

An Empirical Study on Consumer Buying-Behaviour towards Athleisure

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Abstract

Upsurge in fitness- consciousness among people has resulted in a rise of the athleisure trend. Athleisure is the trend of wearing athletic clothing basically designed for performance as casual wear in places other than gyms. Athleisure is usually characterized as more fashionable and less functional. This quantitative study investigated the people who prefer to do physical activity in popular spots and parks of Chandigarh City. The participants were studied regarding their socio-physiological profile, workout routines and their buying behaviour towards athleisure. Analysis of collected data revealed that most of the respondents are concerned about their physical fitness. Most respondents preferred to workout daily. Maximum respondents preferred to wear athleisure as casual wear and T-shirts being the most favourite piece of athleisure. Participants revealed their favourable price range to buy athleisure is Rs1000- Rs 1500 and mode of shopping is E-shopping. Furthermore, Fit, Fabric, Colour Function ability and Quality were the most chosen attributes while purchasing athleisure. As a result of this study, marketing strategists may be able to improve their marketing strategies by understanding the actual needs and demands of consumers.

Keywords: Athleisure; Buying behaviour; Functional; Fashionable.

Introduction

Nowadays, adoption of healthier habits, rise of recreation sports, indulging in active nutritional lifestyle, popularity of wellness therapies and increasing incomes in developing countries are factors driving the sports and fitness clothing market. Many Indians are taking up various fitness as well as recreation activities such as yoga, running, cycling, swimming and aerobics to improve their lifestyle. Consequently, there is an increase in the consumer expenditure on wellness and health, which has increased

the popularity of athleisure segment.

The word 'athleisure' has become the part of Merriam-webster dictionary and is defined as "casual clothing designed to be worn both for exercising and for general use." Although this explanation may theoretically be accurate, it is also slight ambiguous. The true beauty of athleisure is that it is functional as well as completely fashionable. While designed for a particular use, athletic clothing has become increasingly integrated into everyday fashion trends. Athleisure has its foundations in two perfect inverses, 'athletics' and 'leisure'. This new trend has become very popular and is predicted to add another 61 billion US dollar to the industry by 2021 (Euromonitor International, 2016). It was a pair of sweatpants that kick-started the popular fad as people began wearing the comfy fabric to movies, spas, and even to work. The trend is so popular that yoga pants have become the new jeans (Singh, 2016). This trend is attracting attention of masses thus promoting a fit and sound lifestyle. It is observed that there are two principal growth drivers for athleisure. Firstly, the increasing interest of consumers in health and wellness trends. Secondly, it's also a lifestyle movement, fueled by social media specially Instagram and Snapchat which have had tremendous impact on athleisure. With the help of social media many bloggers and celebrities are able to share their healthy lifestyle and what they wear to massive audience worldwide. The growing preference for clothing that conveys a sense of luxury along with featuring performance characteristics to support an active lifestyle has further increased the growth of the athleisure category. The aspiration to showcase an active and fit lifestyle on social media is pushing well off consumers to take up luxury wellness fashion. High end athleisure demand from consumers has forced many luxury brands like Dior, Louis Vuitton and Chanel to launch new sports inspired collections.

The age-long distinction between luxury fashion and activewear no longer exists. At present, it is becoming common for people to wear athletic/sports-inspired clothing and athletic shoes as everyday commodity. It has become so hard to identify what consumers purchase and wear specifically and exclusively for recreational activities, when those same items are also worn outside of the gym or when people are not exercising. Sportswear is hardly the category that hugely benefits from this trend. The impact of athleisure is much beyond sportswear as innerwear, swimwear and even wider apparel businesses have invested in new fabric technologies to stay ahead of the competition. Massive impact is observed on non-apparel cat-

* Euromonitor International is an independent, world-leading strategic market research organization.

egory such as beauty products from sweat proof formulations in makeup ranges that are suitable for working out to more convenient and compact packaging. The target market for athleisure is clearly the younger millennials because those are the people spending their incomes on experiences and fashion significantly (Jain, 2019). The five main attributes sought in athleisure wear are comfort, durability, flexibility, luxury and fashion (Zhou, 2018). Since final product ought to be able to support active as well as social lifestyle, textiles used to construct athleisure need to support functional and design needs. Perhaps this trend really fit in well and is not going anywhere. On the other hand, more competition usually is a sign of healthy growth and validates the message that athleisure is a very lucrative business.

