

# Consumer Decision Making Styles among Female Students in Tertiary Institutions for Clothing Products in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

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**Abstract:** *Decision making is more complex and more critical today in Zimbabwe, considering that the disposal income among the citizens has gone down as a result of more than 10 years of economic and political incongruence among important stakeholders in the country. Most people are earning below the Poverty Datum Line (PDL) and this makes the decision making even more difficult on what to buy with their limited incomes. This is compounded by the use of multi-currency system which is dominated by the use of the US dollar and SA rand. This study is an investigation into the decision making styles among female students in tertiary institutions in Bulawayo, in their process of what products and services to buy. Consumer Style Inventory (CSI) Model suggested by Sproles and Kendall, (1986) has been used to find out the characteristics of these styles among the tertiary female students in Bulawayo. A survey design was adopted in form of a structured questionnaire, which was used to collect data from a sample of 100 female students. The study reveals the following consumer decision making styles among female tertiary students: Confused by over choice, Novelty and fashion consciousness, Brand consciousness and prices equals quality, Perfectionism and high quality consciousness, Habitual and brand loyalty orientation, and Recreational and hedonistic. However the study did not confirm Price Consciousness and value for money and Impulsiveness and carelessness. Also the study reveals that consumer decision making styles are affected by the sudden increase range of products, and increased in retail shops especially the proliferation of Chinese shops. Analysis took the form of computation of means and frequency distributions. The study recommends that manufacturers should try to brand their goods if they are targeting this group.*

**Keywords:** consumer, decision making, female students, zimbabwe

## 1. Introduction

Lifestyles of young female students has been changing in Zimbabwe over the past two decades as a result of modernization, too much exposure to the internet, influx of many goods from regional and overseas markets. The big change can be seen on way most female students from tertiary institutions dress especially those from the urban centers. It is common knowledge that they spend more resources on clothes to improve their image and appearance. This market has been accused by society of not dressing properly in terms of social acceptability and decency. Some are accused of prostituting in order to get enough money to fund their dressing. Judging from this it is important to investigate what influence the tertiary female students' decision making styles. According to Wang, et al (2001), consumer decision making styles can provide rich information and assist marketers to understand consumers' motivation in their choice of products. Mitchell and Bates, (1998) pointed out that knowing consumer's characteristics allows marketers to be able to differentiate their products to match different consumers. According to Walsh, et al, (2001) decision making styles can be used as a segmentation tool.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The tertiary students constitute a large market in Zimbabwe for clothes. This group is aged between 19 and 26 years. Jekielek and Brown, (2005) call this age group as young adults and highlighted that this aged group is not influenced by parents but by informal groups on their consumption patterns. Fannin, (1984) argued that even

though this age group is influenced by informal groups, this class also wants to establish their own individual personas, attitudes, and values. They are highly exposed to information and new innovations and they do not view things the same way as their parents and also are eager to change the decision making of their parents and others (Grant and Waite, 2003).

In this study tertiary female students are investigated on their decision-making styles on clothes. Clothes are very important to female students because they are tied with self-presentation. General it is viewed that the clothes people purchase becomes a means for communicating, improving personality, adds attractiveness (very critical to young females), and socialization. Lachance, et al, (2003) vindicated that clothing is very important for young adults especially females because they can win social appreciation and enhance confidence/self-esteem through their appearance. Clothes choice decisions are associated with social risk for young females as compared to young males.

In Zimbabwe there is general perception that tertiary students do not wear well. They are accused of parading themselves 'naked' on the street without feeling any shame. They are accused of over borrowing from western cultures at the expense of African Ubuntu which emphasizes more on decency. However this view was dismissed by some critics who said the above view usually emanates from the old generation who are not in touch with new realities as a result of modernization. However judging from this background, it is important to find their

underlying factors that influence decision-making among female students.

### 3. Consumer Decision Making Styles

Decision making style refers to the mental orientation describing how the consumers make purchasing choices. Spores and Kendall, (1986) developed a Consumer Style Inventory, (CSI) that consists of eight decision-making styles. This model is described as basic consumer personality, and is related to the concept of personality in psychology. The eight mental characteristics of consumer decision making styles in CSI are as follows:

**Perfectionist, high quality conscious consumer:** perfectionist consumers settle for the best in class (quality products). Such types of consumers are very careful in their shopping and critically compare and contrast products before deciding to buy a particular product.

**Brand Conscious, “price equals quality” consumer:** Consumers in this category believe the higher the price of the product, the higher also is the quality. They prefer well known and highly advertised brands. They usually shop in highly reputable shops which are synonymous with big brands and high prices are prevalent.

**Novelty-fashion conscious consumers:** these are excited with new things. Thrive to keep up-to-date with new fashion trends. They also exhibit showy behavior.

**Recreational and hedonistic shopping consciousness consumers:** these consumers find shopping pleasant and just shop for the fun of it. They are extravagance in their shopping.

