

Changing Perspective of the Indian Consumer towards Contoured Garments

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Abstract: Though India has always been considered a very traditional nation when it comes to fashion, this is changing fast. Today, the Indian domestic apparel market is expected to grow at a compound average growth rate of 11% to reach USD 95 billion by 2020 from its current worth of USD 40 billion.

The reason for this growth can be attributed to the transformational shift in the preferences of the Indian women. As women are becoming more and more aware of fashion and the range of garments available, they are looking for better fits, which can be provided by well fitting contoured garments.

Indian women want both Western and Indian wear to contour well on the Indian figure. A survey was conducted to find out the need and demand for contoured garments in the Indian female population. Women were asked to fill a questionnaire which included questions on the type of fitted garments they wear and assess the satisfaction level with the available contoured garments. Based on the response received in the survey, this paper will establish the need for contoured garments that fit well.

Keywords: Indian womenswear, consumer, fashion, contoured garments, fit, satisfaction

I. INTRODUCTION

It has always been a woman's prerogative to adorn her body. History has repeatedly iterated the attention that women have exhibited towards their body image. While at different points in time, there have been varied standards of physical attractiveness [1] throughout history, there has been evidence that women have relied on contoured garments to shape their body according to the changing beauty criteria.

When it comes to looking good, it is not the shape or the size of the body that matters, it is the fit of the clothes. Fitting problems occur when necessary adjustments to compensate for the differences between the pattern and the body's dimensions are not made. Apparel manufacturers and retailers are also aware of the problems of unsatisfactory fit of contoured garments. To address the problem of fit, patterns developed for contoured dresses must be based on contouring principles which take into account both the bust size as well as the cup size.

According to Morris [2], a significant number of women are dissatisfied with the range and fit of contoured garments available. With increased awareness in the industry, the number of styles and sizes of contoured garments has increased. However, the lack of understanding of body sizing is noticeable especially for contoured garments.

India is the world's second largest exporter of textiles and apparels. With readymade garments being the largest contributor at forty seven percent of the total exports, [3] Indian textile and apparel exports are expected to grow at a CAGR of eleven percent to rise from around USD 40 billion (Rs. 3,20,000 crores) to USD 95 billion (Rs. 7,57,000 crores) in 2023.

The women wear segment comprises 38% share of the total Indian apparel market in terms of value. A study by the market research firm Technopak [4] estimates the Indian women's wear market at Rs 78,500 crore (USD 14.4billion). The growth of this market segment is more than the menswear segment. Women's apparel market is expected to cross Rs 121,400 crores (USD 22.3 billion) by 2017, growing at a CAGR of eleven percent.

Seeing the potential of the Indian women's wear segment and keeping in view their desire for a good fit a study is being conducted to develop contouring increments for providing improved fit across all bust sizes through collecting measurements of varying bust sizes, developing patterns and test fitting to check the accuracy of the same.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It is noted that among other basic needs provided by garments to consumers, the satisfaction of a good fitting ready-to-wear garment is of prime importance. As a result of factors such as body shapes and the unavailability of a standardized Indian garment sizing system, female consumers are left with a narrow choice as far as finding a well fitted ready-to-wear garment is concerned.

While fitted and semi-fitted garments are easily available in the market, it is difficult for female consumers to find close-fitted garments that fit well. With inadequate research available in India on garment sizing and fit problems, clothing manufacturers do not have access to a well-researched scientific approach to design and develop contoured garments that can fit majority of the female consumers.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Clothes have been an important part of any civilization. Through the centuries, various ways have been developed to achieve the desired perfect fit. Of these ways, pattern making was the one that gained the maximum popularity, as the dimension fit of a garment largely depends on the quality of its patterns. Pattern making is the process of creating a template of a fashion style. Of these the most basic ones are the slopers. The basic pattern set for women consists of basic bodice, basic skirt and basic sleeves. These are foundation slopers used for making any other design styles.

A basic block touches only the outer edge of the contours of a human body. For a garment to fit snugly it needs to be tightened along the body shape. According to Armstrong [5], a pattern must be reduced within its frame to fit the dimensions of the body above, below and in between the bust and shoulder blades to fit the contours of the upper torso closer than the basic garment. From the above, it can be concluded that contouring is fitting a pattern closer to the body than the basic sloper [6].

Contoured garments are garments that fit along the contours of the body. They follow the contours of the body tightly. Contouring is a method applied to designs that follow the curve of the bust rather than covering the hollow areas [7].

