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Apparel Choices and Psychological Well-Being: A Structural Equation Modelling Approach.

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ABSTRACT
Fashion and apparel extend beyond functional utility, significantly influencing individuals' confidence, mood, and overall psychological well-being. This study investigates how clothing-related attributes — including fit and comfort, color preference, fashion trends, social influence, and mindful consumption — affect self-esteem and emotional health. Primary data were collected from 491 respondents across selected cities in Tamil Nadu, India, using a structured questionnaire. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to examine both direct and indirect relationships among the constructs. The model demonstrated an excellent fit (CMIN/DF = 1.327; RMSEA = 0.026; CFI = 0.994). Findings reveal that fashion trends exerted the strongest direct effect on psychological well-being (β = 0.218), followed by clothing and color. Perceived fit and mindful consumption served as key mediating variables, amplifying the influence of clothing and color on psychological outcomes. Demographic variables including age, gender, locality, education, occupation, and income were found to significantly moderate psychological responses to apparel. The study underscores the psychological dimension of apparel consumption and offers actionable insights for apparel brands seeking to foster consumer well-being..

Keywords: Fashion, Psychological Well-Being, Self-Esteem, Fit and Comfort, Mindful Consumption, Structural Equation Modelling.

INTRODUCTION:

Fashion has evolved from a basic necessity into a powerful medium of self-expression, identity, and social communication. Clothing not only reflects an individual's personality and cultural belonging but also plays a significant role in shaping emotional states, mood, and behaviour (Kodžoman, 2019). When apparel aligns with personal style and provides physical comfort, individuals tend to experience heightened self-esteem and emotional satisfaction. Conversely, poor fit or clothing dissatisfaction can generate discomfort and negative self-perception (Hossain et al., 2024).

In contemporary society, the rapid proliferation of social media, fast fashion trends, and peer comparison has further intensified the relationship between clothing choices and psychological well-being. Fashion trends now serve as benchmarks of social identity, with individuals increasingly evaluating themselves against prevailing aesthetic standards (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Alongside trend-driven consumption, mindful apparel consumption — wherein individuals select clothing based on personal relevance, comfort, and sustainability — has emerged as a meaningful contributor to emotional satisfaction and psychological balance (Gazzola et al., 2020).

While prior research has explored body image, clothing preferences, and consumer identity (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Kim & Johnson, 2016), limited studies have simultaneously examined multiple apparel-related constructs — including fit and comfort, colour preference, fashion trends, social influence, and mindful consumption — in relation to psychological well-being. Furthermore, the mediating roles of perceived fit and mindful consumption within a structural framework remain underexplored, particularly in the Indian consumer context.

To address this gap, the present study was conducted among 491 respondents across selected cities in Tamil Nadu, India. The study employs Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to examine both direct and indirect relationships between apparel-related factors and psychological well-being across different demographic groups. The specific objectives of the study are: (i) to examine the influence of demographic variables on apparel-related psychological well-being; (ii) to assess the impact of clothing choice, fashion trends, and social influence on psychological well-being; (iii) to analyse the relationship between fit, comfort, and mindful consumption on emotional well-being; and (iv) to evaluate the structural relationships among apparel-related factors using SEM.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 presents the conceptual model and sample characteristics; Section 3 reviews relevant literature; Section 4 describes the research methodology; Section 5 presents the SEM results and discussion; and Section 6 concludes with implications and directions for future research.

2. Review of literature

Clothing, Self-Expression, and Psychological Well-Being

Adam and Galinsky (2012) introduced the concept of enclothed cognition, demonstrating that clothing influences attention, confidence, and task performance through its symbolic meaning. Their work established that what individuals wear directly shapes psychological states and self-perception. Building on this, Slepian et al. (2015) found that individuals wearing formal attire reported higher levels of abstract thinking and self-confidence, reinforcing the cognitive and emotional dimensions of clothing choices. Kim and Johnson (2016) further examined self-expression through apparel and found that clothing serves as a medium for identity communication, thereby improving self-esteem among consumers. Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) proposed objectification theory, explaining that societal emphasis on appearance — including clothing — can lead to self-objectification, negatively impacting body image and mental well-being, particularly among women.

Fashion Trends and Consumer Identity

McNeill and Moore (2015) highlighted that fast fashion influences consumer identity and purchasing behaviour, particularly among young adults, driven by trend adoption and social visibility. Joy et al. (2012) explored the ethical and psychological implications of fast fashion, emphasising how industry practices shape consumer aspirations and identity formation. Niinimäki et al. (2020) analysed the global fashion system and concluded that industry-driven trends significantly influence consumer attitudes, sustainability awareness, and buying patterns.

