

FASHION IN BUSINESS: THE NEED TO APPLY EMPLOYEE DRESS STANDARD

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Abstract

With the help of appearance, as well as fashion, a person represents himself/herself not only as an individual, but also as a professional. The almost disappeared line between work and casual wear is the result of undefined requirements for the clothing of employees in the organization. The aim of the research is to show the need for a workwear standard and provide recommendations to the companies. Formal rules and norms are created by authorities, while informal ones are formed by following the leaders. Formal and informal regulations of employee appearance should be common to corporate life. Appearance and dress standards for employees are formal ways to define the rules related dress code. In every organization we may find work activity norms that define working hours, the procedure for paying salaries, the scope and quality of work. Meanwhile not enough attention is paid to the formal definition of appearance, and often clothing is a component part of work activity norms. The research results show that there is a problem of the absence of dress standard in business. The conducted quantitative study confirmed that there is a need for workwear standard.

Keywords: corporate identity, dress code, dress policy, dress standard in organization.

INTRODUCTION

Research topicality and problem. Fashion is closely related to people's clothing and appearance, which is an expression of social status, a tool for identity formation and means of communication. Brooks (2020) and Madinga et al. (2020) stated that appearance is going to say a lot about person before he or she even had a chance to speak. According to Kaur & Anand (2021) & Suh et al. (2018) a key factor affecting the millennial generation's attitude and purchasing behavior towards fashion and status is their self-image.

Clothes and patterns have been used as tools of non-verbal communication in society since ancient times (Sutter, 2018). Thus, the study of employees' clothing may not be restricted to fashion; on the contrary, clothing can be analyzed from different scientific perspectives and using different disciplinary paradigms. According to the above-mentioned author, the choice of clothing, especially what is worn in the workplace, is part of an individual's daily decision-making process. This may affect both the physical and mental comfort of the employee and can make an impact on the performance of the individual in the organization. As Hautanen (2024) marked in his research work wear is in a very visible role in everyday life of the company.

Using his appearance, often also fashionable, a person represents himself/ herself not only as an individual, a professional, but also expresses respect to their colleagues, managers and clients (Hautanen, 2024). Often, even considering an employee for a new position or to be promoted, not only work results are evaluated, but also how a person presents himself/ herself in the organization; or outside of it, when the organization is represented at events and exhibitions. This presupposes the problem of the study - the absence of dress standard in business.

The uniqueness of the topic is to find out how an employee chooses clothes for work; what influences the choice of work clothes; what influence demographic indicators have on the choice of employee's clothing also to create a document which would be usable in various companies.

The aim of the research is to reveal the need for a standard of work clothing and to provide recommendations to Lithuanian companies.

Research methodology. To reach the aim, the research methods used were literature review and comparison, a questionnaire survey as a quantitative method for empirical research data analysis.

The research results. The results of the research lead to the following recommendations for the development of work clothing standards. The research establishes that the standard of work attire must comply with the company image and vision; one organization may have many different areas of work wear, when it is important to define not only the clothing style but also the situations depending on employees' activity and daily assignments

Originality/Value of the article. This article offers a unique method for companies to be used. The study found that the workwear standard must correspond to the company's image and vision. There can be many different workwear trends in one organization, when it is important to define not only the clothing style, but also situations depending on the employees' areas of activity or daily tasks.

Fashion: the origin and evolution of the concept

The concept of fashion may be illustrated by numerous definitions that vary depending on the era and the field of study. Economist and marketing professor Nystrom (1928) defined fashion as no more or less, the prevailing style at any given time. Psychologist Hurlock (1929) argued that fashion is a recurring change in the choices of a group of people, which, although may be accompanied by utility, is not determined by it. Over time, the concept of fashion has slightly changed, and retail specialist Daniels (1951) stated that fashion is the concept of what is appropriate at the given moment. Sociologists Lang, K. and Lang, G. (2013) treat fashion as an elementary form of collective behavior, the power of which lies in the influence of an anonymous multitude. From a marketing perspective, Professor King (1964) states that fashion adoption is a process of social contagion in which the consumer accepts a new style or product after a designer or manufacturer has introduced it commercially. Fashion is about continuous change, clothing and related products and services, and the exercise of creative design skills. Fashion is a current mode of consumption behavior applied specifically to clothing products and related services (Easey, 2009). Currently, in the Dictionary of International Words (2021), the word *fashion* [French *mode* < Latin *modus* as measure, method, rule, instruction] is defined as the short-term predominance of a certain taste, certain models of clothes, household items in some spheres of life or culture, short-term popularity of some phenomenon, or as a habit, preference, custom.

Basically, these definitions illustrate a multifaceted and contrasting concept of the fashion phenomenon. Each definition is unique, adding specific dimensions to other definitions. The main similarity is that fashion may theoretically be conceptualized as a generalized behavioral phenomenon.

Defining fashion as a generalized concept of behavior is a key step in developing a comprehensive and contemporary theory of fashion. In a broad sense, *fashion* and its constituent elements are part of a common set of material and immaterial phenomena. Historically, in its classical but narrow sense, fashion referred specifically to the fashions of clothing, attire, and personal adornment (Sproles, 1974). However, elements of *fashion* also influence consumer purchasing decisions for products such as automobiles, furniture, home furnishings, residential architectural design, food and dietary choices. According to the above-mentioned author, *fashion* is expressed even in various non-material contexts, such as the dissemination and practice of ideological movements, education, scientific pursuits and emerging lifestyles. Although the context in which fashion operates may differ substantially, the principles underlying recognition are similar.

