

THE IMPRESSION OF WORK WEAR ATTIRE IN THE APPAREL INDUSTRY

P. V. M. Karunaratne¹ and U.P. Hettiarachchi²

*Department of Textile & Clothing Technology, Faculty of Engineering,
University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka*

¹Email: virajinik@uom.lk

ABSTRACT

Getting dressed for work used to be pretty simple for administrative professionals and other office workers. Men used to wear a suit and a tie, and women would dress in a tailored dress or a skirt suit. In earlier days there was no variation in fashion styles. But in the present, people are dressing down for office in comfortable clothing instead of dressing up too formally. Business formal attire is the most flattering clothing known for both men and women. But recently, business casual attire and casual attire is becoming more popular among the workforce. The newer generation has brought a much more different outlook on work attire. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether work place attires are becoming more casual, do employees prefer casual Fridays, do work places have a business formal dress code, do employees prefer business formal attire for work and what types of attire do employees prefer the most. This investigative study is based on quantitative and qualitative research. The study is confined to questionnaires which covered more than 100 employees in the fashion industry in Sri Lanka. Secondary data were collected from books, articles, websites and visual data such as pictures and photographs. The research found that business casual attire is the most popular attire among employees, most of the employees liked the idea of “casual Fridays”, and currently most organizations do not have formal dress attire.

Key words: Organizations, attire, business formal, casual attire, dress code

1. Introduction

Over the past generations, workwear attire has moved to different styles and patterns. The classical style for office wear was formal for both men and women. But after the internet business started in the 1990's, the attire for work has become more into casual wear or informal in style (Parnes, 2001). A formal dress code is a stand down style from business casual. Business formal attire is also known as formal attire, formal wear or traditional dress attire. Men wore suit or dress pants with a collared shirt or a jacket with loafers or oxfords. Women wore slacks or tailored skirt, with a blouse; however, they can wear a pair of closed-toe pumps or flats (Half, 2016). Franz and Norton (2001) show

that the categorization of office attire for men and women will be traditional attire (also known as formal attire), business casual attire and casual attire. Some workplaces turned their attires to uniforms or company logo t-shirts and made “casual dress days” (Araneta, 2001; Lee, 2003; Lindeman, 2004; Munoz, 2001; Oleck and Prasso, 2001; Podmolik, 2003).

At present, the job market is becoming extremely competitive so that the companies have to be innovative to gain interest of the employees. A way to attract the employees for the workplace is to dress less formally. In the present workforce, over 60% are millennials and they prefer a casual dress code. Long ago wearing a suit for a client-facing role was acceptable, but the present employees tend to wear casual to reduce the discomfort with the clients (Peltz, 2016). Research found that people who are interested in fashion styles and clothing are more productive and efficient in their work places (Drake and Ford, 1979; Minshall, Winakor and Sinney, 1982; Musa and Roach, 1973; Soloman and Scopler, 1982).

2. Literature Review

Dress code plays a pivotal role in the corporate business world (Wood, 2019). Wood (2019) explains that wearing a business formal attire is about impressing others. Business formal attire is a higher standard from regular professional outfits. The business formal dress suits evening events and award ceremonies. A dark colored suit and shirt with a tie is business formal attire for men. The shirt should be French cut style and cufflinks can be worn. The pockets of the shirt would be linen or silk. Dark pants can be worn with the shirts and suits. For women, the business formal attire is a suit with a skirt composed with closed toe pumps. In earlier days, employees used to wear business formal attire for the workplace (Half, 2016). Business formal attire is a step down from business casual attire, but it still gives a traditional look. It means men can wear a suit or dress pants with a collared shirt or a jacket and can wear loafers or oxfords. For women, it can be tailored skirt or slacks with a blouse or shirt. Further women can wear a jacket or a cardigan with closed-toe pumps or flats (Half, 2016). Over the years, dress codes for work wear have been switched in different styles. Business formal attire, smart attire, business casual attire and casual attire are the categories of office attire. Business casual attire is also known as boardroom attire (Half, 2016).

