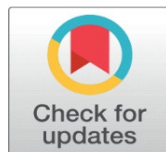


FASHION AND GENDER EQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, fashion has emerged as a pivotal arena for advancing gender equality globally. The research investigates the complex and interesting interplay between fashion and gender equality, focusing theoretically on social constructionist perspectives to explain how fashion reflects and shapes societal norms and gender identities. The objective is to examine the perception of people towards the fashion industry contributing to the discourse and advancement of gender equality through its representations and impact on societal attitudes. Drawing on social constructionist theories, the findings explore how fashion constructs and perpetuates gender norms, as well as how it can challenge and redefine these norms through design, marketing, and activism. A mixed-methods approach is also utilized, combining qualitative analysis of runway shows, and quantitative analysis of societal attitudes towards gender and fashion trends. Data collection involves content analysis of fashion media and surveys assessing public perceptions. This anticipates findings that demonstrate fashion's significant role in shaping and reflecting societal attitudes toward gender. It expects to uncover examples where fashion initiatives have led to tangible shifts in perceptions and policies related to gender equality. The result also contributes to provide empirical evidence and theoretical insights into how fashion can catalyze gender equality. By understanding the mechanisms through which fashion influences gender norms and perceptions, the research aims to inform both industry practices and societal discourse, fostering more inclusive and equitable representations within the fashion landscape. Ultimately, the aim is to underscore the transformative potential of fashion in advancing gender equality, highlighting avenues for future research and actionable strategies to leverage fashion's influence on social change.

Keywords: Fashion, Gender Equality, Societal Norms, Gender Identities, Fashion Industry Practices, Fashion Media, Public Perceptions, Societal Attitudes, Social Constructional Perspectives

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion has the power to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes, allowing individuals to express themselves freely and authentically. By breaking down boundaries and embracing diversity in style, fashion can promote inclusivity and empower individuals of all genders to feel confident in their skin. In recent years, however, there has been a growing recognition within the fashion industry of its role in perpetuating gender inequalities, and a corresponding movement

towards greater inclusivity and diversity [Aune & Eicher \(Eds.\). \(2015\)](#). Additionally, the fashion industry plays a significant role in shaping societal perceptions of beauty and identity, making it crucial for designers and brands to prioritize representation and equality in their work. Eventually, by promoting gender equality within fashion, we can create a more inclusive and accepting society for all. Over the decades, fashion has evolved beyond its functional role of clothing individuals to become a powerful tool for self-expression, identity formation, and societal commentary. Historically, however, it has often reinforced and perpetuated gender stereotypes, dictating rigid norms of masculinity and femininity that limit self-expression and reinforce inequality. Fashion has long been recognized as a cultural institution that not only reflects societal norms but also plays a significant role in shaping them. In the realm of gender equality, fashion serves as both a reflection of existing gender dynamics and a potential catalyst for change. Historically, fashion has often reinforced traditional gender roles and stereotypes through clothing designs, advertising, and societal expectations [Gill \(2015\)](#). This has resulted in a landscape where men and women are expected to adhere to distinct and sometimes restrictive norms of dress and behavior. Fashion designers, brands, and consumers alike are increasingly challenging traditional gender binaries, advocating for gender-neutral clothing lines, and promoting greater representation of diverse gender identities in their campaigns and runway shows [Peirson-Smith & Reicher \(Eds.\). \(2020\)](#). Today, the fashion industry stands at a critical juncture, increasingly called upon to challenge these norms and promote greater gender equality. This shift is not merely about clothing; it encompasses broader social, economic, and political dimensions. By embracing diversity and inclusivity in design, marketing, and representation, fashion has the potential to dismantle harmful stereotypes, empower marginalized voices, and foster a more equitable society. Understanding the transformative potential of fashion in promoting gender equality requires examining its historical contexts, current practices, and emerging trends. By exploring these intersections, we can better appreciate both the challenges and the opportunities for fashion to contribute positively to a more inclusive and just world. Understanding the complex relationship between fashion and gender equality requires a nuanced exploration of historical contexts, contemporary practices, and emerging trends within the industry. By critically examining these intersections, we can better appreciate both the challenges and opportunities for fashion to contribute positively to the ongoing pursuit of gender equality. This shift is not merely symbolic but holds significant implications for social justice and equality. By promoting diverse representations and breaking down rigid gender norms, fashion has the potential to empower individuals to express their identities authentically and challenge societal expectations. Moreover, it can contribute to broader social movements advocating for gender equality by fostering a more inclusive and accepting society [Reitzammer \(2019\)](#). Although, in recent decades, there has been a noticeable shift towards inclusivity and diversity within the fashion industry. This evolution reflects broader social changes and a growing recognition of fashion's potential to challenge and reshape societal norms. Fashion designers and brands are increasingly embracing gender-neutral clothing lines, promoting diverse representations in their advertising campaigns and runway shows, and advocating for greater inclusivity in sizing and fit. The movement towards gender equality in fashion is not merely superficial; it carries significant implications for social justice and empowerment. By breaking down rigid gender norms, fashion allows individuals to express their identities more authentically and challenges the stereotypes that have long constrained them. This empowerment is not limited to personal expression but also extends to broader societal acceptance and inclusivity. Moreover, fashion has