Over the past twenty years, the fashion clothing industry has changed a lot, noticeably moving away from art, and moreover, the so-called *fast fashion* has become very popular. From

a historical perspective, catwalks and fashion shows have been the greatest inspiration for the clothing industry. Based on the fundamentals of rapid response, the fashion apparel industry has moved from predicting future trends to using real-time data in order to justify the needs and desires of everyday wearers. Thus, fashion has become a phenomenon of everyday life, not only of the catwalk.

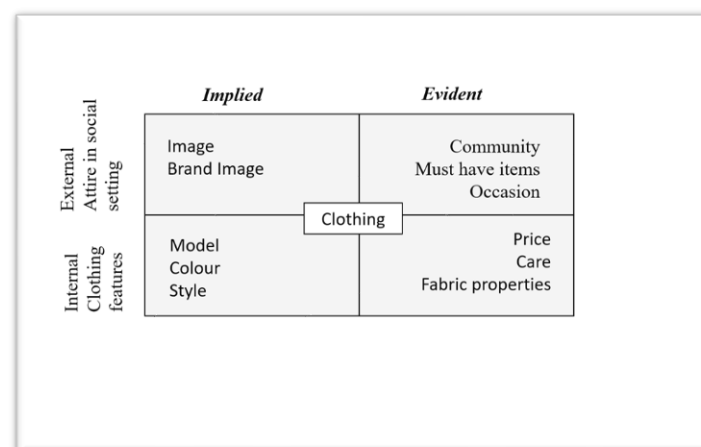
Fashion in clothing consumer behavior

User behavior depends on various factors related to his/ her personality, as well as occupation, profession and lifestyle. When we approach the behavior of clothing consumers, the working environment and the internal rules of the organization may be considered as one of the subcultures, while the recommended groups are the employer, colleagues and partners. Social and group factors are very significant because they influence not only the user, but also the psychological factors of the user's behavior.

Referring to psychological factors, motivation is of utmost importance. According to Bakanauskas (2006), a motive is a constant and strong internal stimulus on which consumer behavior is based. Thus, if the motive is related to a person's professional activity, even very different individuals may choose a similar product. For instance, if the organization has implemented dress standards, even very different personalities tend to choose the same style of goods based on the standards. Uotila (1995) argues that clothes are not only objects: they are also acts. In a general sense, situational factors in marketing are classified as making influence on personality. These factors stem from psychological factors. Situational factors are attributed to "personality", although according to Stankeviciene (2005), they may also be external factors. User behavior is influenced by various factors related to personality, as well as activity and lifestyle.

Another important aspect is that information comes from the environment. Here, the focus is on commercial sources of information, which in the behavior of clothing consumers is undoubtedly fashion and represents the fashion industry. In a broader sense, it is a set of marketing tools that inevitably influence consumers, especially in the context of the consumption of everyday goods (Stankeviciene 2005).

The choice of a specific consumer behavior model depends on the distinctiveness of the product (Stankeviciene 2005). The research examines Crommentuijn-Marsh and Eckertb's (2010) model of factors which influence apparel purchases (Fig. 1):



1 fig. Factors which influence the purchase of clothing

Source: Crommentuijn-Marsh and Eckertb, 2010

Crommentuijn-Marsh and Eckertb, (2010) model was created based on the results of research, which clearly showed that all people who purchase clothes, i.e., clothing consumers,

are guided by a combination of rational and irrational behavior. The methods and principles that individuals apply to buying clothes vary greatly depending on different types of clothes and various situations. This shows very clearly that the behavior of the clothing user depends on the purpose for which the clothing will be used: leisure or work, etc. Furthermore, factors such as brand image, clothing model and style are distinguished as well. It is the style, color and desired image of the organization that may be defined in the dress standard. The above-mentioned authors also distinguish obvious factors, which are usually mentioned as marketing or commercial factors in classic models of consumer behavior. Obvious factors, such as community, must-have items, occasion, arise from internal factors, whereas price, maintenance, fabric properties stem from internal factors. Obvious factors may be based on an individual's personal characteristics, attitude, lifestyle and social environment, starting from the place where the clothes will be worn and ending with the brand image.

