

Consumer Perception on Gender Equality and Designer Performance for Genderless Fashion Brands

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ABSTRACT

This empirical study is intended to examine how gender equality and feminism can affect the design for a local genderless fashion brand in Jakarta, Indonesia. One of the objectives of this research is to provide inputs to designers in improving their performance. Based on a survey of 150 respondents in the retail market sector in Indonesia, it can be concluded that gender perceptions provide a new avenue for a designer when launching a new collection. Consumers are encouraging a trend towards a genderless collection in decision-making. The local genderless fashion market showed good long-term prospects for the retail market in Jakarta.

Keywords: Fashion, genderless, feminism, consumers, and designer's performance

INTRODUCTION

The local fashion industry in Indonesia is very diverse. A growing number of local and international brands are presenting their collections in major cities. Based on data from the Ministry of Industry Indonesian Republic, in 2013 there were 208 designers and 503 local fashion brands in Indonesia. In 2025 Indonesia is anticipated to be a major fashion centre in the world. According to Sofjan Wanandi, chairman of Indonesian Employers Association (APINDO), Indonesia's fashion potential is extraordinary. "Fashion accounts for 40% of the entire creative economy in Indonesia. Therefore, efforts should be encouraged and improved in the local fashion industry which in 2013 contributed 181 trillion.

Feminism can provide inspiration for fashion designers. Using development theory feminism in the fashion world to assist in designing genderless clothing the writer seeks to identify the fundamental

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reasons of choosing a genderless product. The author wishes to know whether the concept of genderless clothing would be accepted in the social community in Jakarta and how it will relate to the fashion designer performance. It will not only research from the design perspective but also customer attitudes, retail stores concept, media and theoretical analysis.

The world is experiencing a paradigm shift in the field of fashion. One of the rapidly growing flows of currency in the world of fashion is genderless or androgyny. Founded on the theory of Thomas Samuel Kuhn (1922-1996) to the paradigm, paradigm occurs in the fashion world; because of the many changes in people's views about the way they dress influenced by social, cultural, political, gender equality. In earlier times, a woman should dress like a woman with a dress, long skirt, and were not permitted to wear pants because it seemed like a boy. In the modern era, long pants are major clothing women to support their activities. Long pants are assisting them to move more easily, freely and comfortable. A lot of designers are prioritizing pants because it could make consumers more confident and look stylish and modern, and feeling of having a similar freedom like men.

In his book "Costume history and Style" Douglas A. Russell reported that the French designer Paul Poiret was one of the first designers to design pants for women, the emergence of the idea of women wearing men's clothing became more popular in the 1920s when the corset

was rejected by women and their turned into a more masculine look, women's rights movement has a strong effect on it (Russell, 1982).

Marlene Dietrich, German actress is considered to be one of the greatest actresses of all time. Marlene Dietrich cultivated her own style with her sensuous look and genderless wardrobe in 1930.

Another issue is the manner the public reacts to this change. In Jakarta there are women who love to wear men's clothing and vice versa man who wears women's clothing for a variety of reasons such as variations in women's clothing choices are more, fittings or the size of a woman who they feel is appropriate to wear. Another issue is if it is right for the society in Jakarta to accept this trend. Where was the gender difference? This could indicate whether there is the equality between women and men in life and especially in terms of dressing.



Figure 1. Anna Tommy, a local fashion brand in Jakarta that offers genderless fashion collection; men and women can wear the same outfits.

The concept from Anna Tommy unisex clothing is for men and women to wear the same type of clothes, but both of the users, make it their own through accessorising, mixing and fitting it to one's individual style. The clothes do not express either masculine or feminine features, but are open for individual interpretation. This empowers the consumers of this brand to construct and communicate their own unique identity through the clothes.

Meaning of unisex and androgyny

According to Bem (1981) (American Psychologist, an expert on gender studies and androgyny), Unisex words refer to things that do not show gender specific. Unisex is objects that suitable for both sexes. The term was created in 1960 and is used quite informally. Although combining uni form is of "unus" Latin, the term seems to have been influenced by words such as unified and universal. In this case, it can be seen as meaning shared by both sexes. Hairdresser, clothing design, designer handbags, beauty salon that caters to both men and women are also often known as unisex. Unisex clothing including clothing such as T-shirts, jeans, jackets, and others which has a neutral size specification to fit to both genders.

Japanese and Korean culture has been showing androgynous appearance as a positive attribute in the community, as illustrated in both the K-pop, J-pop, in the anime and manga, as well as the fashion industry. And in Indonesia have also begun to emerge at the same time in Asia.