become a platform for advocacy and activism. The intersection of fashion and gender equality underscores the industry's potential as a catalyst for positive change. As consumers demand more transparency, diversity, and ethical practices from brands, the fashion industry is increasingly accountable for its impact on social norms and values. This accountability encourages continual innovation and adaptation, pushing fashion toward a future where inclusivity and equality are not just aspirations but fundamental principles.

1.2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Gender equality and fashion are closely related as fashion is a cultural phenomenon that both shapes and reflects societal attitudes toward gender roles and identities. Clothes have been used historically as an outward symbol of gender supporting binary divisions via marketing design and social norms [Entwistle \(2000\)](#). Conventional fashion narratives frequently reinforce inequalities by imposing rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity that limit individual expression [Breward \(2003\)](#). However, fashion is becoming more acknowledged in modern discourse as a possible change agent in the field of gender equality. They show diverse gender representations in ads and runway shows. This forms part of a big change in the industry to be more inclusive [Steele \(2015\)](#). This trend aims to give people more say in how they look. It also wants to make fashion include more identities [Davis \(1992\)](#). This change means more than just looks. Fashion can help wider social movements for justice and gender equality. It does this by questioning strict gender rules and pushing for inclusion [Kawamura \(2014\)](#). It gives a place to talk and be seen. This helps to break down old biases and foster acceptance of different gender identities [Barnard \(2002\)](#). Understanding fashion's historical backgrounds, current practices and emerging industry trends is crucial to realizing the industry's transformative potential in advancing gender equality. This investigation clarifies the difficulties encountered and emphasizes the chances for fashion to take the lead in promoting a more just and inclusive society. Fashion does more than just make things look good. It has a big influence on how society sees gender. It shapes how people think about themselves, power dynamics, and social order. Throughout history, clothes have strengthened and set apart gender roles. Society's rules have led to specific shapes, colors, and styles for men's and women's outfits [Entwistle \(2000\)](#). This led to the marginalization of non-conforming genders and sexualities in addition to restricting personal expression. To give more opportunities for self-expression designers are increasingly questioning gender norms in their collections and erasing distinctions between masculine and feminine aesthetics [Steele \(2015\)](#). Additionally, fashion has become a forum for activism and advocacy. Fashion industry decisions, marketing tactics, and the portrayal of gender in media and advertising have all been impacted by movements like MeToo and the LGBTQ+ rights movement [Kawamura \(2014\)](#). Fashion adds to larger discussions about social justice and equality by elevating underrepresented voices and confronting discriminatory practices. Understanding the relationship between fashion and gender equality requires a thorough examination that takes into consideration historical context, cultural influences, and contemporary industry practices. A critical analysis of these intersections allows us to identify both the progress that has been made and the ongoing challenges in creating a more inclusive and equitable fashion landscape.