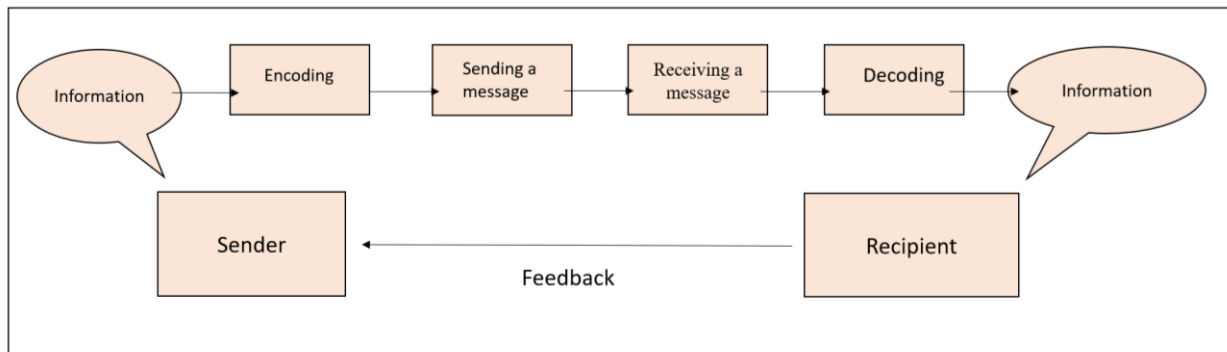
The consumer's behavior when choosing a garment is related to many factors, where the attire does not only perform the primary function of covering and warming the body, and the need to dress often remains in the background. Consumption involvement can be predicted via the importance of consumption behavior in supporting the ego, commitment to the consumption task, communication of the action, the relative perceived importance of the purchase, and the need for feedback on the consumption action (Muncy & Hunt, 1984). Clothing purchases are "wishes" because there is no clear cut-off for clothing needs. Needs and wishes are often determined by the fashion industry and are not clearly separated. An individual's image or self-presentation is a combination of social status and the expression of individuality. Clothing provides identity, is a means of self-expression and communication. What we buy as consumers reflects how we feel, what information we want to introduce ourselves, and how we would like to be perceived by others.

Fashion as a means of employee self-expression and communication. In both their personal and professional lives, people use four modes of communication: verbal, nonverbal, symbolic and paralinguistic. Using the verbal form, an individual communicates through speech or writing, it is the most widely used and familiar form of communication. Nonverbal form of communication is quite subtle and ambiguous, as it involves body language, such as gestures (Sutter, 2018). Symbolic communication includes aspects of the employee's personal life, such as the type of clothes worn in the office and accessories. Paralinguistic communication is characterized by the tone of voice, the rhythm in which the employee speaks and pauses in the discourse, giving the desired meaning to the communication. In this case, symbolic communication needs a wider analysis, since it is the expression of communication that is most closely related to fashion.

Sutter (2018) analyzed number of studies on this topic and argues that today, a form of symbolic communication that individuals use to express themselves through clothing is highly acceptable. Thus, clothing is an integral part of the fashion industry.

Martins and Pinto (2007) also interpret clothes as a means of communication. These authors argue that the "dress" factor, together with other clothing accents, contributes to and complements other communication methods. Thus, clothing is an integral part of a person's identity and clothes are a means of communication. This communication tool may be used inside or outside the organization, when a member of the organization is able to disseminate a certain message to customers, partners, etc. The aforementioned authors argue that such communication reinforces marketing techniques that are used to convey brand identity through physical symbols. Thus, employee clothing may be part of tangible symbols that are widely used by service companies to convey brand identity.

Grebliauskienė and Sueldo (2008) conducted an analysis of the communication process and depicted it as a sequential one: (Fig. 2)



2 fig. Communication process
Source: Grebliauskienė and Sueldo, 2008

To transmit a certain message or information to the recipient, the sender encodes it (creates a message) and sends it to the recipient, who receives the message, decodes it and provides feedback. According to the aforementioned authors, such a concept of communication highlights the importance of having a common code for ensuring smooth communication. The common code ensures the possibility for the sender to encode the information in such a way that the recipient understands it correctly, as it was meant. This communication process may also be applied to symbolic communication through clothing. When choosing clothes or accessories, the sender encodes certain information which is transmitted to others: colleagues, customers and partners. Therefore, it is very important what professional image is created by employees, individually and as a team.

The professional image that a person creates throughout his/her career is directly related to his/ her work environment (Sutter, 2018). Employees consciously adopt workwear styles, as well as specific clothing items or accessories that they align with, such as conservatism. Attire or style authority may be associated not only with clothes, but also with one's positions or roles at work (Rafaeli & Dutton, 1997). Moreover, clothes help an individual to become successful, i.e., work as a tool to boost confidence. If the fashion-sensitive consumer is said to be more reactive to fashion trends, they can also be expected to consume more clothing than those who are not fashion-sensitive (Niinimäki, 2010). In line with increased volumes of purchasing, the fashion-sensitive consumer may also dispose of garments more frequently, deeming them 'unfashionable', despite being functionally wearable (Lang, Armstrong & Brannon, 2013).

As is often the case, even personal experience allows us to say that we feel one way when we choose a white shirt for work, and completely different – when we simply wear a casual sweater. In case of an important meeting or public event, the details of the outfit are considered carefully. This is supported by a study conducted by Peluchette and Karl, (2007), the results of which showed that wearing formal business clothes, for instance suits, increases feelings of confidence and lowers doubts about one's competence, as well as the feeling of being in a more authoritative position. Whereas wearing casual clothes, on the contrary, made the participants feel friendlier, however, less productive in the work environment. In a study by Crommentuijn-Marsh and Eckertb, (2010) respondents also stated that they dress differently in the work environment, e.g., usually in a suit, but wear casual attire in social settings. According to Raunio (1995), clothing has a strong impact on emotions, and apparel can thus give stimulation, energy or feel-good messages to the wearer. Kaiser (1990) argues that clothes can be seen as a fundamental part of our communication in social interaction. Fashionable and socially visible garments are said to be critical to a sense of identity among fashion-conscious consumer segments (Yalkin & Elliott, 2006).