Types of work attires

There are few other types of attire identified for the office environment including business formal attire such as smart attire, business casual attire and casual attire. Franz and Norton (2001) stated that for both men and women, the office attire categories will be business formal attire, business casual attire and casual attire.

Business formal attire

Business formal attire includes standard dresses of suits, sports coats, jackets, ties, and dress shoes (Lee, 2003; Lindeman, 2004; Podmolik, 2003). For both men and women, the suits are included, which are in dark colors (Ranathunga, 2016). Darker shades are more formal than the lighter shades. The business suit for men includes shirt and tie, with oxfords. For women, it includes shirts or blouses with skirts or pant suits. This look can be achieved by wearing heels, minimal accessories and natural makeup (e.g. Stud earrings and a simple watch (Half, 2016)). According to Heathfield (2019), the business formal attire or the traditional dress attire for men is formal suit and a business shirt. To achieve an exclusive look, it is suggested to wear a sports jacket or a tie with leather shoes. She suggested suitable accessories such as leather briefcases, portfolios and diaries. Further she recommends watches as an accessory and delicate cologne which enhances the precise look. The business formal attire for women recommends a skirt suits or pant suits with a formal blouse or a shirt top with stockings, closed toe or heel leather shoes. Accessories recommended are a briefcase, a leather folder for pads of paper and a conservative pen. They can wear jewelry, makeup and perfume which enhances gracefulness and stylishness (Heathfield, 2019).

The smart attire is a step down style from the business formal dress attire. The smart attire of male is composed with sports jacket or a tie with button down



Figure 1: Men's business formal attire



Figure 2: Women's business smart attire



shirt, traditional business shirt or an attractive turtleneck shirt. Men can wear dress shoes and the accessories similar to business formal attire (Heathfield, 2019). Smart attire is not as formal as business formal attire. But still it is an unchanging look for men's work wear. Smart attire for men suggests a collared shirt or a jacket with dress pants or suit with oxfords or loafers. They can wear a collared shirt with a tie (Half, 2016). Female smart attire is a composition of jacket, with a dressy sweater and a blouse, shirt, a turtleneck top with pants or skirts (Ranathunga, 2015). The accessories for women will be the same as for business formal attire (Heathfield, 2019). To achieve the final look, women can wear closed toe-pumps or flats (Half, 2016).

Business casual attire

Business casual attire for men is contained with khakis or Dockers-type pants with shirts or golf- type shirts with collars. This style is composed of sweaters, vests, informal jackets or ties. Leather shoes and accessories are suggested to uplift the style (Heathfield,2019). For business casual, men can wear shirts and slacks and style it with a pullover sweater or with a sports jacket, and accessories such as loafers or oxfords. Wearing a tie is optional for business casual attire (Half, 2016). Business casual attire for women suggests many options such as blouses, tops, sweaters, vests or an informal jacket, skirts and pants with leather shoes and accessories (Heathfield,2019). They also recommend blouses and shirts with skirts or tailored pants with heels or flats (Half, 2016).



Figure 3: Women 's Smart attire



Figure 4: Men's smart attire



Figure 5: Women's business casual attire



Figure 6: Men's business casual attire

Casual attire is required for some professions. Casual attire is composed of t-shirts, jeans and sneakers. But in some work environments casual wear seems different. It means that casual cannot be too casual. This look can be achieved by wearing tailored pants, skirts, collared polos or blouses. They can also wear sweaters or cardigans. Denim jeans are acceptable for casual attire; however, ripped jeans are not acceptable for work. Loafers, sneakers or sandals are also suggested accessories for the casual attire. Employers' preferences for formal wear is becoming less popular and going more towards casual these days (Half, 2016).