As one of the largest and most recognizable brand worldwide, Nike is the front-runner in the category of athletic apparel, accessories and footwear, with its sale estimating approximately to 39.1 billion U.S. dollars in the year 2018 to 2019 (Statista, 2020). The athletic clothing, accessories, and footwear is further categorized into performance, sports-inspired, and outdoor. It is predicted that the global sportswear market has potential to grow further in future. Nike is considered as prominent producers as well as world's leading athletic apparel brand. Other brands like Adidas, Puma, and Under Armour are the major competitors with cut throat competition (Statista, 2020). Women in particular have embraced fashionable activewear with great enthusiasm. This was one of the main reasons for Nike's continued expansion of the athleisure offering. Nike has paid attention to the growing trend for many years, creating successful products like the Flyknit sneaker, the Therma Sphere Max, which comes with a men's hoodie, men's pants and a women's track vest. Nike also created a #BetterForIt digital marketing campaign that featured everyday women as opposed to models or professional athletes.

As part of this, Nike held round tables with athletes to better understand their needs and desire for apparel that combines form and functionality. Lululemon is a Canada-based brand that pioneered the athleisure category. It was founded in 1998 by Dennis J. Chip Wilson. Unlike its peers, Lululemon has tried to change the way pants are sold. The company sells pants in categories like hugged, relaxed, tight and held rather than in traditional sizes. Each style serves a specific purpose in consumer purchases, from fitness to casual wear. Nike is at the forefront of maximizing revenue from the athleisure trend. It is engaged in a heated battle with Lululemon and Under Armor. This fashionable category can be worn both in the office and in the gym alike. Sales of apparel, shoes and accessories increased

compared to the previous year, mainly due to the active wear segment. The huge success of the athleisure trend has also attracted luxury brands such as Dior, Louis Vuitton, Givenchy and Alexander McQueen. These luxury brands have brought a designer look to sportswear by mixing fabrics, fusing patterns and playing with textures. Brands like Brunello Cucinelli and Donna Karan have even launched designer cashmere leggings. Dior launched beaded jumpsuits and dresses with Velcro slip-on sneakers trimmed with embroidery and colorful rubber soles. Chanel introduced chiffon-wrapped couture sneakers with athletic soles embroidered with lace, pearls and tweed, all embodying a sense of comfort and freedom for the person who lives in them. Another significant role in popularizing this segment is played by celebrities who themselves have started their brand in this segment, other than being just the brand ambassadors.

Powering this trend in India are celebrities like Tiger Shroff, Jacqueline Fernandez, Anushka Sharma, Sonam Kapoor, Shahid Kapoor and Hrithik Roshan. In the recent years, Indian designers like Anand Bhushan have used neoprene and scuba fabrics to create new silhouettes which have made sportswear desirable as casual clothing. Another famous designer Anamika Khanna showcased an ethnic infusion with athleisure, her collection comprising of cotton, silk and chiffon fabrics were inspired by sportswear and also included the three stripes from Adidas, reinterpreted by dupattas and pyjama pants. Many new brands are stepping up and traditional brands are launching new lines to stay ahead of the competition. Van Heusen launched its innerwear and athleisure collection for women. Their athleisure line is sporty and ideal for afternoon brunches and night parties. The innerwear collection can be worn with your work outfits or T-shirts on a day out with friends. Puma India hosted an exclusive launch for its new RS-X range in Mumbai. Bringing back the 80strends, the experiential pop-up space showcased Puma RS (Running System) range of sneakers, combining style with sturdiness. The shoes are available in an array of colours, from funky oranges to soothing blues