Sutter (2018) analyzed research and introduces the concept of clothing according to various optics. This reinforces the idea that clothing is not only a physical state (Table 1):

1 table. The choice of attire

Source	Idea
Braga (2004).	Body protection.
Braga (2004).	Image / esthetics.
Durand (1988); Armoni (2007); Lipovetsky (2009); Cavalheiro (2001); Freyre (2009).	The individual's position in society (social status, profession, location or belonging to a certain group).
Durand (1988); Stefani (2005).	A person's identity or what is intended to appear as an expression.
Armoni (2007); König (1969); Barthes (1979); Stefania (2005).	Communication.
Durand (1988)	Spiritual state.
Nacif (2007); Durand (1988); Stefania (2005).	Connection between an individual and the environment/ moments of an individual as part of a group or the life of a group as part of society.
Braga (2004); Freyre (2009); Rech (2002); Cavalheiro (2001); Lipovetsky (2009).	Cultural Form of Representation.

Source: Sutter, 2018

Fashion is more than the idea of attire. It is a language made up of clothes, shoes, accessories, which have their own meaning, and the coordinated result becomes the "look". Individuals express and communicate their identity to other people through appearance. Moreover, a person may create an image to reflect a social group rather than their own personality.

The general image is created not only by the style of clothing, but also by color. In an organizational context, color may become a powerful differentiator, as it is extremely important in the context of nonverbal communication. However, very little is known about the use of color in clothing. There is even less information about the situations when certain colors should not be used, as they do not match the desired information transfer and use in the work environment (Sutter, 2018).

Great attention should be paid to various details of clothing, such as patterns, ornaments and accessories. Prabulytė (2015) who did research on ornamentation in clothing, emphasizes how different periods and continents, countries and regions are characterized by their own history, culture which is conveyed in fashion, and thus in clothing.

Workwear standards. They define that the appearance must be neat, or special workwear must be worn (Staniulienė & Ivancova, 2017). Organizational standards are the basic framework for defining employee behavior and performance. They include organizational goals and aspirations, as well as management expectations of performance results, and provide the meaning, goals and performance requirements for these aims (Susskind et al., 2007).

Organizational standards may also be divided into narrower blocks (Staniulienė & Ivancova, 2017) as marked in Table 2:

2 table. Divided organizational standards

Norms	Norm details
Performance norms	Rules related to working hours, work scope, performance and production levels, delays. Etc.
Service norms	Rules that establish guidelines for customer behaviour, communication ethics, and customer behaviour procedures.
Appearance norms	Define the appearance of each employee: clothing, accessories, hairstyle, perfume, makeup.
Norms of social communication	Related to employee relations and agreements, friendship at the workplace, lunch time, etc.

Source: Staniulienė & Ivancova, 2017

Employees often face different expectations about the appropriate separation of their "personal" and "employee" identities, depending on their position and workplace. Informal, unwritten professional and organizational norms play an important role in defining the appropriate and inappropriate employee appearance aspects at work. A study conducted in Lithuania showed that norms in organizations are often prohibitive in nature and very rarely encourage the desired behaviour (Staniulienė & Ivancova, 2017). The results of the aforementioned study revealed that employees in organizations are not encouraged to comply with the regulations for appearance; instead, they are simply penalized for not obeying them. Thus, these authors recommend involving employees in the process of creating norms and standards, so that they can contribute to a positive atmosphere of working environment, promote self-control and be better recognized.

Dress standard for employees covers areas such as the dress code of an organization, employee appearance: hairstyle, religious clothing, body art, etc. (Trautner & Kwan, 2010). People experience life through clothing items (Woodward, 2007).

According to Staniulienė and Ivancova (2017), organizations have many norms defining various areas; however, they could be divided into narrower blocks, one of which would be appearance norms. These norms regulate the employees' physical appearance: body build, skin, hair, color, attire (clothing and accessories), tattoos, hairstyle, makeup and even perfume. All the previously mentioned elements of appearance influence communication, and the image of the communicator is a very important attribute, as it may convey information about the interlocutor's social status, political attitude, beliefs, etc. (Liesytė, 2015). As Jasilionytė (2008) points out, business attire unites personal reliability, professionalism, comfort and creativity.

Over the past two decades, many organizations have increasingly adopted business casual attire based on the belief that it contributes to higher employee morale and productivity (Pames, 2001). Private organizations see a connection between work attire and workplace performance, which is linked to profitability. Formalized dress and appearance standards are intended to promote employee productivity and professionalism. Jasilionytė (2008) distinguishes two types of everyday clothing.

Business casual, basic casual, smart casual – everyday clothing, which does not make an impression of business attire at the first glance. A jacket is optional, however, a shirt with a company logo, provided by the organization, is a must. If a shirt is not provided, shirts of various colours or polo-style shirts, turtlenecks, sweaters, looser-style trousers or skirts may be worn. According to Jasilionytė (2008), employees must always look professional, even in case they are not wearing fancy shirts or trousers.

Casual wear – any clothes are suitable in this case, for instance cotton, denim or wool trousers worn together with sweaters, various types of shirts and casual closed toe footwear (Jasilionytė, 2008). Such an outfit allows a person a choice of fashionable clothing.