Figure 7: Women's Casual attire



Figure 8: Men's Casual attire

Work attire and role execution in the workplace

Researchers found that the employers who express their attires as “well dressed” imagine they are more responsible, able to be relied on as honest or truthful, having the necessary ability and knowledge, are professional, honest and work in a well- organized and competent way rather than those who are not “properly dressed” (Kwon,1994). It is also found that employers who show curiosity or concern about fashion and clothing are given a usefulness in terms of having productive actions at the workplace (Drake and Ford,1979; Minshall, Winakor and Sinney ,1982; Musa and Roach, 1973; Soloman and Scopler, 1982). Soloman and Scopler (1982) found that both female and male genders show

that suitable and proper clothing styles for workplace have an effect on creating the mood and creating the quality of the presentation. Rafaeli (1997) found that employers show that there is a relationship between the position of employment and the dress attire. The attire for workplace creates the feeling or shows the confidence towards the task to be undertaken at work. Recently, office attires show notable changes into casual wear. The outfits for office wear are getting less tense, spurred by the arrival of a large number of millennials to the workforce. "Dressing for the workplace is getting out of style" (Peltz,2016). An interview in a survey done by office-staffing firm Robert Half International Inc. found that 47% of employees dressed "too casually" for their workplaces and 32% of employees showed "too much skin" (Peltz,2016). In the current business world, it is becoming an employee's market. Suits which fall into business formal attire seems to be heavy-duty for the employees. The casual dress code trend come when the economics are getting too good in society (Peltz,2016).

Working category concerned most about their workplace attires

Research done by Peluchette, Karl and Rust (2006) found that women are more concerned about "the appearance of work attire" when compared to men. Solomon and Scholper (1982) also found that female employees have a powerful interest in their attires to achieve or successfully complete their actions when compared to male employees. Kwon (1994) shows that male employees consider that clothing styles improve the quality of the act of perceiving different occupational attributes. According to Drake and Ford (1979), Minshall, Winakor and Sinney (1982), Musa and Roach (1973), and Solomon and Schopler (1982) females have a higher attention for clothing styles. Solomon and Schopler (1982) show that employees are more productive when they are interested in clothing styles. Over the past generations, work wear has moved to different styles and patterns. The classical style for the office wear was formal for both men and women. But after internet business started in the 1990's, the attire for work has become more casual or informal in style (Parnes, 2001).

3. Methodology

The objective of the study is to explore the employee preferences about work wear attire in the fashion industry in Sri Lanka and understanding the advantages and effects of different work wear attire. The research employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The study investigates the preference for workplace attire of both men and women in terms of their own perceptions. In depth observations were carried out in the selected workplaces. Different work wear categories in the working environments were identified. It shows that employees are getting more into casual wear attire rather than wearing formal wear. Furthermore, the analysis seeks to determine whether

the business casual attire and casual attire are becoming more popular in the workplace. Primary data were collected from a set questionnaire. The focus groups were selected by random sampling and collected data from more than 100 employees. The selected groups were between 18 years and 50 years of age. In order to represent the population, both female and male professionals were selected based on their diverse roles as fashion designers, managers in the fashion industry, retail buyers, merchandisers and textile designers. Secondary data were collected from research papers, websites, books and journal articles. Secondary data lead to find the different types of work wear attire and the reasons employees tend to wear casual attires to workplaces.

4. Results, Analysis and Discussion

130 employees responded to the given questions below. All the data were collected from the employees who are working in the fashion industry like fashion designers, managers in the fashion industry, textile designers, retail buyers and merchandisers. Data analysis was conducted along with 53.8% of female responses and 46.2% male responses. Among them, the employees belonged to the age between 18 and 50 years. In the survey, 37.7% respondents were between 18- 25 years. The minimum respondents were between 42- 49 years.