**Price conscious, “value for money” consumers:** these look for sales prices and concerned in getting the best value for their money and also compare the products. They appear conscious of lower prices in general.

**Impulsive, careless consumer:** they do not plan their shopping and are unconcerned about how much they spend. They can regret their purchasing decisions later.

**Confused by over choice consumer:** They perceive many brands and stores and they have difficulty in deciding which one to choose. These consumers experience information overload.

**Habitual, brand loyal consumers:** they have favorite brands and stores and form habits in choosing these. Buy from same stores and buy same brands.

### 4. Research Methodology

#### Objectives and limitations of the Research

The major objective of the research is to determine how the tertiary female students purchase their clothes based on the Consumer Style Inventory according to Spores and Kendall, (1986).

### 5. Research Design

A descriptive survey design in form of a structured questionnaire was used. The design was used to portray accurately the characteristics of female tertiary students in their decision making styles for their clothes.

The population was all female students in three tertiary institutions in Bulawayo namely NUST, Lupane University, and Bulawayo Polytechnic. Convenience sampling technique was used to select the 100 sample elements (female students). A questionnaire was administered to the sampled 100 female students.

**Table 1:** Composition of the Sample

<i>Institution</i>	<i>No. Sampled</i>
NUST	50
LUPANE	20
BULAWAYO POLYTECHNIC	30
TOTAL	100

The questionnaire was the only instrument used to collect data. The questionnaire was used as suggested by Crimp and Wright, (1993) that it is an important tool that is flexible, fast, accurate and easy to be used for statistical analysis. According to Miller et al, (2002) a questionnaire can provide unbiased statistical results and can be representative of the whole population.

The questionnaire was pre-tested with 10 respondents to check the clarity of the questions. The submissions from the pre-test were factored into the questionnaire and thereafter administered. The questionnaires were completed when the researchers were waiting and this led to the 100% response rate.

The major limitation of the study was that it was based in one city Bulawayo and the results may not reflect the views of all the students in Zimbabwe. Also time was the limiting factor hence the reason to concentrate the study in Bulawayo.

### 6. Findings and Discussion

The students through the questionnaire were asked to acknowledge what influences their decision making styles under the 8 characteristics as proposed by Spores and Kendall, (1986). However some of the items under the characteristics were re-worded to suit the study.

**Table 2:** Eight mental Characteristics of Consumer Decision Making Styles of Female Students in Tertiary Institutions

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Disagree (%)</i>	<i>Agree (%)</i>
1.Perfectionist, High Quality		
I try to buy the best clothes	10	90
Exercise care in finding clothes		
Try to buy the best overall quality	10	90
Carefully watch how much I spend		
Plan my shopping	-	100
Take my time to shop carefully		
	20	80

AVERAGE	15	75
	10	90
	11	89
2.Novelty,Brand Conscious Well known brands are best for me Prefer buying the best selling brands More expensive branded clothes are suitable for me Mostly advertised brands are usually good choice The higher the price, the higher the quality Always keep my wardrobe with up to date fashion Very fashionable and attractive styles are very important to me.	5	95
	-	100
	25	75
	20	80
	18	82
AVERAGE	7	93
	11	89
	11	89
3.Recreational, Hedonistic consumer Shopping is not a boring phenomenon I spent more time moving around Shop for fun Shopping around is very enjoyable to me	17	83
	6	94
	13	87
AVERAGE	1	99
	9	91
4.Confused-by overchoice Consumer There are many brands to choose from that I become confused. It is difficult to distinguish genuine clothes brands Information I get from different firms confuses me The more I learn about products the harder to make choice	14	86
	11	89
	8	92
AVERAGE	3	97
	9	91
5.Impulsive, Careless Consumer I am impulsive when purchasing Always makes careless purchase which I regret later Can easily be pushed by salesperson into buying	99	1
	100	-
	-	-
AVERAGE	100	-
	100	1
6.Price-conscious, “value for money” consumers Wants to spend less on clothes Know the sales promotions in town Bargain for low price	100	-
	100	-
	100	-
AVERAGE	100	-
7.Habitual,loyal Brand Consumer Go to the same shop each I go shopping	2	98

Once I find a brand I want stick to it Trust the tasted brands	3	97
AVERAGE	8	92
	4	96
8.Brand Conscious, “price-equals quality” consumer Believe higher the price, higher the quality Shop at reputable shops stocking reputable brands Go for much advertised brands	2	98
	-	100
	10	90
AVERAGE	4	96

Referring to Table 2 the first Characteristic- Perfectionist, High Quality Consciousness which envisage the best of quality as well as best choice in products by the consumers. Consumers are willing to make to put extra effort to choose the best in terms of quality. Female tertiary students confirmed that they exercise more care in order to purchase best items as vindicated by 89% of them. Second characteristic –Novelty, Brand Conscious, the female tertiary students agreed that they are brand conscious and go for tested, highly advertised brands. Also 89% of them confirmed this position.