Figure 2. Helmut Lang collections
Source. www.theredlist.com



Figure 3. Giorgio Armani collections 1990
Source. www.vogue.it

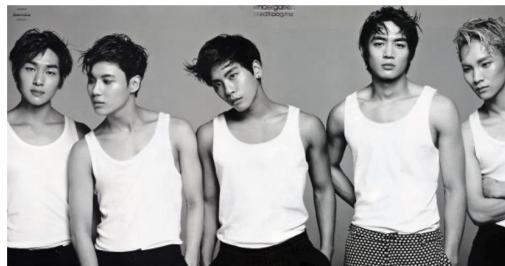


Figure 4. SHINee, Korean K-pop music band for the L'official Hommes Korea Magazine March 2013
Source. www.kpopupdate97

The author would like to compare the terms unisex and androgyny because their trend is part of culture. According to

Raymond William and Edward Thompson, culture is a form of cultural historical materialism, which traces the development of meaning, exploring the context of the material conditions of production. It can be possible to conclude that the term unisex and androgyny have the same meaning to figure out the absence of gender-specific differences. Gender is socially constructed definition of women and men. This is not the same thing as sex (biological characteristics of women and men). Gender is given in the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in their life.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminism refers to a political movement, a culture or economy aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political, sociological and philosophical issues concerned with the problem of biological sex differences and advocating gender equality for women. Feminism is a school of thought and movement demanding the rethinking of women. There are numerous streams by three waves of feminism. The first wave began with the feminist movement associated with the French Revolution of 1789. The illustrious thinker of this period was Mary Wollstonecraft with his book *A Vindication of the rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft, 1792). The initial wave refers mainly to women's right movement of the twentieth century, nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United

Kingdom and the United States (mainly related to a woman's right to choose in politics). The second Wave of the feminism direction switches of the practical activities towards the theoretic. Simone de Beauvoir, in his book *The Second Sex*, mentioned that women have been considered second-class citizens. The second wave refers to the ideas and actions related to the women's liberation movement began in the 1960s (which campaigned for the rights of women's legal and social). The second wave feminists see women's cultural and political inequalities as completely linked and encourage women to comprehend aspects of their personal lives. This second wave feminism is written rationale for discussion as it relates to the termination of discrimination of women included in the fashion world.

Third Wave feminism is influenced by postmodernism. The third wave refers to the continuation, and reaction to the perceived failure, which began in the 1990s. The third wave feminism began in the early 1990s, emerged as a response to the perceived failure of the second-wave, and also as a response to the reaction against initiatives and movements created by the second wave. Feminist theory aims to understand gender inequality and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. While providing a critique of social relations and politics, many feminist theory focuses on the promotion of the rights and interests of women. According to Divia Harilela, a contemporary expert

on fashion, fashion designers apply the androgynous trend as one step further to show the self-expression on gender. According to Danny Chow (as cited in Harilela, 2014), merchandise manager for menswear division in Joyce USA, brand unisex appeal to the younger generation to seek new approaches and self-expression. "This generation is more open-minded and do not care so much about gender. Today, both sexes will buy things they like, regardless of whether they are categorized as male or female," he said, citing brands like Céline, Dries Van Noten and Thom Browne as a favourite of the genders. What makes this unisex fashion so interesting and relevant today is that it is a trend. In contrast, unisex collection is used as a means of self-expression and encourages the wearer to experiment with their personal style without being connected with the constraints of gender. It is likewise relatively easy to use. "Typically, unisex brand will perform a wider variety of sizes to accommodate women's and men's sizes. In general, it is easier for customers to use, because it requires less than perfect body shape." Said Chow. Unisex fashion biggest supporter is designer Rad Hourani Canada, who founded the first unisex brand back in 2007. If there are more designers presenting genderless label, this will generate more interest among consumers and encourage them to explore further. This provides an attractive attention to be in a position to predict what will happen in the future.



Figure 5. Unisex ready to wear collection in ad campaign from designer Rad-by-Rad Hourani October 2013

Source. www.arcstreet.com

Fashion theory: identity, and difference (m. Barnard)

In his book on Fashion theory, Barnard (2007) highlighted an interview Ryan Smith and the actor Jessica Alba says that fashion is the personality on the "outside" and it represents "who you are". Representation is one thing standing for another thing and we are familiar with it in many areas of our lives, means fashion stand for one's identity. One of goal men and women wear genderless collection is also to represent their identity through what they wear. The meaning of what we wear was the interaction between the values and beliefs as a member of various different cultural groups. In Jakarta there are groups in society that love to wear the genderless collection through influences from trend international and overseas cultural trends. There were many aspects of identity and had to do with more than one's personality. Aspects could be ethnic, sexual, racial, gender, national, class and any other cultural identities. Being a

member of a culture was said to be about sharing of values, beliefs and knowledge. Fashion stands for or represents the values and beliefs that we have as members of different cultural groups. The construction of self-identity and meaning is also the construction of a political position, because self-identity and meaning require the relation to other people. Men and women who love genderless fashion brand had a same relation to other people.