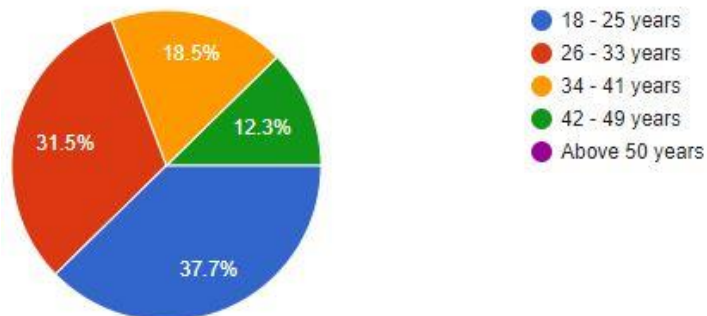


Figure 9: The age groups

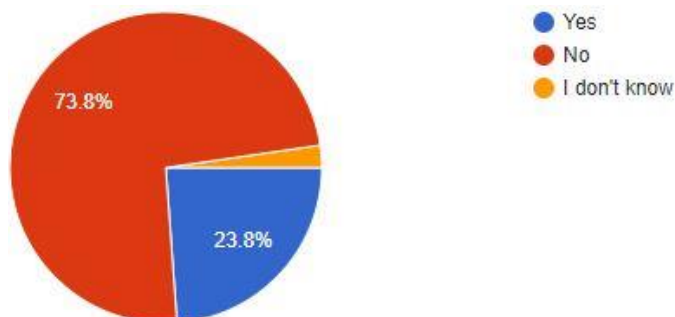


Figure 10: Preference of business formal attire at work

From all the responses, 73.8 % employees responded that they did not have business formal dress attire for work. And only 23.8% employees responded that they have business formal dress attire. The other 2.3% responded that they don't have an idea about the business formal dress attire.

It is analyzed how many employees wear business formal attire for their workplaces at present. 48.1% responded that sometimes they do wear business formal attire for work. And only 24.8% wear business formal attire for the workplace. The other 27.1% do not have business formal dress attire at their workplaces.

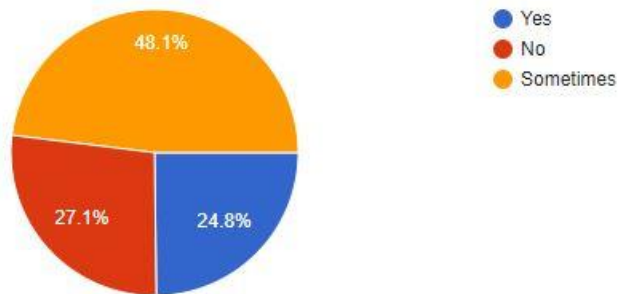


Figure 11: Employees wear business formal attire to work

It is also explored that the period of time the employees wear formal for work. Figure 12 shows that the majority responded that they have been wearing business formal attire for 1- 6 months to the workplace. 24.8% of the employees responded that they have worn business formal attire for more than a year.

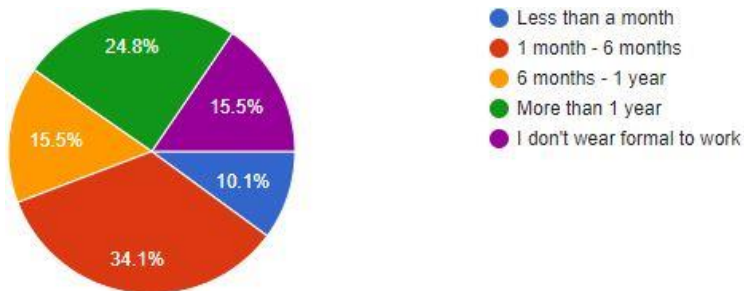


Figure 12: Employees wear/wore business formal attire to work

It is also needed to explore how often they use work wear for work. 46.1% of employees responded that sometimes they do prefer business formal attire for work and 38.3% responded that they do not prefer the business formal attire. Less number of employees (15.6%) responded that they do prefer the business formal attire for work.