Fit, Comfort, and Emotional Well-Being

Kwon (1991) concluded that comfortable clothing significantly enhances positive emotional states and self-confidence by reducing psychological discomfort. Lee et al. (2015) found that well-fitted garments contribute to higher body satisfaction and a more positive self-concept, leading to improved emotional stability. Chattaraman et al. (2018) further confirmed that functional and comfortable clothing enhances psychological comfort and quality of life across diverse consumer groups.

Mindful Consumption and Psychological Outcomes

Bocken et al. (2016) discussed sustainable consumption practices and found that mindful purchasing decisions contribute to long-term consumer well-being, with reduced overconsumption leading to greater satisfaction and lower psychological stress. Niinimäki (2020) emphasised that conscious clothing consumption enhances emotional satisfaction and promotes ethical awareness, with consumers engaged in mindful fashion practices experiencing improved well-being and reduced negative emotional outcomes. Armstrong et al. (2015) similarly found that aligning consumption with personal values fosters personal satisfaction and psychological happiness.

Colour Preference and Emotional Response

Elliot and Maier (2014) reviewed extensive research on colour psychology and concluded that colours have a strong impact on emotions and behaviour — for instance, red is associated with energy and dominance, while blue is linked to calmness and stability. Kaya and Epps (2004) demonstrated that individuals associate specific emotional responses with different colours, indicating that colour in clothing can directly influence mood and emotional states. Labrecque and Milne (2012) further showed that colour significantly affects consumer perception and decision-making, making it a key factor in clothing selection and brand evaluation.

Social Influence and Fashion Behaviour

Bearden and Etzel (1982) found that reference groups strongly influence consumer decisions, particularly for publicly visible products like clothing, with individuals tending to conform to group norms to gain social acceptance. Childers and Rao (1992) highlighted the influence of both peer groups and family on consumption behaviour, suggesting that social interactions significantly shape fashion preferences and purchase intentions. Khare et al. (2012) found that peer pressure has a strong impact on fashion adoption among youth, with the desire for social approval driving clothing choices that influence both self-esteem and buying behaviour.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the influence of apparel-related factors on the psychological well-being of consumers. The research problem was formulated based on the premise that clothing attributes — including fit and comfort, colour preference, fashion trends, social influence, and mindful consumption — significantly shape individuals' confidence, mood, and emotional health. Drawing from existing literature on consumer behaviour, body image, and fashion psychology, a conceptual framework was developed linking these clothing attributes to psychological outcomes.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model developed for this study evaluates the relationship between apparel-related factors and psychological well-being. The model consists of one dependent construct — psychological well-being, measured through self-esteem, confidence, and emotional health — and multiple independent constructs including clothing fit and comfort, colour preference, fashion trends, and social influence. Mindful apparel consumption was incorporated as a mediating variable, capturing the pathway through which aesthetic and functional clothing attributes translate into psychological outcomes. Demographic variables such as age, gender, locality,

education level, occupation, and family income were incorporated as exogenous variables to examine their moderating influence on psychological well-being.

Sampling Design and Data Collection

The target population comprised apparel consumers in Tamil Nadu, India. Since the total population size was unknown, a non-probability convenience sampling method was adopted, which is widely used in consumer behaviour research when population boundaries are undefined. Data were collected from 491 respondents across selected cities in Tamil Nadu, including Dindigul, Madurai, and Coimbatore. Respondents were approached directly, and structured questionnaires were administered in person. The data collection period extended from 7 December 2025 to 17 January 2026. The demographic profile of the 491 respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency (%)
Age	18–25	52
	26–35	24
	36–45	14
	46–55	6
	Above 55	4
Gender	Male	82
	Female	18
Locality	Urban	47
	Semi-Urban	15
	Rural	38
Family Type	Nuclear Family	77
	Joint Family	23

Measurement Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising three sections. The first section captured demographic information including age, gender, locality, family type, education, occupation, and income. The second section measured apparel-related constructs covering fit and comfort, fashion trends, colour preference, social influence, and mindful consumption. The third section assessed psychological well-being indicators including confidence, self-esteem, mood, and emotional health. All opinion-based items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5).

Pilot Study and Reliability

Prior to the main survey, a pilot study was conducted among a small group of respondents to test the reliability and clarity of the questionnaire. Necessary modifications were made based on feedback to improve the validity and consistency of the measurement scales. After confirming the reliability of the instrument, the final questionnaire was administered to the full sample of 491 respondents.

