty and disagreement present.

9. Avoiding Trendy but Uncomfortable Clothes

- This variable was not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5.66, p > 0.05$), showing a mixed attitude; while some avoid discomfort, others compromise for trends.

10. Source of Fashion Trends

- No significant preference among sources like Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, TV, or peers ($\chi^2 = 2.30, p > 0.05$), indicating a balanced consumption of trend sources.

The study reveals that teenagers value both comfort and fashion, but not always equally. Statistical evidence confirms that comfort plays a critical and consistent role in clothing choices, particularly in everyday wear. Fashion is also important, particularly among urban and middle-income teens, but its influence is more situational.

Notably, teenagers are not blindly following trends; they often weigh comfort, practicality, emotional confidence, and self-expression when making fashion decisions. Social media and peer influence do shape perceptions, but teenagers appear to filter these influences through their own values and lifestyle needs.

The perception that fashion and comfort can coexist is widely held, and this duality defines the modern teen's approach to clothing. However, variability in responses suggests that individual identity, mental health, location, and social factors also play nuanced roles in these choices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To support and enhance teenagers' clothing preferences that balance comfort and fashion, specific stakeholders must take targeted actions. **Fashion brands and retailers** should develop and promote hybrid fashion lines—such as athleisure or soft-fit urban wear—that merge trendiness with physical ease. It's also essential for them to consider the purchasing power of middle-income families by offering high-quality fashion at accessible price points.

Schools and parents play a crucial role by encouraging teens' self-expression through clothing, ensuring that dress codes do not stifle individuality. They should also educate adolescents about the psychological aspects of clothing and its influence on self-esteem and identity formation. **Policymakers and NGOs** can further this cause by launching awareness campaigns that promote body positivity and mental well-being through fashion education. In addition, they should support ethical, local, and sustainable fashion initiatives that appeal to socially conscious youth.

Future researchers are encouraged to broaden the scope of current findings by conducting national or international studies and delving deeper into how fashion impacts teenage mental health and self-confidence.

Lastly, **influencers and media creators** should focus on promoting fashion content that is inclusive, diverse, and grounded in comfort and sustainability rather than superficial perfection, shaping healthier fashion narratives for today's youth.

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