Review of Literature

It was reviewed in The New York Times suggesting that 'body-fitness' had been presented 'as a form of self-promotion' (Sassatelli, 1999). People have become proactive because there has been a major upsurge in lifestyle disorders such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases (Aggarwal, 2018). Presently, varied number of activities comes under the category of 'Fitness', including well known sports such as swimming, unorganized sports such as yoga as well as leisure activities such as gar-

dening, dancing, jogging and home workouts. The Global Wellness Institute (GWI)** reported that leisure physical activities contributed to large private sector revenue in year 2018 which comprises of direct consumer expenses on various fitness and mindful activities. More than half of the market represents the fitness auxiliary sectors like apparel and footwear; fitness equipment & supplies and fitness and exercise related technologies. Around the globe, 3.7 percent of people are members of fitness clubs popularly known as gyms or take part in independent fitness activities or classes regularly. Popularity of fitness culture has resulted in flourishing new business models such as luxury fitness, 24/7 gyms, boutique studios, small group training, international and regional franchises, etc. to satisfy to different needs, price and budgets.

In the year 2018, Global Wellness Institute estimated the global apparel and footwear industry as a \$332.7 billion market constituting of \$198.2 billion for apparel and \$134.6 billion for footwear. However, it is not evident that all the spending on sports apparel and footwear is done due to participation in any physical activity. International garment industry is witnessing athleisure as a segment which is flourishing as compared to the other apparel segments. Furthermore, it is predicted to grow rapidly because of various reasons. According to Euromonitor International (2018), the athleisure or sport inspired apparel and footwear segment is exploding in India at the rate of 20-25% annually. Athleisure is a piece of clothing harmonizing routine life, work life and recreation. It represents fading of the distinct boundaries of high fashion and street fashion. A study by O'Sullivan, Hanlon, Spaaij and Westerbeek, (2017) explored that women are adding active wear into their wardrobe and give importance to fashion even in their sports attire. This is evident with the use of active wear as casual wear, office wear, loungewear and evening wear. Also, active wear consumption pattern is affected by the age and generation of women. These active wear garments are used as routine wear mainly among the youth who are considered as the future of the upcoming trend in the market (Bramel, 2005). Another study by Cohen (2014) sportswear is adopted as everyday apparel. This scenario is quite evident that whether worn for jogging, walking, shopping or doing household chores, activewear has become acceptable everyday attire. In Canada, more than half of the women purchases activewear with the primary use as casual wear and sometimes for sport or exercise. Also, one third of American women

** The Global Wellness Institute is a United States based nonprofit organization with a mission to empower wellness worldwide by educating public and private sectors about preventative health and wellness.

have increased the use of casual wear. Activewear continues to become part of office wear and streetwear. Additionally, experience gained from past consumption of activewear and incubation of health and wellness among their lifestyle encouraged consumers to purchase activewear for routine purposes (Watts & Chi, 2019). Lee and Ahn (2016) categorized the design characteristics of athleisure wear of five leading sports brand on the basis of functionality, practicability, and aesthetics. Functionality can be shown for using high quality of fabric and ergonomic and compact fit for activity. Practicality is a design that emphasizes comfort and removes the boundary between sportswear and everyday wear with a simple simplicity. Lastly, aesthetics was shown through design elements to express the beauty of clothes and healthy beauty as a positive external expression of the wearer. Investigator concluded that athleisure wear is a style that combines sportswear and leisure wear as casual everyday wear, has differentiation from sportswear and can develop products as urban-style casual sportswear that can meet the needs of various consumers and expand the sportswear market. The popularity of athleisure has led existing sportswear brands to seek to shift to athleisure image by collaboration with the purpose to deliver symbolic meaning to consumers. The analysis of the collaboration of sportswear brands explained that Adidas conveys creativity, Nike conveys innovation, under armour conveys professionalism, and Puma conveys youth to consumers (Jung, 2017).

Eva, Tim and Takatera (2018) investigated the variation in preference of training t-shirts for women in relation to Japanese and French people. A questionnaire was used to study the impression of the t-shirts' appearances using the 3D simulations. Twenty-four different designs with respect to type of sleeve, bodice length and fitting were developed. The results explained that very short, sleeveless t-shirt and tank top is mostly preferred by both Japanese and French people for practice. It pointed out that people like modern, cool, showy and elaborated designs. Also, they noticed that Japanese people felt that the piece of garment which is suitable for exercise is not suitable to be worn while not exercising, whereas for French people it isn't same. Moreover, brands are becoming vital specially to gain limelight in the market and consumer. Therefore, it is backbreaking to build and sustain powerful brand perception among people. Researcher conducted an online investigation to find out the perception of six apparel companies in relation to ten attributes namely quality, fit, durability, comfort, fabric, innovation, style, social responsibility, comfort, function and overall value. The results concluded that Adidas, Nike are leading in all categories followed by Under Armour, Athleta, Puma and Champion (Conway, 2017).

