Perception towards Business Casual Attire : An Analysis by Gender

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This research paper attempts to study the difference between male and female in regard to their perception of various aspects related to business casual wear.

METHODOLOGY

Univariate and bivariate statistical analyses were performed for the collected empirical data on SPSS. A reliability analysis was conducted with the use of Cronbach alpha standards. To determine gender differences in perception of various aspects related to business casual wear, a survey with eleven statements related to perception of wearing business casual wear at work was administered to 120 samples. The Mann-Whitney U-test results revealed no significant differences ($<.05$) between female and male in their perceptions of various aspects related to wearing business casual attire to work in all the eleven statements.

VALUE

The finding is of utmost interest to the corporate and academia alike to know the perception of the gender on various aspects related to business casual attire. This would help HR corporates to formulate the HR policies related with dress code.

INTRODUCTION

Business casual dress, also known as smart casual, is a popular work-

place dress code that emerged in white-collar workplaces in Western countries in the 1990s, especially in the United States. Many information technology businesses in Silicon Valley were early adopters of this dress code. Casual Dress Codes were used in the mid to late 80s as corporations downsized and needed ways to compensate employees without added expense. In contrast to formal business wear, such as suits and neckties, the business casual dress code has no generally-accepted definition; its interpretation differs widely among organizations and is often a cause of sartorial confusion among workers. Business casual is classic rather than trendy. An employment counselling office at an American university defines business casual dress as a middle ground between business formal wear and street wear.

Business casual wear means dressing professionally, looking relaxed, neat and pulled together. A more pragmatic way of putting this would be that business casual dress is the mid ground between formal business clothes and street clothes. Examples of clothing combinations considered appropriate for work by businesses that consider themselves as using the business-casual dress code are :

- For men : a shirt with a collar (tennis shirt) and cotton trousers, "khakis": in American English.
- For women : a tennis shirt and trousers.

Generally, neckties are excluded from business casual dress, unless worn in untraditional ways. The acceptability of blue jeans and denim cloth clothing varies – some businesses disallow them as sloppy, not casual, yet tolerate men wearing blue jeans with a sports coat.

SOME BASICS FOR MEN AND WOMEN

Khaki pants, neatly pressed, and a pressed long-sleeved, buttoned solid shirt are safe for both men and women. Polo/golf shirts, unwrinkled, are an appropriate choice if you know the environment will be quite casual, outdoors, or in a very hot location. This may not seem like terribly exciting attire, but you are not trying to stand out for a cutting edge look, but rather for your good judgment in a business environment.

HAIR : Should be clean and neat.

SHOES : Should be in polished condition. Make sure heels are not worn.

DETAILS : No missing buttons, no lint; and don't forget to remove external tags and tacking stitches from new clothes.

HANDS : Clean fingernails.

FIT : Clothes should be clean, neatly pressed, and fit properly, neither tight nor baggy.

SMELL : Perfume or cologne should be used sparingly or not at all. Clothes should be odour-free and should never smell like smoke.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of existing literature revealed that there is very little work related to gender differences on business casual wear. The literature review, therefore, includes guidelines offered by various authors who have studied business casual wear.

According to Cole (1999), clothing is a powerful communicator and makes a difference in how individuals are perceived. One connection people often make is between a person's manner of dress and performance: "sloppy dress, sloppy mind, and sloppy work" (Holden, 1998). The implication is that someone who is considering a large investment in an organization would question the advisability of doing so when dealing with someone wearing frayed jeans and sandals (Holden, 1998, 2003).

Dressing appropriately for the job enhances one's corporate image and lends credibility to one's ideas and accomplishments. Clothing that reflects the company culture and that is appropriate to the stage in one's career is recommended (DuBrin, 1990). If the corporate culture is casual, employees are advised to invest in high-quality casual clothing with high-quality accessories as well (Rozakis & Rozakis, 1998). According to Dobson and Dobson (2001), employees can make themselves more promotable by following the dress standards set by their organizational leaders. Employees who follow the firm's dress standards will send the message that they are aware of the importance of appropriate attire to the company's image and that they wish to conform to the standards of the corporate culture.