DATA COLLECTION AND RESULT

Author collected data from the questionnaires to the 150 respondents in all part of Jakarta, majority 60% from

south Jakarta and balance divided into west, north, east and central of Jakarta. To gain valid and reliable information, author had chosen participants from the target audience. Based on the data obtained, results could be used as a research result and findings. Age of the correspondence was between 18-27 years, women, from the upper middle class. Majority almost 85% of them are students and young entrepreneurs whom have a passion in fashion and following the international trends. They bought and visited the same stores, brands that were also observed by author.

The first question was about perception on genderless fashion collection, Figure 6 below shows e the outcome.

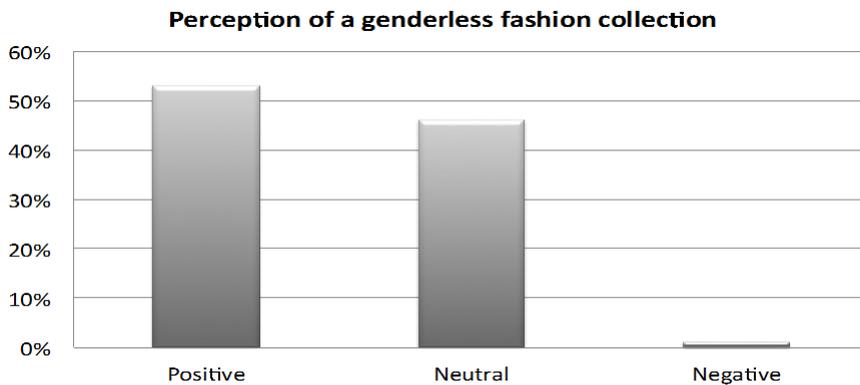


Figure 6. Perception of a genderless fashion collection

Figure 6 shows 52% have a positive perception about genderless fashion collection, while 47% were neutral, and 1% was unfavourable.

This proves that for the actual ages of the consumer, they would have a positive perception of the genderless collection although still 47% found it otherwise.

After rechecked that the term genderless collection was not too familiar to them currently, but after showing samples, they have a clearer picture of the meaning. This positive perception can be found through the growing numbers of the new fashion local brand that focused or offered the genderless fashion collection.

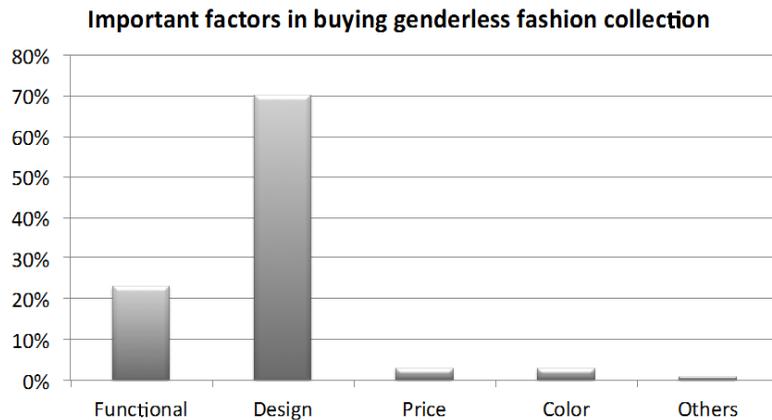


Figure 7. Important factors in buying genderless fashion collection

Design dominates their purchase on genderless clothing 70%, Other 30% are the function of the clothing. In order to support the fashion designer performance as a goal questions on factor decision in buying collection are helpful, the result based on that question showed 70% choose design, and 30% garment product.

From the respondents information, the author found out also that 42% said that the current design that they found in the market less attractive, so according to them, they have not been able to express themselves better. The genderless fashion brand from Stockholm name Stutterheim. Stutterheim designs with high functionality in mind. There is no distinctive difference between genders, and male and females' models are shown wearing the same styles. And important also that this brand offer wider range of sizes XXXS to XXL. Size measurements play a very big role in creating the genderless collection. Full study about pattern and size chart has to be done. Important also for the fashion designer that

they should not designated wearer in mind in creating the brand. It's about combining men and women silhouette. Another brand from Amsterdam, "Nobody has to know" even created a brand with the advance philosophy is to "blur the lines of age, size and gender" through garment. In order to full fill the needs of the attractiveness of a collection, fashion designer has to be able to see from other market fashion such as from Asia, Europe and USA. Author found the "street style" of a market place was important to explore. Learning from those brands, the important point also was how well the brand communicates with their customer about the product.