Significance of the Study

The athleisure trend is developing worldwide, especially in emerging countries like India. Many researches have been conducted to study the US athleisure market and consumer behavior. There are limited studies that have examined this trend in the Indian apparel market and its end users. This is a key area of research that originally started as a trend, has evolved into a lifestyle movement. It revolves around health and wellness as a status symbol. One of the main drivers of this scenario is adoption of healthier habits, rise of recreation sports, indulging in active nutritional lifestyle. The study will determine consumer purchasing behavior for athleisure among people from different age groups. Choosing good clothes always plays a big part in wearer's life and their choice reflects their purchasing behavior. This study is an opportunity for marketers to improve their marketing strategies. So that they can meet the real needs and desires of consumers. The above discussion provides logical reasons for conducting this study.

Objectives

- 1 To study the inclination of consumer towards fitness.
- 2 To work out consumer behaviour in relation to athleisure.
- 3 To analyse various factors that affects the buying decision of consumers towards athleisure.

Methodology

A convenience sampling method was adopted for this study. Primary data was collected by surveying people irrespective of age from three popular recreational spot of Chandigarh city namely Sukhna Lake, Rose Garden and Leisure Valley. For the collection of data, a structured non-disguised questionnaire was prepared for people who prefer to do fitness activity in parks such as yoga, walking, jogging, exercising or cycling. The questionnaire consisted of three sections. In the first section, the respondents were asked questions related to demographic attributes like age, gender, income, etc. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of questions regarding their fitness and third part of the questionnaire was framed to get the respondents' emotions concerning the buying behaviour towards athleisure. The data collected from respondents was coded, tabulated and analyzed.

Results and Discussion

Sample Characteristics

The demographic profile depicts that of 60 respondents, 66.67 percent female and 33.33 percent male participated in the study. More than half of the respondents were from Gen Z (1995-2010), i.e. 61.67 percent, were between the ages of 12-27 years, while the second majority of the samples, i.e. 23.33 percent of respondents were from Gen Y (1977-1995). Around 11.67 percent of the respondents were from Gen X (1965-1976), and only 3.33 percent were between 56-75 years of age, i.e., Baby Boomers (1946-1965). The data presented in Table 1 revealed that most of the respondents were Post-graduates (40%) and second majority had Master's degrees (31.67%) followed by 16.67 percent of respondents were undergraduate. Only 8.33 percent of the respondents were diploma holders, and significantly fewer were Doctorate, i.e., 3.33 percent. The data indicates that 40 percent of the respondents in the sample population have monthly family incomes between 50,000 to 1,00,000. Around 26.67 percent had a monthly family income of more than Rs. 1,00,000 and almost a similar number of respondents (25%) have income between 10,000-50,000, while the remaining 30.6 percent of respondents reported having a monthly income between 30,000-60,000 rupees. Majority of the respondents were Single (65%) and the rest of them were Married (35%).

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents (n=60)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	20	33.33
Female	40	66.67
Age		
Baby Boomers (1946 - 1965) (76-57)	2	3.33
Gen X (1965 - 1976) (57-46)	7	11.67
Gen Y (1977 - 1995) (27-45)	14	23.33
Gen Z (1995 - 2010) (27-12)	37	61.67
Education		
Undergraduate	10	16.67

Graduation	19	31.67
Post- Graduation	24	40
Doctorate	2	3.33
Diploma	5	8.33
Monthly income		
Upto 10,000	5	8.33
10,000 - 50,000	15	25
50,000 - 1,00,000	24	40
Above 1,00,000	16	26.67
Marital Status		
Single	39	65
Married	21	35