According to authors like Armstrong [5], Shoben [8], Knowles [6] and others, the **designs** which can be achieved by contouring are **corsets, strapless outfits** (contouring over, under and at times between the bust), **empire line dresses** (contouring under the bust), **brassiere, bikinis, bra top** (contouring over, under and at times between the bust), **halter dresses** and **dresses with deep cut out armholes and necklines** (contouring at the armhole and neckline), **one shoulder dresses** (contouring over the bust) and **surplice dresses** (contouring over and under the bust).

III. METHODOLOGY

Before conducting the survey, it was established from the review of literature that there was limited information available about women's preferences for contoured garments. As this information was essential for carrying out further investigation into the necessity of the contoured garment, a detailed questionnaire was developed. This questionnaire was aimed at understanding consumer preferences of the Indian women towards contoured garments and the problems faced by them. The purpose of this survey was:

- To study the preferences for contoured garments among Indian women consumers and
- To identify the preferences, the current popularity and challenges related to contoured garments for the Indian women consumer.

A pan India survey was conducted with the objective of understanding the awareness levels and buying behavior of the contoured garments among urban Indian women between the age group of eighteen and sixty years and to understand the current trends regarding the popularity, inclinations and issues surrounding contoured garments. Three hundred and ninety six women were interviewed through structured questionnaires. The sampling was selected through non-probability, convenient sampling. Snowball sampling was used to increase the sample size.

The questionnaire designed used structured, direct, open ended and close ended questions with dichotomous or multiple choices. The Likert scale was also employed in some questions to help quantify the data. Before the questionnaire was administered, a pilot study was conducted. On the basis of the feedback received, the questions were edited, rephrased or modified.

As part of the survey, out of the six hundred questionnaires distributed through three modes - email, web link and in person, four hundred eight questionnaires were received back. Twelve were incomplete and therefore rejected, resulting in three hundred ninety six useable questionnaires. This information, once collected, was used to analyse the need for contoured garments in the close fitted segment of the women's wear market using various quantitative tools.

The data collected was analysed for results and findings using the SPSS software version 16. The statistical tools used were frequency, mean, percentage, cross tabulation, chi-square test and Phi and Cramer's V test.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS FOR THE CONSUMERS SURVEY

4.1 Demography

Out of the three hundred ninety six questionnaires analysed, thirty six percent of the respondents were less than twenty years of age, forty seven percent of the respondents were in the age group of twenty to thirty years, thirteen percent were in the age group of thirty to forty years and the remaining four percent were in the age group of forty to sixty years. The highest percentage of respondents was in the age group of twenty to thirty years.

Out of the total questionnaires received, approximately seventy six percent were students, twenty one percent were salaried women, two percent were self-employed and only one percent were homemakers. Forty percent of the respondents were from an income group earning less than Rs. 30,000/- per month and twenty three percent of the respondents were from the income category earning above Rs. 70,000/- per month.

In response to the question on the respondents brassiere and cup sizes, the maximum percentage of respondents, that is thirty four percent, reported their brassiere size as 32. Twenty eight percent whose self-reported size was 34 and twenty percent reported their brassiere size as 36. These three sizes totaled to eighty two percent of the respondents. The remaining eighteen percent of the respondents were distributed amongst other sizes such as size 28 (2.5 percent), size 30 (7 percent), size 38 and 40 (4 percent each) and size 42 (0.5 percent). This showed that most of the respondents wore brassiere size 32 and 34, followed by 36.

Data was investigated to find out if there was any relationship between the age group and brassiere size using statistical tools such as cross-tabulation, chi-square test and Phi and Cramer's V test. From these tests, it was concluded that there is a statistically significant association between age group and brassiere size. As the age increased the brasserie size also increased upto a certain age.

When asked about their cup size, the maximum percentage of respondents, that is fifty one percent, reported their cup size to be B, twenty six percent reported it to be C, thirteen percent reported it to be A and ten percent reported it to be D. No other cup sizes were reported. The survey showed that the most common cup sizes were B and C.

The distribution of the cup size followed the universal trend of a bell shaped curve, skewed towards the left. The fact that maximum respondents reported their cup size as B is highly reflective of the Indian brassiere manufacturing industry, which predominantly produces cup sizes A to D.

4.2 Preferences in Contoured Garments

4.2.1 Styles and Reasons

Information regarding garment fit preferences were gathered by asking the participants to indicate their preferred fit for contoured garments. Forty three percent of the consumers occasionally wore contoured garments, twenty nine percent of the consumers wore them sometimes (twice a week), fifteen percent never wore contoured garments, twelve percent wore them mostly (3-4 times a week) and only a very small percent of one percent wore contoured garments on a daily basis.