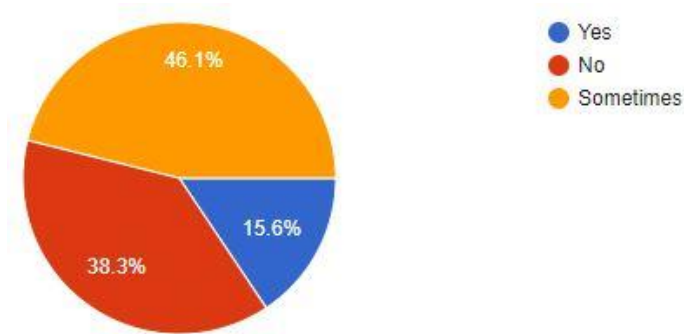


Figure 13: Employee preferences for business formal attire

The survey also seeks to find advantages that employees can achieve by wearing business formal attire. Most employees believed that wearing business formal attire creates a good impression towards the other work partners. 42.6% of respondents show that business formal attire helps to build a solid reputation about them. 34.1% felt that wearing business formal attire to work brings value and respect. 24.8% of employees voted that they do not prefer business formal attire.

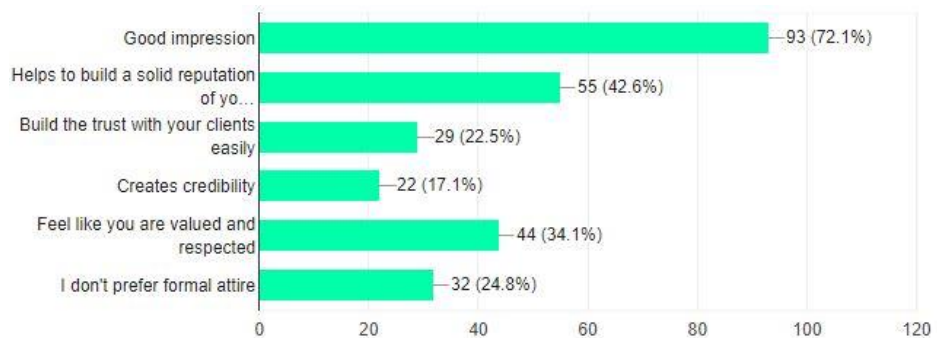


Figure 14: Employees perceptions on wearing formal attire

Employees of 83.8% responded that they prefer casual Fridays. And 10% responded they participate occasionally on casual Fridays. 4.6% responded that they do not like the casual Friday idea. Only 1.5% responded that casual Fridays should not be allowed.

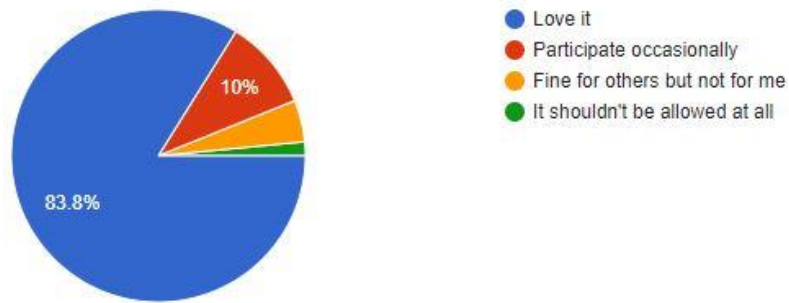


Figure 15: The opinion about “casual Fridays”

Figure 16 shows that employees are more into casual or relaxed work wear attire. This describes the advantages of employees expect by wearing casual attire to work. 90.8% voted that casual dress code is a relaxed dress code to work in an organization. 49.2% responded that casual dress code promotes productivity towards work. 40.8% voted that, by wearing casual attire it boosts employees' morale. And only 3.8% responded that they do not prefer to wear casual attire to their work places. By comparing the advantages of business formal attire and casual attire, it is clear that employees prefer casual attire to business formal attire at work.