1.3. AIM

To study the interrelation between Fashion and Gender Equality

1.4. OBJECTIVES

- To study the impact of the fashion industry's contribution towards gender equality on society.
- To analyze a runway show, and explore its influence on consumer behavior.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

[Salah et al. \(2024\)](#) cover the intricate connection between feminism and fashion throughout history. Fashion has historically been perceived as an oppressive apparatus wherein women are physically and figuratively restrained by form-fitting garments such as corsets to conform to patriarchal standards of beauty. But to support women's independence in dressing the feminist movement has aggressively opposed and rejected these restrictive garments. Using Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity as a framework the author also examines how fashion has been utilized to promote gender norms and performance. Since women are frequently pressured to follow social norms through their fashion choices clothing has played a critical role in the construction and reshaping of gender identity. In contrast, the author talks about how modern chick-lit fashion depictions have used clothes to give women a voice agency, and a means of self-expression. This postfeminist viewpoint honors women's capacity to take control of their bodies and use their wardrobe preferences as instruments of empowerment. The author examines how clothing has both liberated and oppressed women throughout history highlighting the intricate and nuanced relationship between feminism and fashion.[1] [Amos et al. \(2023\)](#) claimed that although men have historically dominated the fashion industry there is hope for more male participation in the field based on the performance of male students in fashion design programs. According to the study male Kumasi Technical University students outperformed female students in several creative fashion design categories including color drawing and beauty. Most students concurred that men have historically and currently made the most of fashion design. The students believed that male fashion designers performed better than female designers in the neighborhood. According to the author, enticing and drawing in a greater number of male students to major in fashion could facilitate the expansion and advancement of the fashion industry. Overall, the author makes the case that even though women have historically dominated the fashion industry the excellent performance of male students points to a chance to raise both gender equality and the number of men entering the sector.[2] [Arvanitidou et al. \(2022\)](#) covered the relationship between gender equality and fashion throughout history, according to the author men and women dressed similarly up until the 18th century with both putting on elaborately decorated long costumes. The 19th century saw a feminization of fashion with clothing serving as a more important medium for expressing sexual differences than social hierarchy. In discussing the battle for the trousers, the author also pointed out that since 1850 women's independence movements had emerged in the U. S. shocked moralists by allowing women to wear pants. Since pants represented male strength, this was interpreted as a challenge by women to traditional notions of femininity. According to the author, women were not brave enough to wear the

softer baggier pants that fashion designers like Madeleine Vionnet and Coco Chanel recommended for them in the 1920s until the 1940s. In addition to rejecting traditional female attire feminists of the 1970s saw fashion as a trap for women. In summary, women's fashion in particular had been a battleground for gender equality. The author contends that fashion has played a significant role in constructing and negotiating gender roles and identities. [3] [Fash et al. \(2016\)](#) address several topics related to gender equality and fashion. The paper looks at how women related to Michelle Obama's appearance and were inspired to adopt their unique style which in turn affected their perceptions and purchasing decisions. Women have expressed discomfort when they see advertisements featuring them in blue-collar work attire the author notes indicating that gender equality was not always reflected in the marketing and availability of these items. Furthermore, the study exposed a concerning trend of unfavorable preconceptions that male students at universities have regarding specific fashion trends connected to African-American and gay men. University students should be taught about the perils of appearance-based stereotypes according to the author. Lastly, the author argues that women of all sizes should have had access to feminine exercise clothes that encourage physical activity and addresses how women may feel pressured to lose weight to have more dress options due to the scarcity of exercise clothes in larger sizes.[6]

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology was divided into 2 two distinct sections to address the objectives of the research project:

3.1. SECTION 1

A quantitative method of research was used in this section as it collects and analyzes numerical data. An online survey assessed societal attitudes toward gender and fashion trends. A simple Random Sampling method was used. The survey was conducted using Google Forms and distributed in Mumbai, with a total of 150 respondents participating. The survey consisted of close-ended questions aimed at determining participants' attitudes towards gender norms in fashion. The quantitative data collected from the study was analyzed to identify trends and patterns in societal perceptions of gender and fashion. The questions were designed to assess participants' opinions on various aspects of fashion and gender norms. These included questions about their interest in fashion, concerns about societal judgments on clothing choices, perceptions of gender representation in the fashion industry, and preferences for brands that promote gender equality. Participants were also asked about their willingness to pay more for clothes from brands that prioritize gender equality, as well as their views on the impact of fashion on personal expression and societal norms. Overall, the survey aimed to explore participants' perspectives on the intersection of gender and fashion, and to understand their beliefs about the importance of inclusivity and diversity in the fashion industry. By analyzing the data collected, insights were gained on how societal attitudes towards gender and fashion could be shaped and influenced for a more unbiased and inclusive result.

