

## **Impact of Technology and Media on Clothing Selection of Adolescents in Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Clothing from pre-historic time till date has served the same basic human needs. These needs are protection, adornment, identification, modesty and status. But adolescents only see clothing as a way to be accepted, respected and a way to attract favorable attention. This paper looked into adolescents developmental needs as they affect their clothing selection. Some of their major identified needs are physical, social, cognitive and emotional, while some basic factors that affected their clothing selections are technology, media, wealth, peer group pressure, fashion, identity, personality, among others. The paper also discussed clothing in relation to adolescents' urge to dressing, and ways to help them develop morally. Conclusion was made and recommendations stated. It was recommended among others that adolescents should be listened to and helped in their clothing selection. Parents should also support them morally and financially where necessary so as not to deviate into immoral acts.*

**Keywords:** *Adolescents, developmental needs, clothing, fashion.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout history, clothing has great meaning, and has indicated people's handicraft skills, artistic imagination and cultural rituals. In today's world of fashion, adolescents are movers and shakers, they inspire fashion to its highest peak because they have short-lived taste in fashion that changes often. These tastes in fashion changes according to their physical and psychological needs. They need clothing to satisfy their need for adornment. As Brown (2003) said "as the nearest environment, clothing affects a person's physical, psychological and social comfort".

Adolescent is a person that is neither a child nor an adult. He/she is a person that has many and pleasant experiences as he/she explores the world about his/herself's good looks. He/she makes many friends, peer groups, and attends school and many various social functions. These activities make his/her needs wide because he/she needs clothing that will make him/her comfortable during these functions. Clothing gives him/her the ability to express personality and have self-confidence. Therefore we can rightly say that clothing gives adolescents personality and helps them to identify with other people. Brown (2003) narrated that "clothing is a non-verbal communication that tells something about the person wearing it, whether intended or not, clothes help make an impression on others". Adolescents' clothing needs are purely

psychological and societal recognition, while their physical need is not important (Crane 2000).

Clothing does much more than just cover the body, it is worn by different group of people for different reasons, they are worn for modesty, adornment, personality, identification, attitude, status, protection beauty, culture, dress code, value, conformity, individuality, peer pressure (Brown 2003). Clothing is any article placed/worn on the body in order to protect, beautify, or adorn it (Encarta 2009), ranging from cosmetics, garments, scarification, tattooing, hairstyles, jewelries, shoes and bags. These items have been worn over decades, but the only change is the materials used in making them due to technological advancement in the world. Crane (2003) added that "in ancient times, clothing was made from items found in nature. The first clothes were probably made from animal skins. Today's technology provides many different fibres, fabrics, finishes and manufacturing processes, regardless of these advances, however the reasons to wear clothes are the same as they have been throughout history". These needs are protection (physical needs), adornment and identification (psychological needs), modesty and status (social needs).

Technological advancement improves and brings variety to choose from. Due to these changes adolescents begin to question moral and religious

ideas that they received from their parents and society in which they live. Sometimes they want to wear what do not conform to their cultural or religious forms. They sometimes seek the approval of friends and classmates. This conflicting issue affects what they choose to wear in order to express their personality, and also the feeling of security. As Brown (2003) said “sometimes teenagers wear clothing in conformity to their peer for conformity, this gives them the feeling of being secured about being appropriately dressed. Identification can be accomplished with emblems, colors, badges, patches, jewelries”. This identification gives the wearer a feeling of unity with others in a group.

### **ADOLESCENTS**

Adolescence is defined as a period between the ages of 10-19 (World Health Organization), though this can vary from one young person to another. These people are called adolescents. In a professional literature, Arnett (1999) stated that “adolescence is portrayed as a negative stage of life-a period of storm and stress to be survived or endured”. Clothing occurs for young people due to physical development and hormonal changes in their bodies. These changes happen in the following areas of adolescents developmental needs - physical, psychological, emotional and behavioral.

