Introduction
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Clothing is seen as an intimate part of an individual – an expression or extension of bodily self. The value of clothing in meeting certain human needs—physical protection, modesty and decoration is well recognized. Today its role in satisfying other needs is being more clearly perceived such as need for conformity, self-expression, social participation etc. Researchers have confirmed the importance placed upon clothing by individuals although importance of clothing varies from person to person (Erwin et al., 1979).

As clothing is an important human need, purchase of clothing is always a matter of making decisions about whether to buy, what to buy, when to buy, how to buy and from where to buy. Consumer has certain strategies and rules guiding the decision while making preference (Sproles, 1983). Each decision making style represents a mental orientation characterizing the consumer’s approach to make a choice. The decision process is often used subconsciously, and a person is not even aware of it.

Demographic characteristics of consumers impact the methods and means they use to progress through the purchase decision process model (Berman and Evans, 2007). Consumers usually search for information to identify and compare alternatives. In the traditional shopping mode, consumers might visit stores, discuss the purchase with friends, consult buying guides, talk to store employers, seek out advertisement, or just visit market to look around. Consumer search increases/decreases due to a variety of factors, including knowledge and experience, risk, time available for purchase, number of products alternative available and the product’s attribute, store alternative available and location. For example, some researchers have found that increased information search is prevalent as education and income increase.

Previous research has indicated that less experience a customer has with a product/store, the more information search behavior is required. Usually the greater
the perceived risk associated with the product purchase, the greater the information search. Research seems to indicate that the amount of time a consumer has available to shop will influence the consumer’s selection and purchase strategies. As time pressure increase, consumers spend less time searching for information and want to purchase product immediately (Denton, 1994).

Age has indeed been identified as an important dimension in fashion clothing (Auty and Elliott, 1998; O’Cass, 2000). Goldsmith (2002) examined the personal characteristics of frequent clothing buyers. The study found that two demographic variables, age and sex were associated with buying. Women reported buying more than men did and younger consumer’s more than older ones. Peter’s (1989) study also showed that female are more concerned about clothes and more involved in shopping than male.

Some other studies seem to indicate that stage in the life cycle may be even more important determination of consumer behavior related to clothing than social class distinction and other factors (Horn and Gurell, 1981).

The clothing practices are also affected by the socioeconomic status of the family. It is said that clothing is one item in the budget that varies proportionately with income for all except the higher income group (Lunia, 2006).

Various evaluative criteria are used by consumer in decision making. Evaluative criteria are the dimensions used to compare products when making a choice. Many studies have looked at criteria that consumers use when making clothing decisions. Some have viewed criteria in terms of extrinsic factors such as price, brand name and store image and intrinsic factors such as style, color, fabric, care, fit and quality. However, style, fit, price and quality have consistently been given high priority by consumer and; brand and country of origin being less important (Soloman and Rabolt, 2004). Product attributes differ widely in importance to consumers; however the attributes most likely will affect product evaluation and purchase (Nowels and Simonson, 1996). As consumers grow older, information search and evaluation of product attributes decrease.
Kapferer and Laurent (1992) explained that brand sensitivity is a psychological variable that affects the consumer’s decision when purchasing a product. When a person is sensitive to a brand, the brand plays a significant role in the decision making process that precedes a purchase. Brand name is frequently used as an information cue to determine quality and has been found to influence perception of quality of goods in numerous studies. Type of brand name (generic, national or private) has been found to influence rating of quality of products.

Quality proneness can be defined as a willingness to pay for quality. Some studies have noted the effect of brand name on quality perception of specific item of apparel (Davis, 1985; Behling and Wilch, 1988).

Fashion consciousness refers to a person’s degree of involvement with the style or fashion of clothing (Nam et al., 2007). It is characterized by an interest in clothing and fashion, and in one’s appearance. Walsh et al. (2001) found that fashion consciousness was related to a desire for up-to-date styles, frequent changes in one’s wardrobe and pleasurable shopping.

Studies have shown that women more than men consider themselves innovative regarding fashion, and that the degree of innovation is related to, for example, age (Goldsmith et al., 1999 and O’Cass, 2004). While mature consumers are not as likely as young consumers to adopt new fashions (Law et al., 2004), the fashion involvement for women tends to be caused by a high motivation to fit into a particular group and to avoid the “wrong” cues. Although mature women find it difficult to estimate clothing quality, they often consider brand as a surrogate indicator of product quality (Auty and Elliott, 1998).

Consumers make comparison in terms of price, quality and style of garment by visiting several stores by and large. The average Indian buyers especially women put in a high degree of shopping effort before making the final purchase of a garment. There hardly exists any pre-purchase preference for a garment item. Consumers shop around a lot before making a final purchase decision. Pre-purchase preferences for brand do not play any significant role in making the final purchase decision. By
and large, the price is the most important factor that serves as the basis to what to buy and what not to buy. The survey report (2001) of the market research wing of the textile committee also says that the single most important factor, which comes first on priority to the Indian consumer while purchasing any textile item, is its price (Davar, 1987).

Of all the social groups, teenagers are one of the groups that attach the most importance to fashion and physical appearance in general. Clothing is one the most noticeable aspect of adolescent culture and an important means by which individual adolescents express their identities and gain social approval. In adolescence, clothes, because of their symbolic function are powerful interaction tool to communicate self importance (Shim and Koh, 1997). Several researchers have found a relationship between the feeling of not having enough clothes and low self esteem in adolescents (O’Neil, 1998). Thus clothing decisions of adolescents are associated with strong social and psychological risks.