3.2. SECTION 2

A qualitative method of research was used in this section. In this section, a runaway show was analyzed. Bombay Times Fashion Week 2024 took place on day

1 at the prestigious Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences. Held on 3rd May 2024, this event presented several Bollywood celebrities, including Karisma Kapoor, Malaika Arora, Mrunal Thakur, and Miss India 2022 winner Sini Shetty. Karisma Kapoor graced the runway for the renowned clothing brand Awigna by Varsha and Rittu, while Malaika Arora mesmerized the audience in a stunning ivory lehenga designed by Archana Kochhar. Miss India 2022 winner Sini Shetty and actress Mrunal Thakur also showcased exquisite designer wear as they graced the runway. Notable personalities such as actor and former model Rahul Dev, actress and model Mugdha Godse, founder of Florian Foundation Archunaa Jain, along with Dilshad Khan and designer Vishal Kapoor, were present during the opening show of Bombay Times Fashion Week in Mumbai. The event was a true celebration of fashion and glamor, showcasing the latest trends and designs in the industry. Singer Daler Mehndi also walked the ramp wearing a creation of 'Suwannee by Sam' during the show.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion were divided into 2 two distinct sections to address the objectives of the research project:

4.1. SECTION 1

To investigate societal perceptions of gender and fashion trends the researcher used quantitative research methodology. A random sampling technique was used. An online survey was conducted with 150 respondents from Mumbai. 120 Female respondents and 30 male respondents participated. The survey consisted of the views of the respondents which were answered through closed-ended questions. The survey included questions regarding respondents' interest in fashion, their opinions on portraying women in the fashion industry, and their awareness of brands that promote gender equality. The purpose of the survey was to study the respondents' perspectives on gender diversity and gender inclusion in the fashion industry. The findings of the online survey were as follows:

- **Participant's Interest in Fashion**

Figure 1

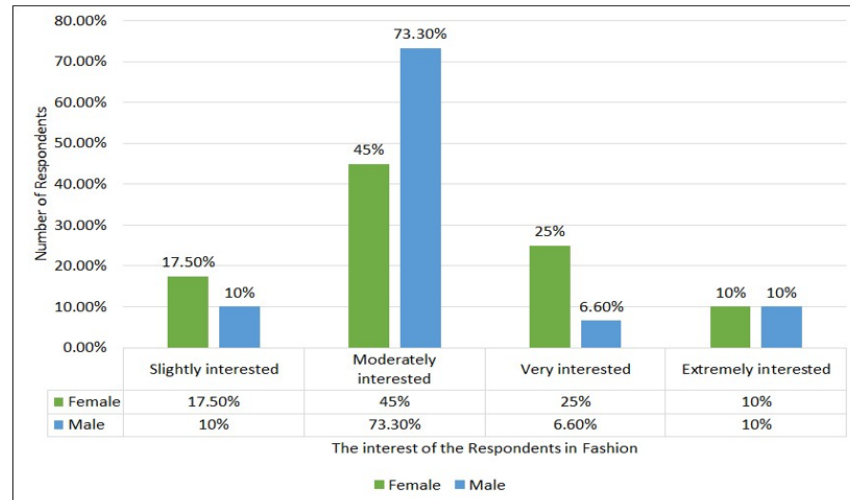


Figure 1 Participants Interest in Fashion

The graph represents the distribution of 120 female and 30 male respondents based on their level of interest in fashion. According to the data, 17.50% of women were slightly interested and 10% were extremely interested. On the other hand, 10% of men were slightly interested and 10% were extremely interested.