#### **Developmental needs of adolescents and their clothing needs:**

Physical development: The physical changes that herald adolescence are the most visible and striking markers of this stage. However, these physical changes represent just a fraction of the development that adolescents experience. Their developing brains bring new cognitive skills that enhance their ability to reason and to think abstractly. Entering puberty heralds the physical changes of adolescence such as growth spurt and sexual maturation. There is a rapid skeletal growth, as Ibrahim (2007) stated that “the rapid growth period brings its problem in dress. As legs and arms grow long, garments are quickly outgrown, sleeves are short or tight, trouser dangle at a ‘high water mark’ above the ankles, and skirts look indecently short. Dresses become tight around the chest, and the waistline is out of place, so that adolescent may develop a strain posture and stilted motions to conceal the poor fit of his/her clothes”. Regardless of the timing of the physical changes that take place during adolescence, this is a period in which physical appearance commonly assumes paramount importance. Both boys and girls are known to

spend hours concerned about their appearance, particularly in order to ‘fit in’ with the norms of the group with whom they most identify. At the same time, they wish to have their own unique style, and they may spend hours in the bathroom or in front of the mirror trying to achieve this goal. Santrock (2001) advised parents to “take adolescents seriously when they express concerns about aspects of their appearance, such as acne, eyeglasses, weight, or facial features”. The way adolescents feel about their bodies can affect the way they feel about themselves as a whole, concerns about their bodies can erode the quality of life for young people, keeping them from healthy relationships, taking up an inordinate amount of time they could be using to cultivate other aspects of their personalities, and leading them to overspending on goods and services to improve their bodies (Jaffe 1998). To cultivate a healthy body image, adolescents can tap and sift from information and messages related to body image, appearance, attractiveness and eating that they encounter in the media, at home and from their friends.

Emotional development: Adolescents develop emotionally, establishing a new sense of who they are and who they want to become. The process by which an adolescent begins to achieve a realistic sense of identity also involves experimenting with different ways of appearing, sounding and behaving. Although it is now commonly accepted that identity formation neither begins nor ends during adolescence. Arnett (1999) observed that “the stereotype of adolescence emphasizes emotional outbursts and mood swings”. Adolescents are concerned about physical changes – height, weight, facial hair; developing breasts are all source of sensitivity and heightened emotions. A child develops low esteem if there is a gap between one’s self-concept and what one believes one should be like, Jaffe (1998) identified characteristics in adolescents with low esteem as; feeling depressed, lacking energy, disliking one’s appearance and rejecting compliments, feeling insecure or inadequate most of the time, having unrealistic expectations of oneself, having serious doubts about the future, being excessively shy, and rarely expressing one’s own point of view, conforming to what others want and assuming a submissive stance in most situations. Vanderhoff (2009) mentioned that “clothing is one of the basic needs of people (adolescents) that satisfied the socio-psychological or emotional needs with relationship to the inner self and in relationship with others, when these needs are not met, problems arise”.

**Social development:** Adolescents social development involves relating in new ways both to peers, family, school, work and community; they begin to experiment with new behaviors as they transit from childhood to adulthood, adolescents generally prefer to spend increasing amount of time with fellow adolescents, and less time with family. Peers provide a new opportunity for young people to form necessary social skills and an identity outside the family. Arnett (2003) observed that “peers provide a new opportunity for young people to form necessary social skills and an identity outside the family; peers have significant sway on day-to-day values, attitudes and behaviors in relation to school, as well as tastes in clothing and music”. Most adolescents want to be popular; the advantage is that, popular adolescents possess a broader array of social skills than their less well liked peers, better self-concepts, a greater ability to form meaningful relationship, and greater ability to resolve conflicts with these relationships. But the downside is that popular teens are at higher risk for exposure, and participation in risky behaviors (Allen, Porter and McFarland 2005). Participation in sports, which has important direct health benefits, is one socially sanctioned arena in which adolescents physical energies can be positively channeled. Other activities include dance, theater, carpentry, cheerleading, hiking, skiing, skateboarding and part-time jobs. These activities provide adolescents with opportunities for getting exercise, making friends, gaining competence and confidence, learning about team work, taking risks, building character and self-discipline (Boyd and Yin 1996). In order to establish greater independence from the parents, adolescents orient themselves toward their peers to a greater extent than they did in earlier stages of development, and conformity and concerns about acceptance are at their peak (Santrock 2001). Socially, Raiders Jackets can mark one as a member of an exclusive club, which adolescents may and may not define as a gang. These kids do not feel safe alone in the society, so they resort to the purchased security of a certain jacket and with others who feel similarly ostracized from school. Parents must be aware of what their children wear, especially of an item of clothing seems to indicate some connection to other kids they see around, because what kids wear can put them in danger today (Burke 1991). In another dimension, Brown (2003) stated that “clothing contributes to social comfort when it helps you feel as if you fit in with others in a group so that you can interact easily. Clothing can signify your membership in a special organization or group. Uniform has both social and

communication function”. Parents can help adolescents withstand peer pressure and find alternative ‘cool enough’ group that will accept them, because the need to belong to groups at this stage is too strong to simply ignore.