More than one-third (34.2%) of executives polled think that business casual dress has gone too casual, according to a recent survey by Management Recruiters International, Inc.

Once there was a time when a person could walk into the office of a manager, accounts executive, or salesperson and expect to see the individual behind the desk adorned in crisply pressed suits with starched white shirts. It was something that was not open to discussion but rather ingrained in American culture that certain dress was considered appropriate in those professions (McPherson, 1997).

According to a study completed by CSUS marketing professor Dennis Tootelian, nearly two-thirds of Americans have felt inappropriately dressed at a business or a social function and more than two-thirds are uncertain about the differences among business attire, business casual and casual dress in the work-place. Nearly one in three reports that it is harder to know what is acceptable to wear to the office today than it was 10 years ago. According to Tootelian, the biggest fashion problem for workers today is the concept of "business casual". "The term 'business casual' needs to be better defined," he said. "People don't know what it is." For men, Tootelian said, the standard for business attire has been a suit and tie with matching, shined shoes. Business casual could mean anything from a sports coat with or without a tie to pleated cotton slacks with a collared shortsleeve polo shirt and loafers. For women, business attire already offers them a choice of pant suits, suits, dresses and co-ordinated skirt and slack ensembles and the notion of business casual may be more subtle, with factors such as pattern, colour, texture and material playing a role. "Unfortunately," Tootelian said, "business casual may not help women as much as it does men."

According to Miner (1963), the aesthetic qualities of various physical characteristics are unlikely to have any effect on performance.

A sense of occasion and the ability to dress properly for it are among the refinements of civilization. 'Casual,' a word whose meaning is much abused these days, too often means slack and slovenly. In this context, it is a short step from a business suit to a sports jacket (Horn, 1975).

Michael Evans, the spokesman of Burger King, commented after the destruction of hurricane Andrew in 1992 forced people to come to work in casual clothes: "We learned that you don't have to wear a uniform to get the job done. It is not what you look like–it is what you can do".

There are benefits to wearing casual clothing in the workplace, such as good morale, open communication between managers and employees, and a lack of cost to the employer (Gutierrez & Freese, 1999).

Gutierrez and Freese also note that the professional image may be weakened if clients feel employees are too casual to be entrusted with their business.

A national survey of office workers' attitudes toward casual dress shows that 41% felt casual dress improved worker productivity, while only 4% perceived a negative impact...... 51% said they did their best work when dressed casually (McPherson, 1997).

In a 1998 survey by USA Today, 64 per cent of respondents said they work more efficiently when wearing casual dress. The vast majority of the surveyed

employees felt that dressing casually resulted in a variety of benefits, including comfort, increased camaraderie and better work environments in the words of McPherson (1997). A survey from a sample of 1,540 Certified Public Accountants illustrates that about 60% agree that wearing casual clothing at work increases productivity (Gutierrez & Freese, 1999).

A Deloitte Human Resources assistant stated that the dress policy is an added benefit and a morale booster. She feels that the more comfortable employees are, the more productive they will be. Many people feel that "dressing casually can lead to better attitudes about work, greater spontaneity, and improved relations among employees" (McPherson, 1997).

After surveying 500 firms in 1997 and 1998, research psychologist, Jeffrey L. Magee came to the supposition that "continually relaxed dress leads to relaxed manners, relaxed morals and relaxed productivity and that relaxed dress led to an increase in litigation, a decrease in company loyalty and increase in tardiness."

There is a fear that casual dress makes employees too comfortable and not professional enough. When you wear the more casual attire, human nature says you will act a little bit more casual (Sweeney, 1999).

A 1999 study by employment law firm Jackson Lewis found that 44 per cent of the [Human Resource] executives polled noticed more tardiness and absenteeism after implementing a formal casual dress policy.

Casual dress can have clear advantages, at virtually no cost, for most corporations and industries in the words of Michael R. Losey, SHRM's President and CEO.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research paper is to study the difference between male and female in regard to their perception of various aspects related to business casual dress code.

HYPOTHESIS

Research Hypothesis 1($H1_a$) : There is a significant difference between male and female in regard to their perception of various aspects related to business casual dress code.

