CHAPTER 1
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A study of consumer behaviour is basic to all marketing activity. The knowledge of consumer behaviour is vital for effective product planning and efficient execution of a firm's advertising and sales promotion policies. To be a wise consumer, one must necessarily be a decision maker. With the complexity of today's marketing structure and the multiplicity of fabrics available, a consumer often finds the decision making process difficult or even frustrating [1]. Satisfaction of the ultimate consumer is, in fact, the core purpose of any marketing system.

The textile industry is beginning to realise that the consumer ultimately determines the outcome of fibre competition. Accordingly, it is imperative that the producer who seeks to maximize the acceptance of his product, adjusts his product to the consumer's needs.

Several significant changes have taken place in the buying habits and clothing behaviour of Indian consumers, especially during the last two decades [2]. The consuming public have now become discriminatory and demand a wider choice and better variety of products. The textile industry
has been manufacturing different types of fabrics to suit the taste and demands of people. Recent advances in textile research have given the consumer a multitude of new fabrics and finishes from which one has to make his choice.

Fabrics made from synthetics and synthetic blends are no longer considered luxury items. The possibilities of fabricating new types of fabrics of numerous blend compositions, revealed by the vast amount of research and development, have made the manufacturers to realize the potential offered by blending different types of fibres. The multiple requirements of the consumers including some which are inherently contradictory such as moisture absorption, quick drying, increase crease recovery, crease retention, indicate that no single fibre type will be able to meet the functional and aesthetic requirements, even with the wide varieties of fabrics available. The increased use of fibre blends has necessitated the development of methods for their quality assessments.

A majority of the consumers whom the author interviewed are of the opinion that not much product information such as correct labelling on fabrics, in terms of brand name, blend composition, price, washing instructions
etc. is available, that might facilitate a wise decision process. The term consumer satisfaction encompasses preferences for products, purchase practices, and problems faced by the consumer which are important. It has been pointed out [3] that efforts might be more successful if market survey researches are conducted to find out directly from consumers what their needs are rather than making assumptions.

Shaw and Stavrakas [4,5] opine that the final choice of fabrics for specific end uses should be made on the basis of different tests on wear life and service trials. Abram [6] has discussed as to what the consumer can do for the manufacturer so as to tune the products as per consumer needs. Consumer satisfaction should be the prime criterion on which the production of textile materials should be based. The consumer and the producer have a mutual responsibility for the satisfactory performance of a textile product. The user has an equal responsibility to carefully follow the label instructions to ensure expected wear life [7].

Going hand in hand with consumer preferences and purchasing habits is the actual laboratory evaluation of marketed textile goods, so as to substantiate the requirements and ideas of the consumers. So research findings
form a valuable link between the consumers and the textile industry. Consumer research in this field helps not only the consumers in their decision making but also to provide the textile manufacturers with sufficient and up-to-date information as to consumers' requirements for a particular product. Research findings also provide the textile manufacturers and converters with sets of standards by which textiles are marketed.

A wide variety of woven uniform fabrics with varying blend compositions, finishes and weave structures are marketed today. Agencies such as Defence Department, Transport Department, Hospital staff, Police force and School children require uniforms for carrying out their tasks in a most efficient manner. By personal interviews with different sections of employees of the above mentioned categories for pilot survey, it was found that various authorities supply three sets of cotton uniforms per year to their employees, without ascertaining their preferences. A majority of these employees were found to exchange the three sets of cotton uniforms for one polyester blended set and lose certain amount of money in these transactions. Hence, it was decided to carry out a systematic study to elicit information regarding their preferences and purchasing pattern and to recommend to the concerned authorities guidelines for obtaining optimum performance.
of uniform fabrics, with suitable geometrical, aesthetic and wear properties.

Fabrics which are used for uniforms are expected to have the characteristics of durability, appearance, style, design, crease resistance, crease retention and dimensional stability. In addition, there are factors of comfort such as moisture absorption, bulkiness and anti-static properties. Finally, there are general requirements such as quick drying, resistance to any form of degradation etc. These are not comprehensive, but they do illustrate the wide range of properties and expectations of performance of textiles from the consumers' point of view [8].

A thorough study of uniform fabrics is essential in view of the multiplicity of fabrics that are marketed from time to time. From the available literature it was found that no comprehensive study has yet been carried out combining consumer preferences and serviceability of uniform fabrics. Information is also required on correlation between serviceability of apparels and several physical properties measurable by laboratory tests.
1.1 **Statement of the problem**

It is with this background and in keeping with the current needs, that the present research was undertaken. It was carried out in two phases - the first phase comprising of a consumer survey covering the consumer preferences, different aspects of buying behaviour and market survey. A quality assessment of select test fabrics forms the second phase. On the basis of the literature reviewed the following objectives were set.

1.2 **Objectives**

1.2.1 **Phase I**

1. To study the consumer preferences and choice of fabrics for uniforms and for general use.

2. To relate the Socio-Economic Status (S.E.S) of consumers on their preferences and choice of uniform fabrics and general fabrics.

3. To study the after-sale satisfaction of fabrics used for uniforms and for general use.

4. To study the mode of maintenance of clothes by various sections of consumers.

5. To identify the fast selling uniform fabrics through a market survey.
1.2.2 Phase II

6. To subject the test fabrics to 100 soil-wash cycles to simulate wash wear cycles and to assess the relative serviceability of ten types of fabrics used for uniforms at different levels of launderings such as 25, 50, 75 and 100.

7. To study the aesthetic, mechanical and comfort properties of the test fabrics.

8. To transfer the above findings into more meaningful terms for the consumer and to fix some standards.

The general review of literature pertaining to the above objectives has been presented in Chapter 2. Besides this, relevant literature survey and background information are given at the beginning of each chapter. Chapter 3 deals with the objectives in Phase I, while Chapters 4 to 8 concern with the objectives of Phase II as follows: Chapter 4 deals with physical properties of uniform fabrics, Chapter 5 is related to ease of care properties, Chapter 6 brings out comfort properties, Chapter 7 concerns with the low stress fabric mechanical properties, Chapter 8 deals with the aesthetic qualities and Chapter 9 gives a summary and major conclusions along with recommendations and suggestions for future work.
REFERENCES


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