According to Brower (2013), the dress standards of employees should be differentiated according to gender, however, the principles of gender equality must be followed. The research conducted by the above-mentioned author showed that clothing is a feature which may influence the employee's mind, feelings and actions. The scholar conducted a survey in which respondents reported that they felt more competent and authoritative when wearing formal business or business casual attire, rather than casual wear; and felt less creative in formal business attire. Previous research (Gutierrez & Freese 1999) shows that a person feels less friendly when dressed formally, compared to either of the other two casual wear styles.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Employee attire and requirements for clothing and looking at the workplace depend on the company: the number of employees, the way the company represents itself in the market,

the activity of a company/ a particular employee, a company public image and a position of an employee (Sutter, 2018).

The research methodology: The questionnaire survey method was used to collect quantitative data, allowing it to deepen different potentially contributing factors and to systematize the data in as much detail as possible, thus obtaining more accurate results (Sundareswaran et al., 2022). For more accurate conclusions, a wide range of consumer market segments is required, thus revealing the specifics of the problem by delving deeper into demographic and psychographic characteristics. The choice of the research type was determined by the fact that the analyzed audience had relatively many degrees of freedom – freely selected independent parameters that unambiguously determine the position of the system and its parts in the reference frame, the number of which is used in mechanics (Visuotinė Lietuvių Enciklopedija, 2023) (psychographic, demographic data), therefore a qualitative study would not have fully covered the tasks set. A quantitative study was also chosen due to the possibility of interviewing more research participants more widely, allowing for a greater diversity and scope of the population's opinions.

Data analysis methods. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The research selection methods: the respondents of the survey can be all adult residents of Lithuania with work experience. According to the data of the Lithuanian Department of Statistics (2021), there are 2,305,886 of them, which constitutes the population (N) of this survey. The research was determined using the Paniott formula (Kardelis, 2016):

$$n = 1/(\Delta^2 + 1/N)$$

where N – population size, Δ – margin of error.

According to the presented formula, it is calculated that in conducting a study with a reliability of 95 percent and the data obtained with a 5 percent error, 384 respondents (n) need to be interviewed.

The survey allowed to collect data, necessary for quantitative research. The questionnaire collected data was systematized with the help of a control question. As a result, sixty-eight questionnaires were rejected as damaged or unsuitable for analysis. Data from 418 appropriate questionnaires are used for the research. Descriptive statistics and comparative analysis were carried out, which helps to reveal the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and the attitude towards the need for employee dress standard in more detail.

Based on the analysis of scientific literature, questionnaire questions were formulated, and a questionnaire was compiled from them; the questionnaire was posted on the Internet, *apklausa.lt*. Data was collected from March 30 to April 20, 2022. During the survey, the questionnaire was additionally distributed and sent via electronic channels – using social media, e-mail; the collected data was systematized, and descriptive statistical and comparative analysis was performed.

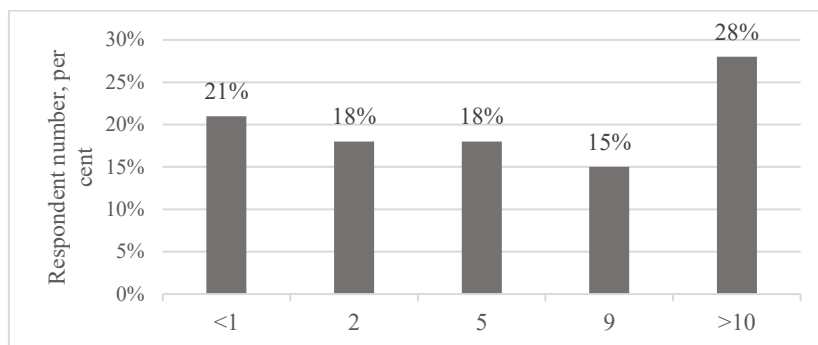
The quality control of the study was carried out in one stage, in which mechanical rejection of surveys was performed – if all answers were marked according to the order of meanings (the first choice was marked in each question).

The survey anonymous questionnaire was developed considering the conclusions of the analyzed scientific works to clarify the measurement indicators that would allow assessing the parameters under study. The research survey questionnaire consists of two parts: demographic and basic. The analysis of the collected data, which used descriptive statistics, was carried out in two stages: univariate and bivariate visual parameter analysis, investigation of the causality of respondents' choices and comparison of the results with the scientific literature.

Quantitative research ethics – the survey is anonymous; the responses are confidential and used only for descriptive statistical summaries in this study.

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

The search for the influence of fashion on the clothing of employees and the need for a dress standard, 418 appropriate questionnaires are used for the research. The largest group of respondents – twenty-nine per cent are under twenty-five years old. The respondents who make another group 19-22 per cent fall into three age categories from twenty-six to fifty-five years old. The smallest group – nine per cent of respondents belong to over 55 years old category. 74 per cent of which are women and 26 per cent men (Fig. 3).



3 fig. Respondent's age, per cent.

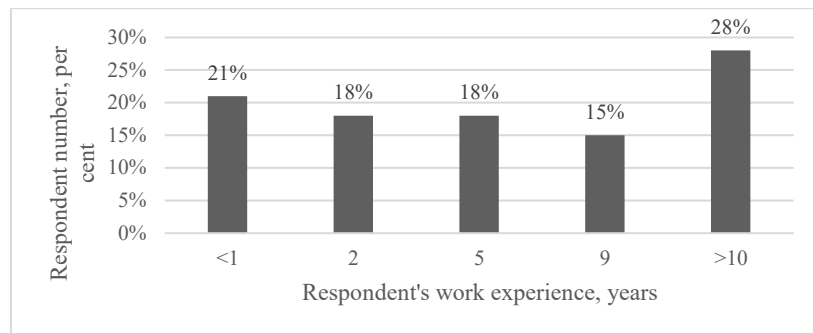
Source: compiled by the authors, based on quantitative research data, 2022

Ganesan-Lim et al. (2008) note significant differences between behaviors that are expected of women and men in the pursuit of being feminine and masculine.