Compared to this, thirty five percent of the consumers wore fitted garments sometimes, thirty percent of the consumers wore them mostly, twenty six percent of the consumers wore them occasionally, eight percent wore them always and a small percentage of two percent never wore fitted garments.

Fifty two percent of the consumers wore semi-fitted garments mostly, thirty two percent of the consumers wore them sometimes, twelve percent of the consumers wore them always, three percent wore them occasionally and a small percent of two percent never wore semi-fitted garments.

Compared to this, forty three percent of the consumers wore loose garments sometimes, twenty four percent of the consumers wore them mostly, twenty percent of the consumers wore them occasionally, nine percent never wore them and a small percent of four percent wore loose garments always.

The findings from this survey correspond with the findings of surveys conducted by Newcomb and Istook [9] on Mexican-American female consumers, Pisut and Connell [10] on American consumers and Kasambala [11] on South African consumers which states that even these women prefer semi fitted garments. Based on the inferences drawn from these surveys, it can be concluded that women all over the world prefer semi fitted garments most of the time.

4.2.2 Consumer Preference for Contoured Garments

Sixty four percent of the women consumers liked contoured garments and thirty six percent of the women consumers did not like contoured garments. On further investigation, on whether this result is applicable to the population in general, a hypothesis was formulated and was tested using the Z-test. From this test, it was concluded that more than sixty percent of the consumer would like to wear contoured garments.

Some of the respondents reported that they wore contoured garments for a short duration at special occasions only. When asked for reasons for preferring contoured garments, varied responses were received. A

contoured garment accentuated the body shape and complimented it by helping achieve the desired slim shape, thereby making the wearer look narrower or smaller. It made them look more presentable and appealing, thus providing the comfort and confidence of looking good. The fashion trends of the period also play a very important factor in influencing the choice of the consumers.

Reasons cited by some of the respondents for not preferring contoured garments were unavailability of size, unavailability of style to suit the body type and shape, inappropriate fit, the feeling of not being comfortable in a contoured garment and the necessity of getting it custom-made.

4.2.3 Type of Contoured Garments

It was found from the survey that the most preferred contoured garment were empire line dresses with fifty four percent of the respondents liking them, followed by dresses with a deep cut back with fifty one percent of the respondents liking them, and halters with a following of forty two percent. Strapless outfits were liked by thirty six percent of the respondents, whereas thirty two percent of the respondents preferred dresses with scooped necklines. The three least preferred contoured garments were one shoulder dresses with twenty three percent of the respondents liking them, dresses with deep armhole with twenty percent of the respondents liking them and corsets with only seventeen percent of the respondents liking them. Refer Figure 1.

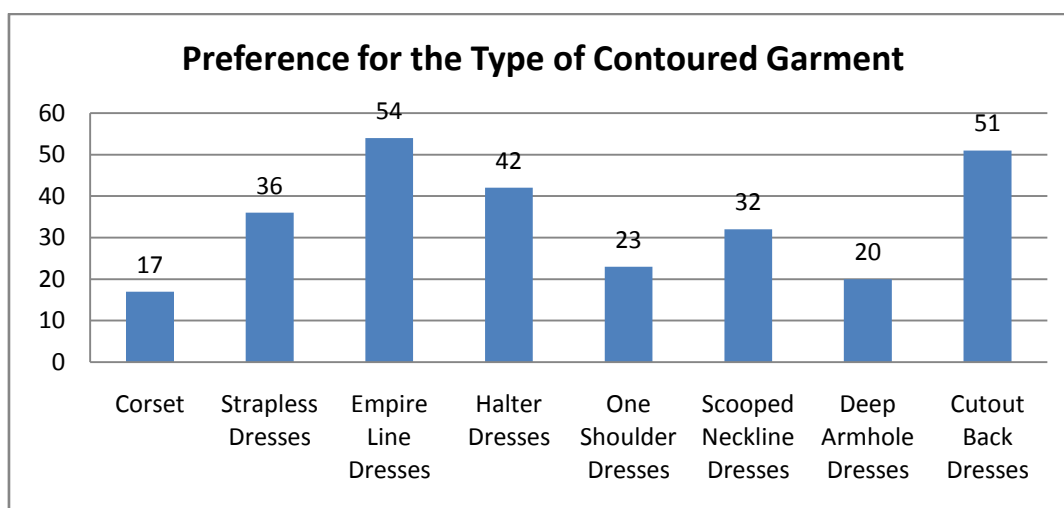


Figure 1: Preference for the type of contoured garment

The main reason cited by the respondent for the dresses or preferred style was personal preferences that were guided by the look of the garment, body type, the fit of the garment and the ongoing fashion trends.