Concerned about fitness

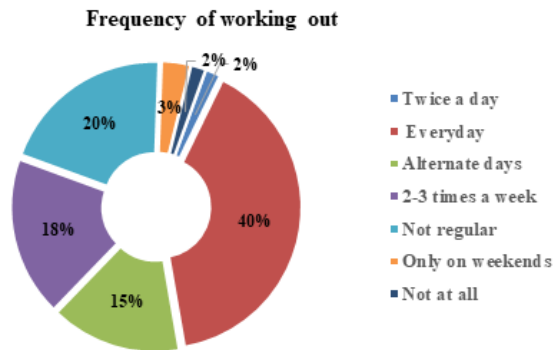
The table 2 describes the importance of fitness for the respondents with regard to their fitness or health in three different scenarios which were before Covid19, during Covid19 and after Covid19. This was measured using a 3-likert scale anchored with Extremely, Moderately and Not at all. The result depicts that maximum numbers of respondents are extremely concerned about their fitness i.e. 60 percent during the Covid19 pandemic. Second majority of respondents expressed their concern i.e. 53.33 percent before and after pandemic also. So, this can be concluded that fitness is a matter of concern for more than half of the respondents on a regular basis. Respondents usually undertake good amount of exercise and healthy eating habits to keep their fitness under control. Nearly half of the respondents take care of their fitness regularly but not on a serious note. 46.67 percent, 40 percent and 45 percent of respondents reported Moderately concerned in terms of fitness before Covid19, During Covid19 and After Covid19 respectively. Least number i.e 1.67 percent responded negatively to their approach toward fitness consciousness. The reasons quoted by them were laziness and a busy schedule.

Table 2. Concerned about Fitness (n=60)

	Extremely (%)	Moderately (%)	Not at all (%)
Before Covid19	53.33	46.67	0
During Covid19	60	40	0
After Covid19	53.33	45	1.67

Frequency of working out

Exercise is crucial for a fit body and mind. This contemporary era demands for regular physical activity as there is an increase in physical ailments, obesity, mental stress and sedentary lifestyles. The results in Fig 1. shows that maximum number of respondents (40%) indulged in physical workout on daily basis whereas 15 percent of respondents were not able to do workout regularly due to their busy routine and lazy attitude. Followed by 15 percent and 18 percent of respondents preferred that they work out on alternate days and 2-3 times a week respectively. Least number of responses were noted for option like only on weekends (3%), Not at all (2%) and Twice a day (2%). It can be concluded that most of the people are becoming physical active these days. People are adopting workout activities such as aerobics, cardio, weight lifting, swimming, walking, jogging, and yoga etc.

**Fig 1. Frequency of working out**

Preference to wear athleisure

Athleisure has become a lifestyle trend. The result shows that majority of respondents (63%) preferred to wear athleisure sometimes during their

day (fig.2). In contrast, 17 percent of respondents like to wear athleisure every time as they feel it is a comfortable attire. There are 13 percent of respondents that do not wear athleisure at all because of their jobs, busy schedule but they do have some t-shirts and joggers that they prefer to wear as leisurewear. Only a few respondents i.e. 7 percent avoid wearing athleisure as far as possible but they prefer to wear it either while jogging or practicing yoga. However, maximum responses were in favour of preferring athleisure during major part of the day.

Favourable purposes to wear athleisure other than gym

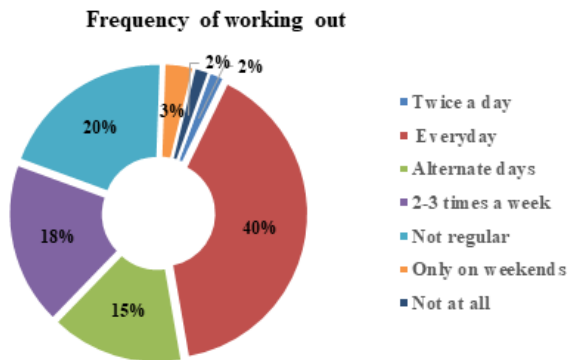


Fig 2. Preference to wear athleisure

Athleisure is a piece of clothing consumed for dual purposes of performing athletic activity and as leisurewear. The result depicts that the other purposes stated by respondents includes wearing athleisure at college (58%) followed by wearing it at home (20%) and while outing with friends (8%). Only a few number of respondents i.e. 5 percent wears it while shopping. Similarly, only 5 percent chose to wear athleisure while walking. Least number of respondents 3 percent prefers to wear athleisure piece like T-shirt and shoes to their offices. Surprisingly, 13 percent of respondents don't prefer to wear athleisure other than Gym.