This also extends to the relationship that men and women typically have with fashion clothing. For instance, the extant fashion clothing literature highlights that females in general are more fashion conscious than men (Solomon, Schopler, 1982), more interested in fashion, more attuned to fashion and more willing to try new styles (Davis, 1994).

Most respondents – 80 per cent – are the residents of big cities, whereas the rest reside in towns and rural areas. The research includes a question regarding the respondents' work sector to find out whether they work in a private or public one. This information is relevant due to the fact that the society and publicly available sources have suggested a hypothesis that public sector employees have strict dress standards and the dress culture in this sector is more developed. Thus, the decision was made to verify this hypothesis, i.e., if private sector employees could follow and learn from the public sector in this matter. Further analysis of data will either confirm or deny this opinion, as the analysis will show how different the employees' attitude towards the need for a dress standard is.

Respondents working in public and private sectors account for 56 per cent in the private sector and 44 per cent in the public one, which allows a deeper analysis in this case. The respondent, as an employee, may assess and provide information related to workwear in the organization more accurately and objectively in case he/she has sufficient work experience in that company (Susskind et al, 2007). Thus, the aim is to find out the respondent's work experience in the organization they are currently employed (Fig. 4).



4 fig. Respondent's work experience in the organization, per cent.

Source: compiled by the authors, based on quantitative research data, 2022

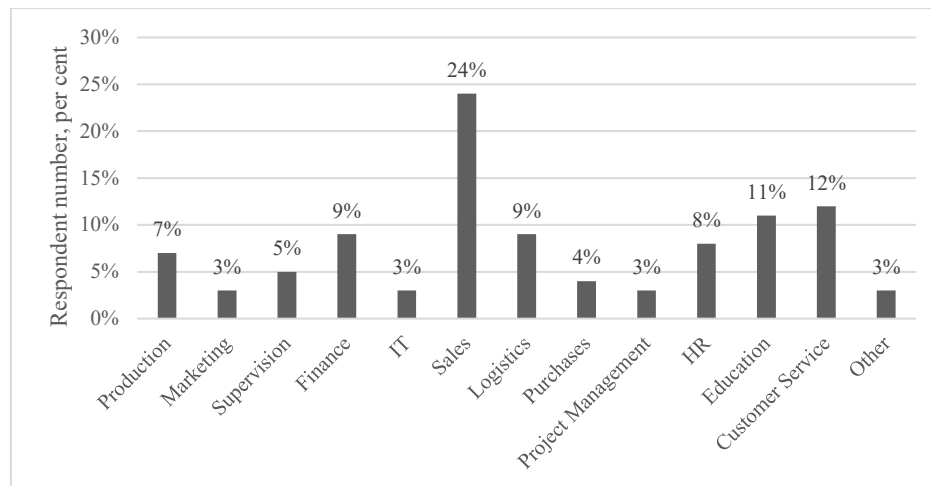
The bar chart shows the respondents regarding the years of work experience in their current organization. Since the percentage of the respondents is quite even, the survey results may be evaluated very favorably, and the final result will be objective.

Clothing requirements are much more relevant for a person employed in customer service, sales department, administrative staff, etc., who is in direct contact with other people and work in offices where the clients are met. The size of the organization, i.e. the number of employees, is relevant as it is easier to manage informal rules in small companies, while in larger companies the rules must be defined more precisely.

The research results show that the respondents work for organizations of different sizes: 23 per cent of them work in very small companies which employee only 10 employees; 25 per cent of respondents work for small organizations under 50 employees; 31 per cent of respondents work for average companies under 250 employees and 21 per cent of respondents work for large enterprises which employ more than 250 people. There is no significant gap among the distribution of respondents, thus, the expected result from research on employees of different organizations.

The research results show (Fig. 5) that distribution of respondents by activity is fairly equal, except for the sales activity, where 24 per cent of respondents are employed. A slightly larger number of respondents work in education and service sector 11 and 12 per cent respectively; in finance and logistics – 9 per cent and in personnel management 8 per cent of the respondents. 3-5 per cent of the respondents work in other sectors mentioned earlier and the remaining 3 per cent indicated they are employed in other sectors.

Among the mentioned activities are medicine and sports. While it is generally assumed that in these fields specialized workwear is always necessary, however, we may notice some exceptions. They are illustrated by the control question, which was designed to allow the rejection of unsuitable respondents, i.e., those who must wear specialized clothing provided by the employer. Other frequently mentioned activities where the respondents must wear specialized work wear include military, sales and customer service. This means that organizations often provide work wear to employees who interact with customers and work in sales, thus creating a representative image. It is probably a more convenient and safer method that helps control employees' clothing faster and more efficiently than standardizing work wear and allowing an employee to make his own choice of image.



5 fig. Respondent's activities in the organization, per cent.