Analytical Framework

To examine the relationships among the variables, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed using AMOS software. SEM enables the simultaneous evaluation of both direct and indirect effects among constructs within a unified model and, unlike traditional regression analysis, provides a comprehensive understanding of structural relationships and mediating effects. The dependent variable was psychological well-being; the direct independent variables were fit and comfort, fashion trends, colour, and social influence; the mediating variable was mindful consumption; and demographic factors served as exogenous variables. SEM was selected due to its ability to test complex multi-variable relationships and validate the theoretical framework simultaneously.

4. Results

Model Fit

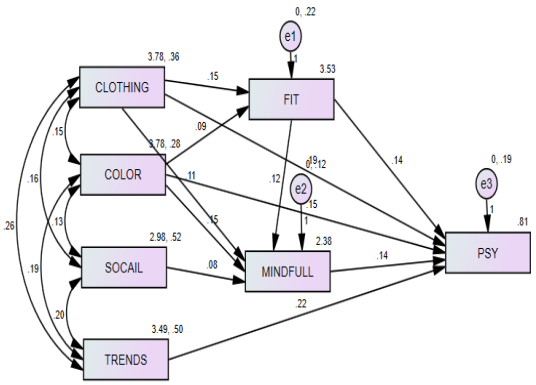
The Structural Equation Model demonstrated an excellent fit based on multiple goodness-of-fit indices, as presented in Table 2. The Chi-square value was 5.308 with 4 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.257. Since the p-value exceeds 0.05, the Chi-square test is non-significant, indicating that the proposed model does not differ significantly from the observed data. The CMIN/DF ratio of 1.327 is well below the recommended threshold of 3.0, confirming a good model-data fit. The RMSEA value of 0.026 falls below the acceptable limit of 0.08 and even below the ideal threshold of 0.05, indicating an excellent approximation to the population covariance matrix. The NFI (0.999) and CFI (0.994) both exceed the recommended cut-off of 0.90, further confirming the model's exceptional fit. Overall, all indices validate the structural model as statistically sound.

Table 2: Model Fit Summary

Chi-Square	df	CMIN/DF	RMSEA	NFI	CFI
5.308 (p = 0.257)	4	1.327	0.026	0.999	0.994

The structural relationships among the constructs are visually represented in Figure 1. The path diagram illustrates the direct and indirect linkages between the independent constructs (clothing, colour, fashion trends, social influence), the mediating variables (perceived fit and mindful consumption), and the dependent construct

(psychological well-being), along with their respective standardised path coefficients.



Regression Weights

The standardised regression weights from the SEM analysis are presented in Table 3. All eleven structural paths were found to be statistically significant, confirming the validity of the proposed relationships.

Table 3: Regression Weights

Path No.	Structural Path	Estimate (β)	C.R.	P-value	Result
P1	CLOTHING → FIT	0.146	3.596	***	Significant (Positive)
P2	COLOR → FIT	0.092	2.038	0.042	Significant (Positive)
P3	COLOR → MINDFUL	0.148	4.292	***	Significant (Positive)
P4	SOCIAL → MINDFUL	0.077	3.169	0.002	Significant (Positive)
P5	CLOTHING → MINDFUL	0.114	3.587	***	Significant (Positive)
P6	FIT → MINDFUL	0.116	3.443	***	Significant (Positive)
P7	TRENDS → PSY	0.218	5.944	***	Significant (Positive)
P8	MINDFUL → PSY	0.139	2.531	0.011	Significant (Positive)
P9	FIT → PSY	0.139	3.339	***	Significant (Positive)
P10	CLOTHING → PSY	0.186	4.253	***	Significant (Positive)
P11	COLOR → PSY	0.155	3.471	***	Significant (Positive)

Direct and Indirect Effects

Table 4 summarises the direct, indirect, and total effects of each predictor on the endogenous constructs — perceived fit, mindful consumption, and psychological well-being. Indirect effects reflect the mediated pathways operating through perceived fit and mindful consumption, while total effects represent the combined influence of each predictor on the outcome variables.

Table 4: Direct and Indirect Effects

Variable	Predictor	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
Perceived Fit	Clothing	0.146	0.000	0.146
	Color	0.092	0.000	0.092
Mindful Consumption	Clothing	0.114	0.017	0.130
	Color	0.148	0.011	0.159

Variable	Predictor	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
	Fit	0.116	0.000	0.116
	Social	0.077	0.000	0.077
Psychological Well-Being	Clothing	0.186	0.038	0.224
	Color	0.155	0.035	0.190
	Fit	0.139	0.016	0.155
	Social	0.000	0.011	0.011
	Mindful	0.139	0.000	0.139
	Trends	0.218	0.000	0.218

Effects on Perceived Fit: Clothing (β = 0.146) and colour (β = 0.092) show positive direct effects on perceived fit, indicating that appropriate clothing selection and colour preference significantly improve consumers' perception of fit and satisfaction.