The third characteristic- Recreational, Hedonistic consumer- which is concerned with pleasure aspect of shopping was confirmed as the driving force in the purchase clothes by female students. They acknowledge saying that they buy for fun and find joy in shopping around to find and buy what they want. The fourth characteristic relates to confusion by over choice. The results showed that the students are confused because the increasing number of clothes brands on the market, information overload from advertising firms and imitations (student it difficult to identify the original brands from imitations). Also the introduction of new products makes the choice even tougher.

The fifth characteristic- Impulsive, careless consumer was completely dismissed by the students. They say they do not buy impulsively as they are quality oriented. They are also not pushed by salespeople to buy before they are satisfied with the brand. They give their purchase much thought and care. Almost 100% of them confirm this position. The sixth characteristic -Price conscious, “value for money” consumers was also rejecting by the consumers. They say they do not necessarily buy well because they are cheap but target quality products regardless of the price.

Seventh characteristic related Habitual, Loyal Brand Consumer. Consumers under this orientation buy their favorite brands regularly. They have confirmed that they purchase well-known brands and once they are satisfied with the products they become addicted to it. The eighth one- Brand Conscious, “price equals quality” consumer - They believe that high price brands are of high quality. The 96% of respondents confirmed that their decision

making is influenced by price of the product. The strongly believe that there co relationship between the price and quality hence they prefer highly priced products.

**7. Conclusion and Further Research**

The study has categorized the consumer decision making styles of female tertiary students in Bulawayo in line with CSI model developed by Spores and Kendall, (1986). The CSI model is composed of 8 characteristics namely- Perfectionist, High-quality Conscious, Novelty-Fashion Conscious, Confused by Over choice, Impulsive- Careless Consumer, Recreational, Hedonistic consumer, Brand Conscious, “price equals quality” consumer, Brand Conscious, “price equals quality” consumer, Price conscious, “value for money” consumers. The characteristics used for decision making by the students confirmed by the results include Perfectionist, High-Quality Consumer; Novelty-Fashion Conscious; Confused by Over choice; Brand Conscious, “price equals quality” consumer; Recreational, Hedonistic consumer and Habitual, loyal Brand Consumer . The results were overwhelming on these six characteristics. However the students confirmed that they are not categorized under Impulsive, Careless Consumer and Price Conscious, “Value for money” consumers. The information on female tertiary students’ consumer decision making styles is very important to firms targeting this target group.

This research was limited in its scope in that it ignored other important variables that affect consumer decision making. Further studies should take into account how variables such as culture and interpersonal influence female students in the consumer decision making styles. Also further studies should take into account the whole youth market in Zimbabwe not one town or province. A comparative analysis between the female and male on consumer decision making styles is another area of further research.

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**Appendix 1 – Questionnaire**

The researcher(s) is requesting you to fill appropriately this questionnaire. The information sought is needed only for academic purposes and will be treated in confidentiality. The researcher(s) are carrying out research on the topic- Consumer decision making styles among female students in tertiary institutions for clothing products in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.  
 (Do not put your name)

Name of Institution-----  
 -----  
 Academic Year-----  
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 Please tick where you fit.

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Agree</i>
<b>1. Perfectionist, High Quality</b> I try to buy the best clothes  Exercise care in finding clothes  Try to buy the best overall quality  Carefully watch how much I spend  Plan my shopping  Take my time to shop carefully		
<b>2. Novelty, Brand Conscious</b> Well known brands are best for me  Prefer buying the best selling brands  More expensive branded clothes are suitable for me  Mostly advertised brands are usually good choice  The higher the price, the higher the quality  Always keep my wardrobe with up to date fashion  Very fashionable and attractive styles are very important to me.		
<b>3. Recreational, Hedonistic consumer</b> Shopping is not a boring phenomenon  I spent more time moving around  Shop for fun  Shopping around is very enjoyable to me		
<b>4. Confused by over choice Consumer</b> There are many brands to choose from that I become confused.		

It is difficult to distinguish genuine clothes brands		
Information I get from different firms confuses me		
The more I learn about products the harder to make choice		
<b>5. Impulsive, Careless Consumer</b> I am impulsive when purchasing		
Always makes careless purchase which I regret later		
Can easily be pushed by salesperson into buying		
<b>6. Price conscious, "value for money" consumers</b> Wants to spend less on clothes		

Know the sales promotions in town		
Bargain for low price		
<b>7. Habitual, loyal Brand Consumer</b> Go to the same shop each I go shopping		
Once I find a brand I want stick to it		
Trust the tasted brands		
<b>8. Brand Conscious, "price equals quality" consumer</b> Believe higher the price, higher the quality		
Shop at reputable shops stocking reputable brands		
Go for much advertised brands		