A perusal of literature revealed that most of the researches have been conducted on clothing behavior of adolescents/teenagers. There is lack of data on middle age (baby boomers) adults’ clothing purchasing behavior. Apparel companies have largely neglected this segment in their pursuit of the youth market. Lack of interest in older consumers has been attributed to several factors, one of them being negative stereotypes associated with aging.

Middle age is generally considered to extend from age forty to age sixty. Because middle age is a long span, it is customarily divided into early middle age, which extends from age forty to age fifty, and advanced middle age, which extends from age fifty to age sixty. During advanced middle age, physical and psychological changes that first began during early forties become far more apparent (Hurlock, 1981).

There are two philosophies about how people should adjust to middle age: one, that they should stay young and active and two that they should grow old gracefully, taking life comfortably. Some middle aged men and women desire to be inconspicuous therefore, they try to dress as conservatively as possible and yet adhere to prevailing style.
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Interest in clothing in middle age, which begins to wane after marriage and especially during the early years of parenthood, intensifies when the external physical changes which accompany advancing age becomes noticeable. Both men and women use diet, exercise, cosmetics, or clothing either to reverse those changes or to hide them. Interests in fashionable quality of clothes shift to interest in clothes that make them look younger (Hurlock, 1981).

Middle-age people are well aware that clothes are important to their image. Men recognize importance of clothing and grooming to business success. As they advance towards the peak of achievement in middle age, they become far more clothes-conscious than they were when they were younger and their status in the business world was lower. Women, by contrast, are less clothes conscious in middle age than in early adulthood, though they, like men, recognize the importance of clothes and grooming to success in business and social world (Ryan, 1966).

Middle age group is still the one that exerts the most impact on consumption pattern (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004).

Research on older female consumers indicates that their interest in fashion does not necessarily decline with age (Banner, 1983). Two thirds of women in one study of older women exhibited a positive degree of fashion consciousness and indicated a desire to keep up with fashion. They are not specially price consciousness nor do they tend to shop around; however they do tend to gather information from many sources (Martin, 1976; Lumpkin and Greenberg, 1982). This woman is also less prone to social pressure and more willing to create a distinctive look that feels right to her and willing to pay more for better quality apparel. This generation is much more active and physically fit than its predecessors (Solomon and Rabolt, 2004).

Present study attempts to analyze clothing purchase behavior of middle-aged adults to find out answer to the questions such as how fashion conscious and brand aware are adult Indian consumers? Is price the most important factor in the selection of clothes for adults? Are fit and comfort more important than style for Indian consumers? Is there a change in the purchase behavior of clothing of this middle aged due to mass media exposure? Are they competent consumers?
JUSTIFICATION

A comprehensive review of literature suggests that knowledge on the mechanisms through which adult/mature consumers’ shopping behaviors, especially with respect to apparel buying behavior, are shaped is still far from being complete.

Studies have mostly focused on clothing purchase decision of teenagers and young adults. As mentioned before, clothing decisions of adolescents are associated with strong social and psychological risks. The importance of clothing as a means of achieving approval and acceptance appears to decrease in favor of aesthetic or economic consideration with greater maturity and self confidence. As people mature, they are able to express more individuality in clothing selection. Thus social and psychological risks are not associated with decisions of adults.

Moreover, middle aged adults are financially independent, knowledgeable, with more experience than teenagers or young adult. Evaluative criteria and decision making process of middle aged may be different from teenagers and young adults.

Also, almost all studies related to clothing buying behavior of mature adults have been conducted in the developed countries, and comparatively very limited attention has been paid on this segment of consumers in developing countries. An increasing amount of evidence suggests that the attitudes, beliefs and perceptions of consumers in developed countries are significantly different from those in developing countries (Rathnayake, 2011). Consumer research has historically examined consumers in Western countries. Clearly, consumers in non-Western and developing countries are also of substantial theoretical and managerial importance. Given that the preponderance of theories and accepted truths about shopping behaviors are based on studies and observations of mostly Western populations, an interesting question is whether these theories and descriptions hold for non-Western shoppers as well?

Very few studies have been conducted on decision making process of middle aged people in India. What is now needed is more research into actual and desired consumption by middle aged Indian consumers. We need to understand the evaluative criteria they use in making clothing decisions.
SIGNIFICANCE

Consumer behavior is a complex area. Indian retailers and marketers do need to find out as much as they can about their customers in order to identify their needs, how they behave, what influences them to make a decision to buy and what processes they follow when selecting a product/service.

Middle age adult segment is one of the most important consumer segments. Apparel manufacturers, retailers, marketers need to know if decision making in purchase of clothing of adults of different sex, socioeconomic status, lifestyle and geographic location differ. This will help them in planning strategies; in production and marketing apparel products to mature segment. Thus this study will be useful to marketers to target this segment and develop appropriate promotional strategies as it will add to the knowledge base about evaluative criteria and decision making process of middle age adults.

It is on the basis of above context that the present study has been planned to find out decision making determinants in purchase of clothing of adults aged 40-60 years.

OBJECTIVES

1. To study the factors affecting decision making of middle age consumer while purchasing clothes.
2. To find out effect of demographic variables on decision making of adults for clothes.
3. To study existing clothing buying practices of middle age adults.

HYPOTHESIS

1. Decision making mode of middle age respondents in selection of clothes is not associated with demographic variables.
2. There is no association between consumer demographic and clothing buying practices.

DELIMITATIONS

1. Study was limited to 600 middle age respondents.
2. Study was limited to Gorakhpur and Delhi areas.