**Cognitive and moral development:** This is how adolescents think, reason and understand situations. It is the development of a sense of values and ethical behavior. Adolescents’ cognitive development, in part, lays the groundwork for moral reasoning, honesty, and pro-social behaviors such as helping, volunteerism or caring for others. The higher level thinking allows them to think about the future, evaluate alternatives and set personal goals (Keating 1990). Adolescent girls tend to feel more confident about their reading and social skills than boys, and adolescent boys tend to feel more confident about their athletic and math’s skills (Allen et al 2005). Teens are concerned with their appearance and their every move. One consistent experience of adolescence is the constant feeling of being ‘on stage’ and that everyone and everything is centered on their appearance and actions. This preoccupation stems from the fact that brain changes actually spur adolescents to spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about and looking at themselves.

## **FACTORS THAT AFFECT CLOTHING SELECTION OF ADOLESCENTS**

**Media:** it includes music, television, and most recently, the internet. They are an important part of the adolescents’ community. Adolescents spend an estimated 6-8hours per day exposed to some form of media (Robert 2000), and youth are increasingly attending to more than one form of media at a time. Media is a growing influence on the development and clothing selection of adolescents; this affects them positively if not careful negatively because of their portrayals to negative dressing. The internet is now a ubiquitous presence in the lives of adolescence, although all youth do not have equal access to computer, either at home or at school. Rideout (2001) discovered that “in a recent survey that 95% of 15-17years olds have been online, with most in this age group (83%) having access to the internet from home. Nearly a third (29%) has access to the internet from a computer in their bedroom, where parents are much less able to monitor its use.

**Identity:** identification is the process of establishing or describing who someone is or what

someone does. Identity and cloth are in timely linked. Cloth display, express and shape identity imbuing it with a directly material reality. Identification can be accomplished with emblems, colors, badges, patches and jewelries; this identification gives adolescents a feeling of unity with others in a group. They offer a useful lens through which to explore the possibly changing ways in which older identities are constituted in modern culture.

Powell and Gilbert (2009) theorized clothing and identity into five categories: they are:

- i. The role of clothing as a marker of class distinction in which dress is an aspect of cultural part of how elites establish, maintain and reproduce positions of power, reinforcing relation of dominance and subordination. Crane (2000) observed that the dominance of class in the account of fashion has been challenged. The democratization of fashion and the rise of street styles have rendered its dynamic less central.
- ii. Clothing is preoccupied with gender. Clothes have been used to hide sexual difference in its strong biological sense, at the same time to pointing up and signaling it through assumptions concerning gender in clothing codes.
- iii. The third major way in which clothing and identity has been theorized is in semeiotic terms, whereby clothing is presented as a linguistic code- a means whereby people send messages about themselves. Clothing is indeed a code which should be regarded as an aesthetic rather than linguistic code communicating ambiguity and complexity.
- iv. Clothing is theorized in terms of performativity, emphasizing its role in processes of self-realization and presentation. It expresses identity to the outside world and acts back on and reinforce it for the individual at a direct physical level.
- v. It is also theorized in terms of sub-group analysis, in which clothing and body styling is seen as markers of the boundaries of the group, a means of stabilizing identity and registering belongings. The approaches tend to focus on youth culture, street styles and counter cultural modes.

**Individuality:** it is self-expression. It is the quality that distinguishes one person from another (Crane 2000). It is the characteristic of being unique. When people choose styles and colors of clothes that are totally different from those of their friends, they are communicating their individuality. They are satisfying their need for adornment while rejecting peer pressure and conformity.

**Conformity:** it means obeying or agreeing with some given standard or authority. Humans learn early in life what others expect them to wear and other authority figures like peer pressure in order to be accepted. However, too much conformity can mean a loss of personal identity.

**Status:** it is the position or rank compared with that of others. Good or high status is usually associated with recognition, prestige and social acceptance. Clothing is sometimes used to gain a higher rank in the society, along with achievement and peer approval. Thus many people are willing to pay more for garments with designer labels or popular logos. Youths may try to achieve a higher status by wearing fur coats, diamond jewelry, or expensive clothing items, some items enable them to feel important and it shows what they have achieved.

**Technology:** it gives variety of clothing which increases the rate of fashion locally and internationally.

**Fashion:** It is the reigning style at a particular time. it seems customary for teenagers to buy most of their garments new each year based on the reigning style, rather than rotating purchase from one year to the next as is typical of adults. Teenagers are more concern about the fashionableness of a garment than its durability or quality. Adolescents usually select their clothing, although they are accompanied by mothers or family members. Adolescents want to be part of fashion because of their taste for clothing.