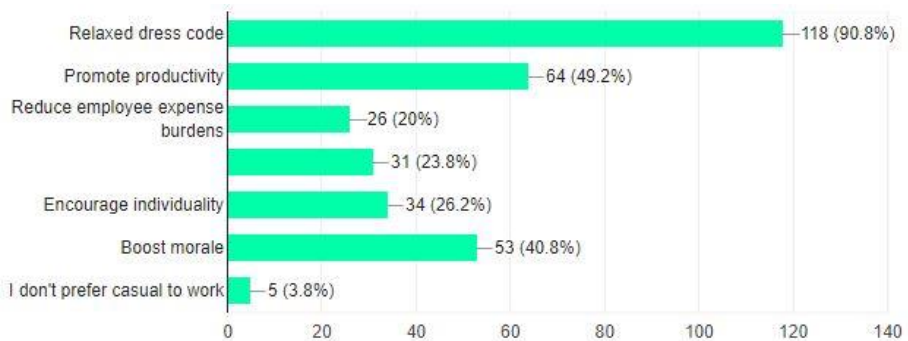


Figure 16: Employees prefer by wearing casual attire

The survey also seeks an ideal dress code that employees prefer. 56.2% responded that business casual is the best attire to wear for the work and 25.4% prefer jeans/ t-shirts which are included as casual work attire. 7.7% responded with business formal attire and also the same amount of employees responded for no dress code which is that employees can choose anything that they prefer to wear at work. Only 3.1% voted that they prefer shorts/ flip-flops as their ideal dress code.

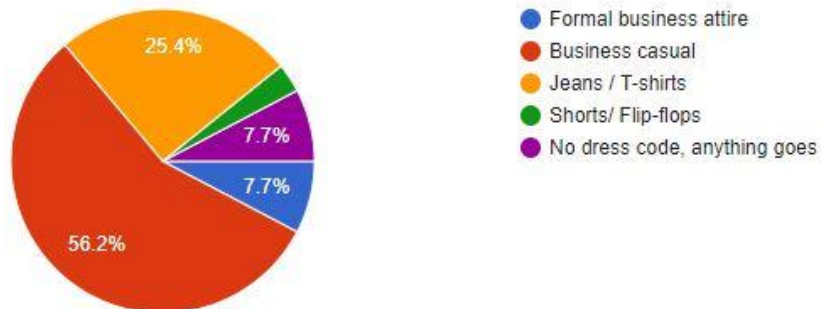


Figure 17: Employee's ideal work attire

The survey reveals that the most preferred attire was business casual attire. 52.3% of employees responded to business casual attire. And the survey reveals that the least favorite attire of the employees was business formal attire, which preferred 10% out of 131 responses. The second favorite outfit was the casual attire which is preferred by 19.2% responses. 18.5% among them prefer smart attire. Besides these results show that employees prefer more relaxed outfits to wearing formal attire. It was revealed that business casual attire and casual attire became employees' favorites.

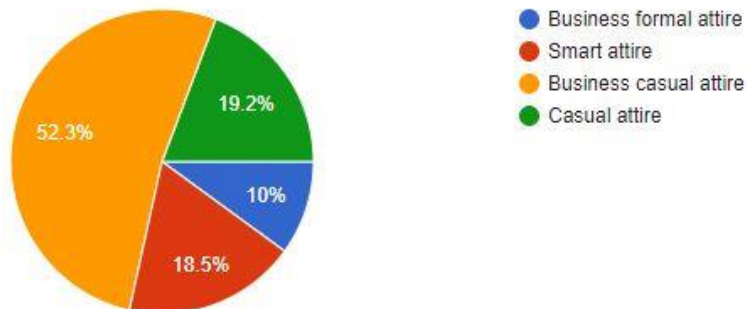


Figure 18: Employee preferences for work wear attire

5. Conclusion and Implications

The results show that the most popular and favorite dress attire has become business casual attire. Business casual attire is a combination of both business formal attire and casual attire. The results gained from the questionnaire show that business formal attire and casual attire have different advantages. The business casual attire is in between both of these two attires, so that it gives both the advantages of business formal attire as well as casual attire. Also, it was found that most of the organizations do not follow business formal attire for work. Since the job market is becoming really competitive, organizations have to attract employees. One way to attract employees is the relaxed and comfortable dress code. The results show that casual attire promotes

productivity and also boosts morale of employees. So, from that it can be proved that attire does affect the organizations' productivity. Further research can identify preference for employees' work attire in different work environments. Since employees' favorite attire has become business casual attire, research can be conducted to introduce new styles for the fashion market in Sri Lanka.

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