4.3 Popularity of Contoured Garments

It was revealed from the analysis of responses that the purchase of the following contoured garments have gone up in the last five years: empire line dresses and dresses with deep cut out back by fifty one percent each, halter dresses by forty four percent, dresses with scooped neckline by forty percent and strapless outfits by thirty nine percent. Most of the respondents disagreed with the increase in the sales of one shoulder dresses (61 percent), dresses with deep armhole (61 percent) and corsets (46 percent).

The answers received revealed a clear trend showing that more and more women in the age group below thirty years are buying a number of contoured garments.

When asked for the reasons for this increased buying of contoured garments, varied responses were received. A lot of women said that the social acceptance of women choosing to wear what they want influenced their purchasing habits giving them the assurance and the freedom to buy such clothes. With the changing cultural background, women are becoming more aware of themselves and their bodies. They want to look good and feel confident about themselves. The rise of occasions in the personal and social lives of women demands that they are well dressed, at all times. Women are now seen embracing the idea of fashion, as a means of self-expression, and not merely as a functional purchase [4].

According to Gupta, the broadening lifestyles of Indian consumers have led to a change in their clothing needs [12]. With more women entering the workforce, they have started asserting their choices and creating a demand for more clothes that suit them [13], making them look good and feel confident about themselves. This has led them to explore the option of contoured garments also.

Increasing urbanization and access to the western world through media, social network and mobile applications has also influenced the choices of women. They want to look no less than their western counterparts and therefore keep themselves updated on what they are wearing.

Television, magazine and other media forms as well as moving out of the house to work, transmits strong fashion messages to women, emphasizing that what they wear is important.

4.4 Fit Issues

4.4.1 Issues Faced in Contoured Garments

Of the three hundred and ninety six surveys conducted, sixty three percent of the women accepted that they faced problems when buying contoured garments off the shelf and thirty seven percent reported no problems.

Although a rise in the popularity of the contoured garments is seen, it could be ascertained from the questionnaire that the participants were not happy with the availability of the contoured garments off-the-shelf available. When these women were asked, about the kind of problems they faced, they referred to multiple problems such as, unavailability of sizes and styles and gapping and wrinkles in certain areas of the outfit.

As seen from Figure 2, the study pointed out that fifty four percent, that is, thirty one and twenty three percent agreed or strongly agreed respectively with the fact that their sizes of contoured garments were not available in the retail market. This indicated that clothing manufacturers do not take different body shapes and sizes into consideration when manufacturing contoured garments.

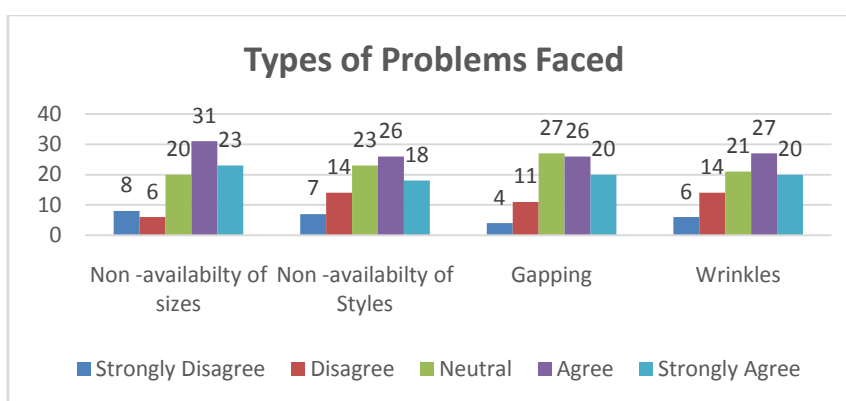


Figure 2: Type of problems faced when buying contoured garments

Non availability of style was the second most common problem faced by the respondents. Almost forty four percent, that is, twenty six and eighteen percent of the respondents respectively faced this problem due to availability of only limited styles and colours in each sizes, especially larger sizes. Not all the styles offered in smaller sizes were offered in larger sizes.

The major problem faced by the women was of either gapping or wrinkling. Gapping over the bust or under the bust area caused the garment to hang loosely either above the bust or under it, which led to dissatisfaction. Due to tight fit over the bust or under the bust, wrinkles were formed.

Fifty five percent of the respondents reported that the garments were altered to be able to attain good and proper fit. Twenty five percent of the respondents felt that the contoured garments that they brought off-the-shelf were either gapping or wrinkling.