Source: compiled by the authors, based on quantitative research data, 2022

In this research it was important to find out the number of respondents who must follow the formally approved work wear rules (Fig. 6). This question was purposefully formulated to make sure that the problem stated in research exists: the absence of a dress standard in business. The results show that only 13 per cent of all respondents work in organizations that have formally approved work wear rules. Twenty-six per cent of respondents are guided by informal, i.e., unapproved work wear rules, and even 61 per cent of respondents admit that there are absolutely no work wear regulations in their organizations.

These results confirm that a problem of lack of dress standards in business exists. Since, as mentioned previously, the general opinion in society is that public sector employees have strict dress standards and the dress culture in public sector is more developed, the decision was made to make further analysis. For this purpose, only the respondents employed in the public sector were chosen to find out how many of them must follow formal workwear standards.

Thus, the results show that it is wrong to assume that public sector employees have strict dress standards; this assumption is denied by the results. As shown by survey results, only 17 per cent of the respondents employed in the public sector must follow formally approved rules on dress code. The remaining 49 per cent of respondents' state that there are informal rules and 33 per cent indicate the absence of rules. Apparently, the absence of dress standard is relevant in both public and private business. Most employees either do not have anything to guide them when it comes to workwear, attire and image, or they follow informal rules, which, as the survey analysis show, may be interpreted very differently. Hence, the question arises what the employees' attitude is regarding this problem. They might assume that dress standard is necessary, or otherwise may be opposed to work wear standardization. The answer to this issue is revealed by the question in the survey where the respondents are asked whether they think work wear standards are necessary and provide the arguments. Only 7 per cent responded negatively, as they believe that approved rules or workwear standards are unnecessary, but these respondents did not provide any arguments. Another 13 per cent of respondents say that approved rules or work wear standards are unnecessary and give their arguments. Generally, the arguments against the standardization of work wear are as follows: the employees' freedom of choice may be restricted, as most of them follow an ethical dress code anyway; and strict dress code may restrict other employee qualities.

The final results show that 20 per cent of respondents oppose the need for a dressing standard. However, these results are evenly divided, regardless of the sections through which the interviews are filtered. **This means that the results are not outstanding in any age group, do not depend on the period of work experience or the size of an organization or activity.**

Thus, the assumption may be made that this depends solely on individual characteristics and character traits. In summary, we may assume that the employees who fear framework and the restriction of freedom are nevertheless ready to accept the work wear standards that could ensure freedom of choice and self-expression, i.e., not very strict and detailed requirements, which are more like guidelines.

Eighty per cent of respondents agree with the need for a dress standard. Some of them argue that this is a benefit for the organization, while others admit it as a benefit for employees themselves. Even without specialized clothing with company logos, an organization's dress standard is a tool for shaping the company's image through employee clothing. Among other arguments for dress standard is the need for commonality, an expression of neatness and equality in the company. Some of the respondents notice significant benefits for employees, for instance, saving time when choosing clothes for work in the morning may act as a prevention of delays. Moreover, there is a feeling of knowing what is appropriate and a sense of security that there will be no misunderstandings due to inappropriate attire. A very important social aspect may also be noticed: barriers among different social classes are less likely to appear when manifestation of exclusive luxury attire is restricted.

To add to the previous question, the respondents were asked to give their position and state whether they agree or disagree with statements. The results confirm that most respondents **agree with the need for a work dress standard.** This denies the statement that informal rules and verbal agreements are sufficient. Eighty-six per cent of the surveyed do not agree that clothing must be business-like and fashion changes should be barely noticeable; while 61 per cent of the respondents do not agree that employees must wear fashionable clothes. Thus, the assumption may be made that fashion trends must be the focus of work clothing, which is employees' free choice. Since an employee is an individual who may want to dress more fashionably at certain stages of life, in other cases they may remain unnoticeable by wearing classic clothing. This has already been confirmed by previous studies, which are introduced in the rubric outline above. Many scholars state that the need for fashion and clothing changes in the context of individual's self-expression.

Since the issue of the need for a dress standard is fundamental, the decision was made to verify certain statements in more detail, from different perspectives. Firstly, attention is drawn to the statement "It is necessary for an organization to have formal rules for defining work wear"; 35 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement. After reviewing and detailing the demographic indicators of the respondents, we may see that 89 per cent of them fall into the age group of 18-25 years old. This shows that the younger generation expresses more opposition and wants more freedom. Another 31 per cent of respondents think that "informal rules on employees' look at work are sufficient". Having analyzed the data of these respondents in different sections, we may notice that these are the employees with long-term work experience in their current organization, which in 83 per cent cases, is a small company employing under 50 people. Thus, an assumption may be made that small companies clearly communicate and disseminate their informal work dress rules; in case they do not change, and the staff turnover is not high, this is a sufficient measure for work dress control.

With the respondents' views, arguments and suggestions, it must be noted that **most of the employees approve and support the need for work dress standards.** The dress code helps create a positive image of the company, adds self-confidence and creates an atmosphere of professionalism and unity. Moreover, the respondents state that work dress standards should be detailed in defining work wear for different situations, (for instance, working with clients), or the job position, however, flexible enough in style and colors to leave the employee the opportunity to express his/ her own creativity.