Effects on Mindful Consumption: Clothing (total effect = 0.130), colour (0.159), fit (0.116), and social influence (0.077) all positively influence mindful consumption. Colour exhibits the strongest total effect on mindfulness, suggesting that aesthetic appeal encourages more thoughtful and value-oriented apparel choices. Clothing and colour also show small indirect effects, indicating mediating relationships operating within the model.

Effects on Psychological Well-Being: Fashion trends demonstrate the strongest direct effect on psychological well-being (β = 0.218), followed by clothing (total effect = 0.224), colour (0.190), fit (0.155), and mindful consumption (0.139). Clothing and colour also exert indirect effects through perceived fit and mindful consumption, indicating that part of their influence on psychological well-being is channelled through these mediating constructs. Social influence shows no significant direct effect on psychological well-being but contributes a small indirect effect (0.011), suggesting its impact operates through other constructs in the model.

5. Discussion

Influence of Demographic Variables on Psychological Well-Being

The study found statistically significant relationships between psychological well-being and demographic variables including age, locality, education, income, and occupation, confirming that psychological responses to apparel are not uniform across consumer groups. Younger respondents reported higher levels of confidence and emotional satisfaction from clothing, whereas older groups showed relatively moderate responses — consistent with prior research suggesting that fashion consciousness and trend engagement are more pronounced among younger consumers (McNeill & Moore, 2015). Urban respondents expressed stronger positive psychological well-being compared to rural and semi-urban respondents, reflecting greater exposure to fashion media and retail environments. As educational level and income increased, respondents demonstrated greater agreement with statements reflecting confidence and emotional positivity, indicating that access and awareness shape apparel-related psychological outcomes.

Impact of Clothing, Fashion Trends, and Social Influence

Fashion trends emerged as the strongest direct predictor of psychological well-being (β = 0.218), confirming that alignment with contemporary styles enhances confidence and emotional satisfaction. This is consistent with Niinimäki et al. (2020), who found that industry-driven trends significantly influence consumer attitudes and identity. Clothing also demonstrated a strong total effect (0.224) on psychological well-being, reinforcing Adam and Galinsky's (2012) enclothed cognition theory, which posits that the symbolic meaning of clothing directly shapes psychological states. While social influence showed no significant direct effect on psychological well-being, its indirect contribution (0.011) through mindful consumption suggests that peer and social norms subtly guide apparel choices, which in turn affect emotional outcomes — a finding aligned with Bearden and Etzel (1982) and Childers and Rao (1992).

Role of Fit, Comfort, and Mindful Consumption

Fit and comfort emerged as significant predictors of psychological well-being (total effect = 0.155), with perceived fit also serving as a mediating variable between clothing attributes and emotional outcomes. This aligns with Lee et al. (2015), who found that well-fitted garments contribute to higher body satisfaction and reduced self-consciousness, and with Kwon (1991), who concluded that physical comfort reduces psychological discomfort and improves daily well-being. Mindful consumption contributed positively to psychological well-being (β = 0.139), supporting Bocken et al. (2016) and Niinimäki (2020), who established that conscious and value-driven consumption reduces psychological stress and enhances emotional satisfaction.

Structural Relationships — SEM Insights

The SEM analysis confirms the multi-dimensional and interconnected nature of apparel-related influences on psychological well-being. Clothing and colour influence psychological well-being both directly and indirectly — through perceived fit and mindful consumption — validating the mediating roles of these constructs within the structural model. The model's excellent fit indices (RMSEA = 0.026; CFI = 0.994) lend strong statistical support to the proposed theoretical framework. Together, these findings establish that apparel serves not merely as a practical necessity but as a psychological instrument that shapes confidence, mood, and self-perception.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the influence of apparel-related factors on psychological well-being among 491 consumers in Tamil Nadu, India. SEM findings confirm that fashion trends, clothing attributes, colour preference, perceived fit, and mindful consumption significantly shape consumer confidence, mood, and emotional health, with demographic variables further moderating these relationships.

The findings offer actionable insights for apparel brands and marketers: designing garments that prioritise fit, comfort, and aesthetic appeal — while aligning with contemporary trends — can meaningfully enhance consumer psychological well-being and brand loyalty. Retailers may also benefit from promoting mindful consumption as part of their brand identity, as it positively reinforces emotional satisfaction.

7. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited by its geographic scope (Tamil Nadu, India) and the use of convenience sampling, which may affect generalisability. Future research could replicate this model across diverse cultural and regional contexts, incorporate longitudinal data to examine how apparel-related psychological well-being evolves over time, and explore the role of online fashion consumption and social media influence as additional constructs.

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