Some of the participants mentioned that they brought garments only from shops where alteration facility was available. Though some of the respondents were able to achieve the desired fit with little alterations, majority of the respondents were unlikely to request alterations. They would rather continue looking for fitted garments elsewhere.

4.4.2 Suggestions for Contoured Garments by the Consumers

When asked in the survey, how the problems faced by the consumers, while buying contoured garments, could be solved, seventy six percent of the respondents agreed that the contoured garments should be available in different cup sizes and twenty four percent said that they were quite comfortable getting their contoured garments altered as per their preference.

The questionnaire also provided an option to the respondent to give any other suggestions. Some respondents cited their preference of getting their contoured garments tailor-made as a suggestion to attain a

better fit. A small percentage of the respondents also said that rather than going to the trouble of getting the garment tailor-made, they would prefer to keep looking for a well fitted contoured garment.

4.4.3 Problem Areas of the Contoured Garment

It was seen from the research conducted that buying ready-to-wear contoured garments off-the-shelf had its own share of problems. When questioned about the main problematic areas as far as the fit of the various contoured garments was concerned, varied responses were received. An improper fit was defined in terms of gapping and wrinkling.

From the results, it was ascertained that the main problem area as far as one shoulder dresses, off shoulder dresses, halter dresses and dresses with deep armholes were concerned, was gapping at the armhole and the neckline. Wrinkles or creases under the bust were also reported to be a major problem. The primary reason for this was that most of the garments are designed for the hour glass figure.

Gapping was also reported in between the bust and the neckline of contoured garments that had a deep neckline, deep cut out back and corsets. On the other hand, wrinkling was observed in corsets and halter dresses with deep cut out backs. In some garments, like off shoulder dresses and brassiere top dresses, a few respondents reported wrinkling over the bust area. The reason for this was that majority of the garment manufacturers produced contoured garments using measurements of the B cup size. If these manufacturers used varied cup sizes, then the fit issue would be solved to a certain extent.

V. CONCLUSION

This study was able to confirm the consumer preferences for contoured garment through the surveys. These conclusions are presented below.

The highest percentages of respondents in the Consumer Survey were students under the age of thirty years. The maximum number of the respondents wore brassieres size 32 (thirty four percent) followed by size 34 (twenty eight percent) and size 36 (twenty percent), adding to eighty two percent in total. Half the population wore cup size B followed by cup size C (twenty six percent). These two cup sizes added to two-third of the population (seventy seven percent).

The most preferred style of garment was semi-fitted. The second preference was given to fitted garments followed by loose and the least preferred was contoured garment.

However, when asked if the respondents preferred contoured garments, sixty four percent of the respondents agreed to the same. Due to its nature of being close fitted and tight, they were worn for short durations and at special occasions. Contoured garments help in achieving the desired slim shape. The main reasons for not preferring to wear contoured garment were unavailability of correct sizes, unavailability of styles to suit body types and shape and inappropriate fit. Another reason was that it required custom-tailoring, which was cumbersome due to the busy lifestyle of women.

The most preferred contoured garments included empire line dresses, dresses with a deep cut out backs, halter dresses followed by strapless outfits and dresses with deep cut out neckline. The least preferred contoured garments were corsets, dresses with deep armholes and one shoulder dresses in that order.

The trend showed that the demand of contoured garments had increased in the last five years. The order in which the demand has gone up are empire line dresses and dresses with deep cut out backs by fifty one percent each, halter dresses by forty four percent, dresses with scooped neckline by forty percent and strapless outfits by thirty nine percent. The demand for one shoulder dresses, dresses with deep armholes and corsets have not increased as compared to others in this category.

The analysis of gathered data also revealed that women in the age group below thirty years were buying more number of contoured garments at present than before. The reasons for this buying of contoured garments, were varied. However, broadening lifestyles and roles played by the Indian women consumers have led to a change in their clothing needs and demand for more clothes that suit them and enhance their figures, thereby exploring the option of contoured garments also.

The survey revealed that Indian women faced problems in fit, especially in the ready-to-wear contoured garments segment. The major problems were non-availability of sizes and styles and the need for alterations. The alterations varied from style to style, but were mainly required to adjust the fabric around the bust, either above or under. The primary reason for the non-availability of sizes was the fact that majority of the garments were being manufactured for cup size B, which covered only forty eight percent of population. This left a major portion of fifty two percent of the women population looking for sizes. The need for alteration-free, more cup size range and appropriate styles according to sizes was felt.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there has been an increase in demand for contoured garments in India and consumers are not satisfied with the fit of off-the-shelf contoured garments available.

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