The respondents were asked to mention the style of work clothing most suitable for their organization. Each respondent was able to choose several options. By far, most respondents, 69

per cent consider a classical style to be the most appropriate style at work; 45 per cent account for business-like style and 23 per cent are in favor of casual style. Another 3 per cent of respondents express the opinion that styles of work clothing should be chosen according to assignments planned for the day. Considering all the answers, we may see that nearly 50 per cent of the respondents marked two answer options, which means that it is not necessary to define one most suitable style in work clothing. It is important to define the situations and objectives with some reference to the appropriate style, position to be expressed or message to be conveyed. The research results conducted by Peluchette & Karl (2007), showed that wearing formal business clothes (e.g., suits), increases feelings of confidence and authority and decreases doubtfulness. Whereas wearing casual clothing, on the contrary, made the participants feel friendlier, however, less productive in the work environment.

The same idea is reinforced by the tenth question, where the respondents describe what style of clothing they chose for work and what determines their choices. Most respondents affirmed that even in the absence of formal dress requirements, they prefer a classic or casual style, i.e., a choice is made based on the activity planned for the day. Most respondents say they feel more professional in classic attire. A few answers stand out, as the respondents say that they choose a casual style based on the idea that they want to look like everybody else at work, although they realize that classic or business-like style could create added value for the company image; "I choose a casual style, although I know that a classic, business-like style would be more appropriate for my work. However, there are no requirements, therefore I dress like most employees to keep the balance"; or "I choose a simple, casual style. Since there are no formal rules, everyone in the company looks casual and I do not want to stand out". These and other similar cases show that certain rules may introduce definition, create added value for both company image and employee self-confidence.

The survey shows that most employees participating in the labor market are conscious and considerate and choose to represent their company rather than their interests. This is also applied when choosing work clothing. A frequent answer is that they choose a business-like/classic style because they represent their organization and even if its values are not the same for their personal needs, the employees must adapt: "I choose clothes that match my company vision"; "I choose a classic style, as it is important to maintain an aesthetic image in sales". However, some respondents admit that personal comfort is the most important factor even working in an office, because otherwise it would not be possible to work productively: "I want to feel comfortable every day at work, not to demonstrate fashion or feel restricted by some outdated dress code"; "comfort is most important every day at work". It is important to find the most suitable balance in attire that would match company image, create and communicate the right message of company vision and also meet the employees' expectations.

Further analysis dwells upon differences of employees' priorities for choosing clothing, the meaning of fashion for an individual and the ways fashion may add to personality aspects. This enables us to assess the influence of fashion on work when choosing attire. Generally, fashion is considered a priority when choosing attire for 56 per cent of respondents. Some of them choose fashionable combinations, while others emphasize their outfits only with fashionable details. However, most of these respondents belong to the private sector. This shows that employees in the private sector feel less restricted and tend to express themselves more through attire. Referring to employees in the public sector, they more often give priority to classic combinations and clothing that matches the company image. This means that public sector employees are used to a diplomatic or traditional business dress code at work. This is acceptable if the attire does not limit personal creativity.

Research data shows in which age groups fashion is given priority: fashionable clothing details are mainly chosen by the respondents of the 18-25 years old age group and the 26-35 years old age group. This means that the younger generation employees realize themselves

through fashion and accept fashion in the working environment. Klemaite (2011) also revealed that fashion is particularly important for the younger generation.

Klemaite's (2011) study results are confirmed. Therefore, when creating a dress standard, the different age groups of company employees must be considered.

Further research aims to find out what fashion means personally to employees. In this case each respondent was able to make a choice of several options. The vast majority of the surveyed, 70 per cent, noted that fashion is manifestation of character and personal identity; 52 per cent state that through fashion they express aesthetic needs and only 11 per cent said fashion mean nothing. It is important to appreciate the fact that even if fashionable clothes are not chosen for work, fashion itself remains important. Forty-seven percent of respondents say that fashion helps perfectly express personality; 36 per cent of the respondents note that fashion adds personal strength. This means that fashion is an important personal expression and supports the idea mentioned earlier that the work dress standard cannot completely constrain personal expression through fashion.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The change in clothing style is significant for the development of consumer behavior principles. The main elements influencing the choice of work attire are aspects of the social environment, self-awareness, personal and moral values and emotions. The study confirmed that there is a need for workwear standard.
2. Research results show that fashion has a significant influence on employees' clothing. Eighty-three per cent of the respondent's state that fashion helps personal expression and development. Fashionable clothing combinations and details are mainly chosen by the younger generation of employees, as they realize themselves through fashion and do not avoid it in the working environment. Middle-aged and older employees give priority to classic combinations or only fashionable details.
3. Fashion is an important personal expression, and the work dress standards cannot restrict this freedom. The following aspects should be discussed regarding work dress standard: clothing style, colors, accessories and jewelry; employees' responsibility. The respondents' views, arguments and suggestions, it must be noted that **most employees approve and support the need for work dress standards**. Research results show that a document which defines work dress standard does not exist. It is strongly suggested for companies to have an internal policy regarding clear guidelines for work attire. Regarding the day works, meetings etc. employees could easily check the dress code suggestions. Also, the authors recommend a work-wear document prepared with dress code photos. Further research will be aimed at identifying how different generations perceive dress standards, how work dress standards affect a company's finances, employee motivation or productivity gains. Due to the lack of research in this field, the author believes that such studies and modeling can bring unexpected results.

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