- **Perception of respondents regarding feeling restricted in their clothing choices due to societal norms.**

Figure 2

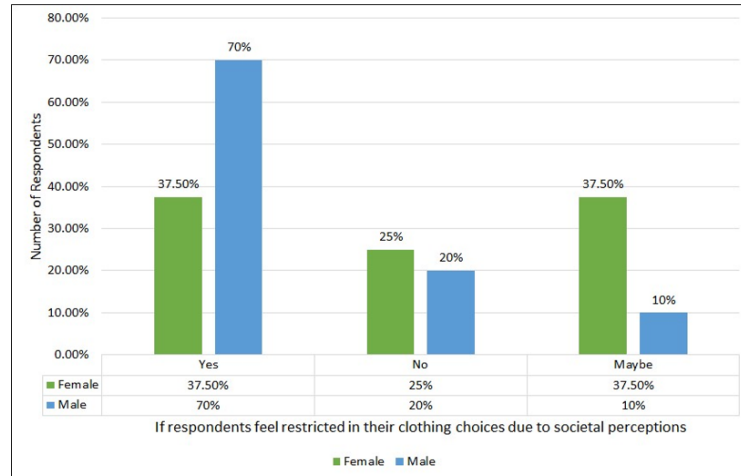


Figure 2 Restriction in Clothing Choices Due to Societal Perceptions

On analysis, it was found that 120 female and 30 male respondents reported their restricted feelings in their clothing choices due to societal norms. The data reveals that 37.5% women answered Yes, 25% of women responded No. Additionally, 37.5% of women expressed uncertainty regarding their clothing choices. On the other hand, 70% of men answered Yes, 20% of men answered No, and 10% of men were unsure.

- **Perception of the respondents related to the fashion industry whether it showcases different genders on social platforms.**

Figure 3

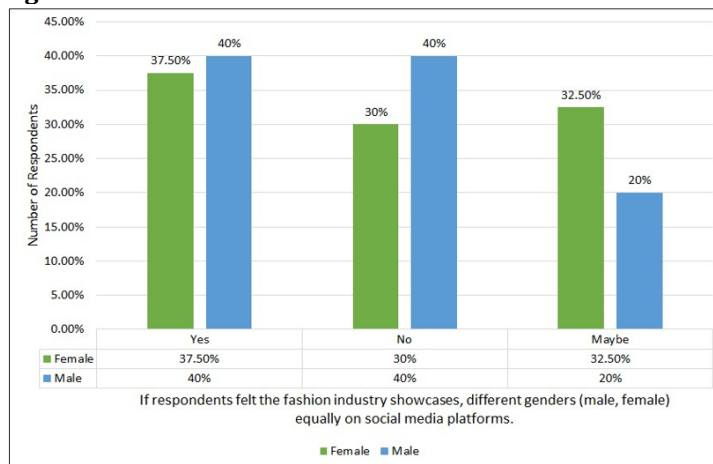


Figure 3 Fashion Industry Showcases, Different Genders (Male, and Female) Equally on Social Media Platforms

The graph represents 120 female and 30 male respondents who felt the fashion industry showcases different genders (male, and female) equally on social media platforms. The data reveals that 37.50% women answered Yes, 30% of women responded no, and 32.50% expressed uncertainty. On the other hand, 40% of men responded yes, 40% of men responded No and 20% of men were unsure of their response.

- **Respondents' perception of a brand that equally highlights garments for all genders**

Figure 4

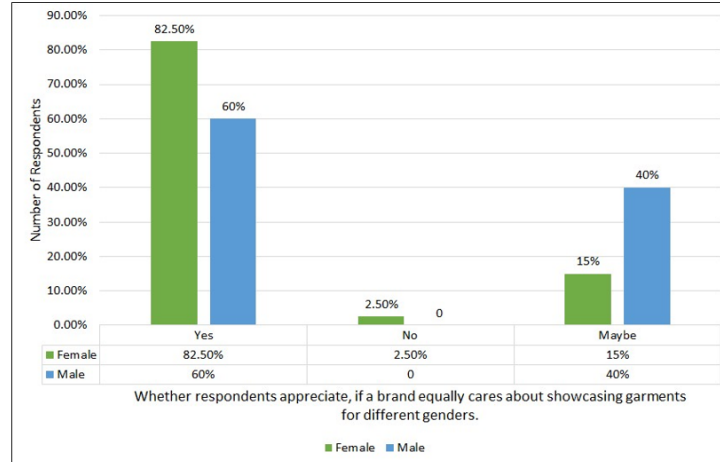


Figure 4 Appreciation of a Brand that Equally Values Showcasing Garments for all Genders