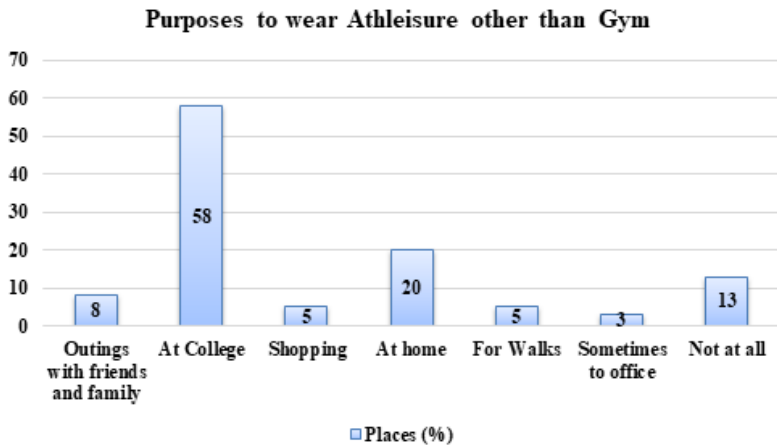


Fig 3. Purposes to wear Athleisure other than Gym

Average amount spend on athleisure

Average amount spent on athleisure by 60 respondents is mentioned in Fig. 4. The result showed that 53 percent respondents prefer to spend on an average between Rs1000- Rs1500, 37 percent respondents spent upto Rs1000, 8 percent respondents spent between Rs5000 to Rs10000 and minimum number of respondents 2 percent spent more than Rs10000 at a time while shopping for athleisure.

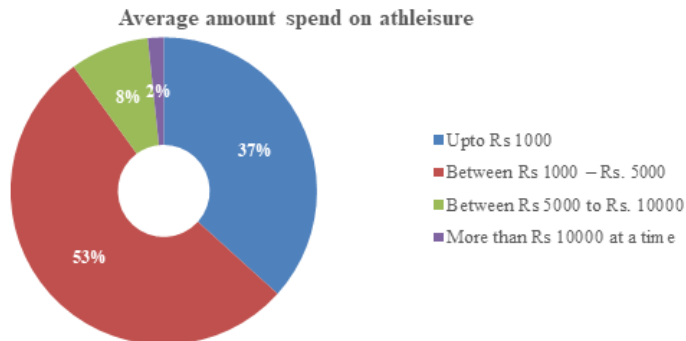


Fig.4. Average amount spend on athleisure mode of shopping

The results further showed that online shopping is most preferred mode of shopping by 67 percent of respondents. Famous e-shopping websites

among respondents are Amazon, Myntra, flipkart etc. The online shopping has increased tremendously with the restriction due to stay-at-home orders during Covid-19 pandemic. Consumers feel E-shopping is easy and comfortable, it even saves time. In contrast, 33 percent respondents rely on Offline purchases through various National and International Athleisure brand outlets. Most popularly Nike, Puma, Addidas, Under Armour and so on. Some of them even purchases local manufactured garment from retail outlets.

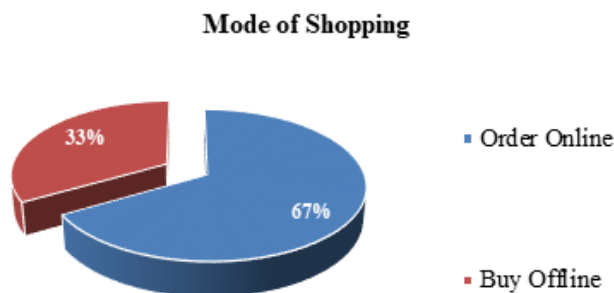


Fig 5. Mode of Shopping

Preferred category of athleisure

The data represented in the fig.6 depicts multiple responses of the respondents. The maximum number of respondents preferred to buy T-shirts (81.7%) followed by 48.3 percent preferred to purchase joggers. Around same number of respondents preferred shorts (38.3%) sweatshirts (31.7%) and innerwear (31.7%). At last, 28.3 percent of respondents preferred to buy leggings which concluded that women prefer to buy leggings. The results further determine that T-shirt is a popular piece of athleisure wear among all the age groups. People prefer to wear T-shirts at home as well as at workplace.