In the branding analysis of the brand, brand identity should be able to communicate the uniqueness of the clothes. Furthermore local fashion brand should communicate the personal attributes, which are authentic, unique, independent, following international fashion trends that are related to the value of the target market.

The local fashion brand should be able to offer their customer with an emotional and self-expressive benefit when they purchased the product. Maintaining the customer loyalty and become part of the brand in the important key for the success.

Next questions, which are connected to it, are their goal in wearing the product so it will advise the fashion designer to be able to create a design suitable for their consumer.

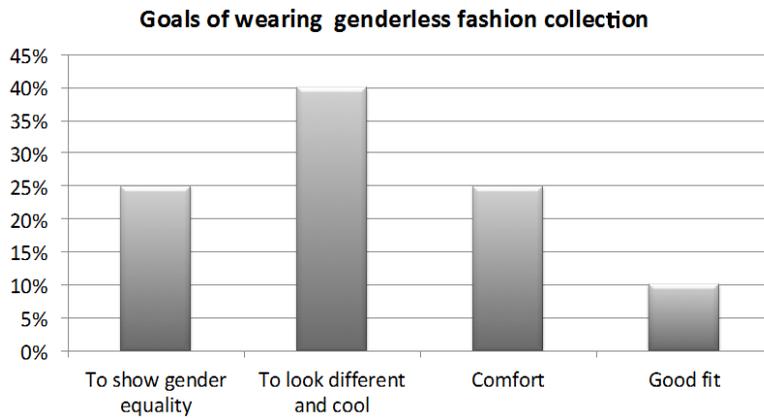


Figure 8. Goals of wearing genderless fashion collection

The result shown 40% consumer want to look different and 25% to show the gender equality and 25% comfort and 10% on a good fit. Goals of the consumer are very

important also in creating the right product. The independent contemporary women loved the masculine clothes and giving a feminine touch by adding accessories.

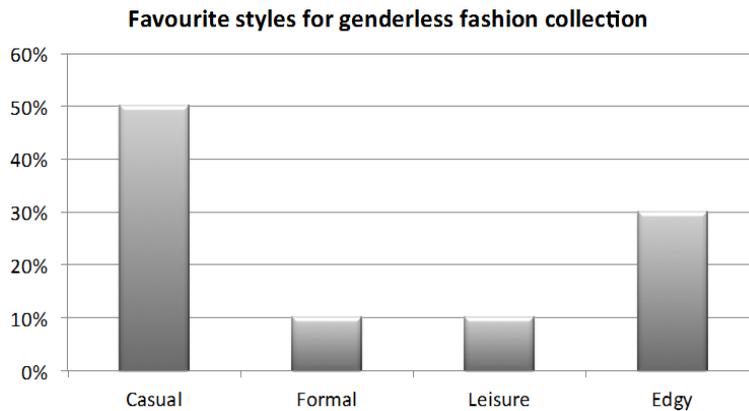


Figure 9. Favourite styles for genderless fashion collection

Type of design that selected by consumers for their wardrobe, 50% casual, 30% edgy, 10% formal and 10% leisure attire.

From the results of this data, the authors can conclude that there is a huge potential for genderless fashion collection in the local retail market in Indonesia. Based on the researcher observation in the retail market through some stores like The Goods Dept., Bright spot, some online business in Jakarta, it was shown the acceptance of the Indonesian customers about this type of collection.

The change in the consumer attitude will lead also to the performance of the fashion designer how the fashion designer is able to discover the new consumers' expectations. From the view of the media and marketing of the genderless fashion brand, androgynous styling, gender neutrality has become a key for a fashion advertising and promotion in the current seasons. Fashion designers taken the idea of genderless collection and translate into the multiple lifestyles and became more common. This was allowing a greater choice in what will be worn and how to interact with the user. This trend will be informed through the marketing messages.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the above discussion, the authors draw the conclusion that contemporary feminism could underlie

the launch of unisex clothing collection today. International designers follow a socio-cultural development of people's lifestyles, and their basic objectives were in accordance with the theory of feminism. Gender equality does not mean that that women and men become the same, but the opportunities and life chances are equal. Gender analysis also computes social and economic differences between women and men.

In terms of consumers, the basic use of genderless clothing in addition to it being a form of expression is the desire to experiment with style and not being bound by the constraints of gender. From the respondent's sample, it could be concluded that perception about gender provides a new avenue for a designer to design a new collection that will enhance their performance. This paper concludes that changes in society and consumer behaviour perception about gender could lead to performance excellence of the fashion designer.

It is therefore recommended that the fashion designer be more acquainted with consumer tastes to be able to secure a share in the growing Indonesian retail sector.

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