**Money:** money at hand determines what one purchases. This is a difficult situation because where adolescents cannot afford, they now depend on friends, which if not monitored by parents, make them fall into problems.

**Occasion:** these are activities embarked by adolescents which need different clothing. They are sports, school, social function, part time jobs, associations and excursions. The type of clothing

chosen should reflect occasion/activity adolescents engage in.

**Environment:** it involves the values and weather condition of the society/community in which adolescents find themselves.

## **CLOTHING AND ADOLESCENTS**

Clothing is garments made from different materials and taking different forms used by man to protect him from the weather, and to adorn him. Hwang (1996) stated that “clothing is an important part of our image. The cloth that we wear reflects our personalities, our character, and help to make up our image”.

According to Bill (1991), “clothing provided a mark of identity and a means of non-verbal communication, and that in traditional societies; clothing functions almost as a language that can indicate a person’s age, gender, marital status, place of origin, religion, social status or occupation. But in modern industrialized societies, clothing is not so rigidly regulated and people have more freedom to choose which messages they wish to convey”. Fashion changes from time to time, it may be from season to season, or year to year. These trends influence the shape of clothes. Changes in clothing come as a result of high technology in textiles.

Fashion changes very quickly due to modern technology and communication methods. Also modern technology has changed the way fibres are processed, fabrics are manufactured and garments produced. Mass production has taken on a new aspect due to new technology in producing the fabrics, the use of computers for pattern design, grading/sizing (change pattern pieces to different sizes), pattern lay out, cutting pattern pieces, and assembling cut fabrics is done within a very short time. In the field of communication, such as computers, fax machines and satellite, information from around the world can be obtained in minutes. Fashion can be viewed from any country, any designer and television programs or movies. Clothing seen on TV stars artists, advertisements in magazines often become the fashion tomorrow.

Clothes designed especially for adolescents are latest to the commercial clothing field. Prior to 1943, girls and boys from 12 to 15 years of age had to select clothes from that designed for children, and when children sizes become too small, they had to select from garments designed for small adults styles too grown up, and both were impiously proportioned for the adolescents

figure (Encyclopedia). This being a very self-conscious age, it became important to provide suitable clothing in acceptable styles to meet adolescent’s activity needs. Ibrahim (2007) added that “teens are special people and should have special fashions just for them, not ‘warmed up’ last year fashion, but clothes designed with sophistication of their big sisters, cut to fit their own growing teens figures”.

## **WAYS TO HELP ADOLESCENTS DEVELOP HEALTHY BEHAVIOUR**

- Talk to friends who have teenagers and get a perspective on the issues. Talking to the parents of your teenagers’ friends may be helpful in terms of information and mutual support.
- Take comments about adolescents appearance seriously and spend time actively listening to such concern.
- Get teenagers to talk about their feeling, fear and what stresses them out about the physical changes happening in their body. When adolescents talk about their feelings, listen, do not jump in too quickly with advice, want, or tell them that their feelings are irrational or unfounded.
- Teenagers need open communication with parents on many topics and need their support and encouragement. Above all they need their unconditional love.
- Adolescents should know that media images do not reflect the average person; there is wide diversity in physical appearance and rate of development. Therefore, encourage critical thinking about the media and the nature of our consumer culture.
- Encourage activities of adolescents that focus on attributes other than physical appearance, such as academics, sports, music, arts and writing or craft.
- Never subject an adolescent to public criticism or mockery of their thoughts or actions.
- Let adolescents accept who they are, identify their unique strength and build on them.
- Teenagers need to know about safety in general, have an opportunity to reflect on risk taking behavior and become more prepared should they find themselves in danger.
- Reinforce these messages regularly.

## CONCLUSION

Clothes act as an intermediary between the body and its public presentation which can literally be put on or off. Clothing offers a field in which one can explore the cultural constitution of age. Clothes are cultural artifacts, embedded in current and historical sets of meanings, shaped by social and cultural concerns. Clothing has been historically age ordered, reflecting embedded assumptions about age, its role in the society. Age has always been one of the key structuring principles; and should not be surprised to find it reflected at the bodily level in the clothes that people wear. One of the wider roles of clothes is to render social difference, concrete and visible. Today adolescents wear clothes the same reasons they have worn them throughout history. They wear clothes because of their values, attitudes their tendencies toward conformity and individuality and their personalities. Values are usually balanced in people's choices. Clothing choices can also give clues about personality traits. Therefore parents should guide their children morally and financially on the choices of their clothing, this will encourage trust, confidence, respect and sense of responsibility.

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