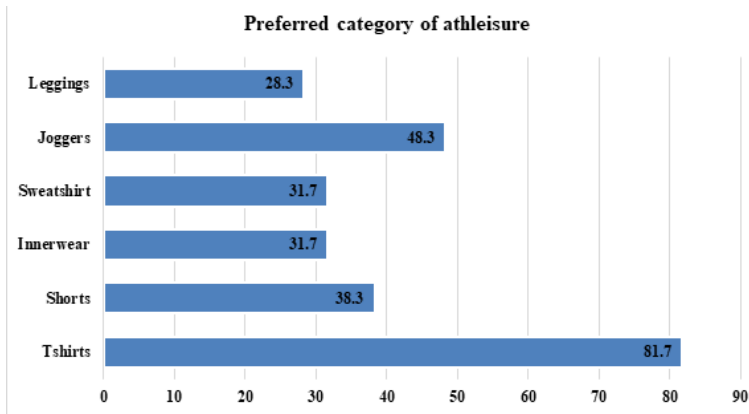


Fig.6. Preferred category of athleisure

Factors preferred while purchasing athleisure

Every consumer has varied behaviour which supports their buying decision. The table 2. shows different factors on which the consumer's preferences were recorded on 3-likert scale anchored as Extremely, Moderately and Not at all. According to data, it can be observed that most of the respondents preferred Fit as extremely important factor while purchasing athleisure i.e. 71.67 percent. Followed by Colour (60%), Cost Price (48.33%) and Functionality (58.33%). Similarly, maximum number of respondents considered factors like Fashion ability (58.33%), Fabric type (75%), Brand (43.33%) and Recommended by others (55%) as moderately important while purchasing athleisure. Unexpectedly, 41.67 percent of respondent stated that the advertisement of the product on social media do not affect their purchasing decision. So, the results concluded that every individual give importance to different factors while purchasing athleisure. But, most important factors that is considered crucial for athleisure are Fit, Colour, Functionality, Fabric Type and Quality. Every manufacturers and marketers must value these factors while producing and marketing athleisure.

Table 2. Factors preferred while purchasing Athleisure

Factors	Extremely	Moderately	Not at all
Fit	71.67	25	3.33
Fashion-ability	35	58.33	6.67
Fabric type	23.33	75	1.67
Colour	60	38.33	1.67
Brand	41.67	43.33	15
Cost Price	48.33	45	6.67
Functionality	58.33	40	1.67
Advertisement of the product on Social Media	20	38.33	41.67
Quality	63.33	33.33	3.33
Recommended by others	20	55	25

Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the individuals for whom physical fitness is crucial. The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed the lives of everyone around the world. It has altered the daily activities of almost everyone, including those who were depended on gyms for their physical fitness. Fitness consciousness during COVID-19 has been the highest among people. The findings further conclude that majority of the respondents works out regularly. With regards to athleisure the results indicate that participants prefer to wear athleisure regularly at some times of their day. Furthermore, young participants like to wear athleisure to their college place other than gym. This support the previous literature that athleisure has faded the boundaries between athletic and casual wear. Additionally, participants preferred to buy athleisure between the price range of Rs.1000-Rs1500 with T-shirt being the most favourite category of athleisure. E-shopping during COVID-19 has arisen because of lockdown worldwide. Home workouts and Work from home environment are the key drivers for increasing athleisure sale during lockdown. Consumer's interest has shifted from formal wear to more comfortable wear. This further supports the finding of the present study that participants preferred to shop more online as compared to offline especially during lockdown. Also, participants specified Fit, Colour, Functionality, Fabric Type and Quality as vital factors that affect their buying decision. The current study is considered stimulating future research directions for marketers

both online and offline. The sellers of athleisure products, especially online websites, should be aware of the target consumer behaviour, which is influenced by several market and consumer dependent variables.

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