The graph represents 120 female and 30 male respondents who appreciate if a brand equally cares about showcasing garments for different genders. The data reveals that 82.50% women answered Yes, 2.50% women denied it, and 40% expressed uncertainty. On the other hand, 60% of men responded Yes and 40% of men responded No.

- **Findings of the study of fashion can help people feel freer to be who they are**

Figure 5

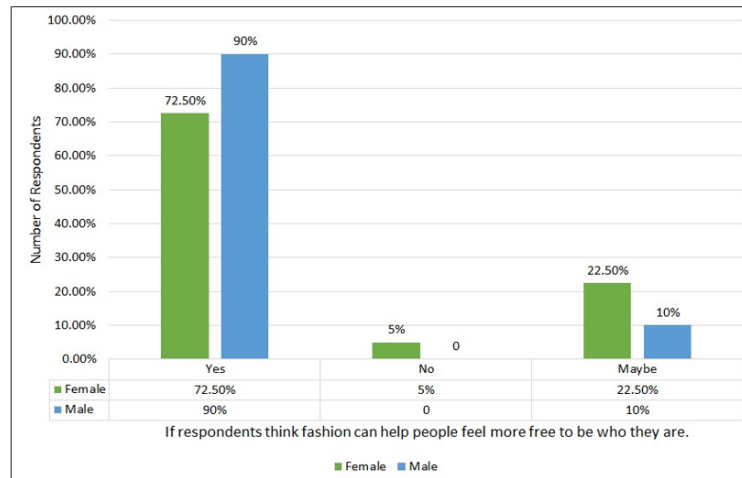


Figure 5 Fashion Can Help People Feel Freer to be who they are

The graph represents 120 female and 30 male participants who think fashion can help people feel freer to be who they are. The data reveals that 72.50% of women answered Yes, 5% of women answered No, and 22.50% of women expressed uncertainty. On the other hand, 90% of men responded Yes and 10% were unsure of their response.

- **Analysis of respondent's views on whether there should be a change in mindset related to fashion to make things fairer for everyone**

Figure 6

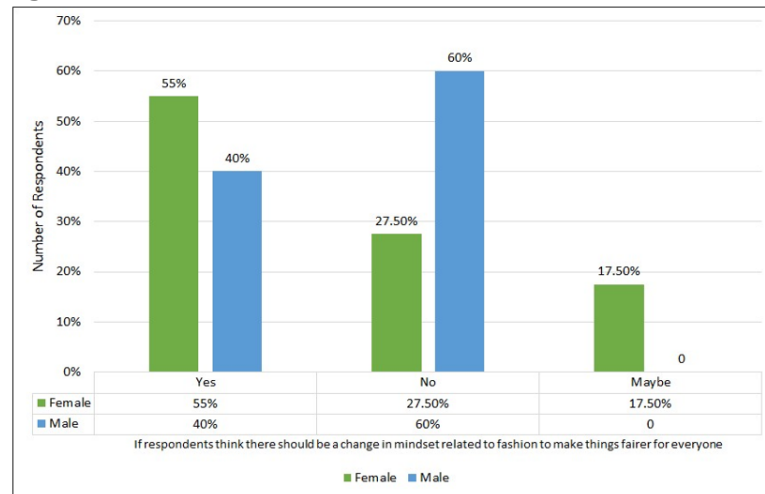


Figure 6 There Should be a Change in Mindset Related to Fashion to Make Things Fairer for Everyone

The graph represents 120 female and 30 male participants who think there should be a change in mindset related to fashion to make things fairer for everyone. The data reveals that 55% of women answered Yes, 27.50% answered No, and 17.50% of women expressed uncertainty. while 60% of men responded yes and 60% of men responded No.

4.2. SECTION 2

The researcher analyzed a runway show using a qualitative approach. Bombay Times Fashion Week 2024 was held at the prestigious Grand Hyatt Mumbai Hotel & Residences on May 3, 2024. The event featured prominent Bollywood celebrities such as Karisma Kapoor, Malaika Arora, Mrunal Thakur, and Miss India 2022 winner Sini Shetty. Karisma Kapoor showcased designs by Awigna by Varsha and Rittu, while Malaika Arora stunned in an ivory lehenga by Archana Kochhar. Miss India 2022 winner Sini Shetty and actress Mrunal Thakur also graced the runway in exquisite designer wear. Notable personalities in attendance included actor and former model Rahul Dev, actress and model Mugdha Godse, Florian Foundation founder Archunaa Jain, Dilshad Khan, and designer Vishal Kapoor. Singer Daler Mehndi also walked the ramp in a creation by 'Suwannee by Sam' during the show. Bombay Times Fashion Week in Mumbai was a celebration of fashion and glamor, highlighting the latest trends and designs in the industry. The researcher's observations in this runway show are as follows:

- **Visibility and Representation:** The runway featured prominent Bollywood figures and personalities like Mrunal Thakur, Karisma Kapoor, Malaika Arora, and Sini Shetty demonstrating the impact of women on fashion trends and conventions. Their involvement highlights the increasing trend of

inclusivity and diverse female figure representation in fashion encouraging a wider range of ideals for beauty and role models.

- **Designer Diversity and Expression:** An array of design aesthetics that appeal to various tastes and identities can be seen in the designer wear on display from companies like Suwannee by Sam Rittu Archana Kochhar and Awigna by Varsha. The variety of ways that designers express themselves subverts gender norms by providing inclusive wardrobe options that honor uniqueness and break through stereotypes.
- **Influence and Engagement of the Audience:** Actors' models and other public figures in attendance point to a major impact on how society views beauty and fashion. In addition to amplifying trends, their support of designer collections fosters conversations about gender inclusivity and representation in the fashion industry.
- **Social Change and Cultural Effects:** Through their promotion of diversity, debunking of stereotypes, and celebration of the empowerment of women through visibility and creative expression events such as Bombay Times Fashion Week act as forums for cross-cultural communication and dialogue.
- **Future Implications:** A rising desire for fashion that is both aesthetically beautiful and socially conscious is indicated by the success and reception of such events. Gender equality can be further advanced by reshaping industry practices, influencing consumer behaviors, and creating a more inclusive fashion landscape through ongoing efforts to amplify diverse voices and perspectives in fashion.

5. CONCLUSION

The researcher highlighted the fashion industry can either support or contradict conventional gender norms from design to marketing and production. Initiatives that show a growing commitment to showcasing a wider range of gender representations and promoting inclusivity like gender-neutral collections and inclusive sizing are encouraging to see. Second the study highlighted how societal attitudes regarding gender roles are influenced by gender representations in fashion media. Diversity in gender identities and expressions has been found to dispel stereotypes and advance conversations about gender equality in advertising fashion magazines and social media. The opening show of Bombay Times Fashion Week 2024 was also examined in the study and its contribution to the advancement of gender equality in the fashion industry was highlighted. Such events are essential in influencing cultural narratives and advancing positive social change because they highlight a variety of talents and encourage inclusive designs. In conclusion, the research demonstrated how consumer perceptions and preferences are shaped by the fashion industry and how these factors can resonate with and impact society's values. Adopting inclusive policies and celebrating gender diversity within the fashion industry can go a long way toward fostering constructive social change. The study focused on the necessity of continued discussions and actions to advance gender equality in the fashion industry going forward. It emphasized the importance of marketers and designers using their platforms and power to advance the creation of a more welcoming society that values and celebrates gender expression diversity. The researcher highlighted the importance for the fashion industry to continue researching and advocating for gender equality to make real progress in this direction. The study emphasized that fashion has the power to inclusiveness and constructive social change.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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