Null Hypothesis 1 ($H1_0$) : There is no significant difference between male and female in regard to their perception of various aspects related to business casual dress code.

METHODOLOGY

Instrument

A questionnaire survey was used to gather information from respondents to statistically test the hypothesis.

The primary source of data collection in this study is structured questionnaire. Structured questionnaire method was used to determine the perception on various aspects related to casual dress code. Secondary data collection was also done from various articles, research papers, magazines, websites and books. It also includes data from company and other referral sites and sources.

The demographic data collected included gender, age, years of experience, marital status and educational qualification. The other items, which were simple to operationalize, were company allow employees to wear business casual attire to work, number of days per week is professional employees allowed to wear business casual to work, the casual dress code difference depending on the employees' level within the organization. This information was collected by asking the respondents to respond whether the company allows employees to wear business casual attire to work (categorized into two options of Yes and No), number of days per week, is professional employees allowed to wear business casual to work (categorized into four options, 1 day per week, 2-4 days per week, 5 days per week, Occasional), the casual dress code difference depending on the employees' level within the organization (categorized into two options of Yes and No). A total 11 questions were included asking respondents to indicate their perceptions of wearing business casual attire to work on five-point likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree).

The Sample

The questionnaire was administered to a non-probability sample of 150 respondents from different parts of India. 30 of the questionnaires were incomplete, and therefore, rejected. The sample is represented by 120 respondents, 24 from Female and 96 Male. The primary data was collected from the respondents to measure their perception on casual dress code along with demographic data. Table 1 exhibits the demographic profile of the sample and Table 2 depicts the cross tabulation table of gender with generation and marital status.

Table 1

		Frequency	Per cent
Generation	Gen Y	75	62.5
	Gen X	45	37.5
	Total	120	100.0
Gender	Female	24	20.0
	Male	96	80.0
	Total	120	100.0
Marital Status	Single	64	53.3
	Married	56	46.7
	Total	120	100.0

Table 2

Demographic Variable		Gender		
		Female	Male	Total
Generation	Gen Y	19	56	75
	Gen X	5	40	45
	Total	24	96	120
Marital Status	Single	18	46	64
	Married	6	50	56
	Total	24	96	120

ANALYSIS

Univariate and bivariate statistical analyses were performed for the collected empirical data on SPSS. A reliability analysis was conducted with the use of Cronbach alpha standards to ensure construct have reliable questionnaire items, a reliability analysis was conducted with the use of Cronbach alpha standards. Simple frequency distribution and cross tabulation was performed to gather information on demographics such as gender, generation and marital status. Bivariate analysis was carried out to examine the relationship between independent variable (gender) with the dependent variables like comfortableness in wearing business casual, prefer to dress casually for work, etc. The Mann-Whitney U-test was carried out to test the hypothesis as independent variable has only two levels and dependent variables are ordinally scaled.

FINDINGS

The dimensionality of the scale was examined by considering the Cronbach alpha score. The scale has a coefficient alpha of 0.824 (Refer Table 3). The simple frequency distribution of questions like days per week companies allowed their employees to wear business casual attire to work (Refer Table 4), Casual dress code different depending on employees' levels within the organization (Refer Table 5). Majority of employees (82%) said no to this statement. The rating by the respondents for each of the items on the perceptions of wearing business casual attire to work was averaged and descriptive statistics were calculated to get the perception of wearing business casual attire of the respondents (Refer Tables a, b & c).

Table 3

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
0.824	0.824	11

Table 4

		Frequency	Per cent
Days per week allowed wearing BCA	1 day per week	37	30.8
	2-4 days per week	9	7.5
	5 days per week	29	24.2
	Occasional	45	37.5
	Total	120	100.0

Table 5

		Frequency	Per cent
Dress code different depending on levels	Yes	38	31.7
	No	82	68.3
	Total	120	100.0

GENDER AND PERCEPTIONS OF WEARING BUSINESS CASUAL ATTIRE TO WORK

The Mann-Whitney U-test was carried out by using SPSS. The first section

of the output gave the descriptive statistics for the gender and for the independent variables (Refer Table 6a) (Descriptive statistic for independent variable is less useful). In this, there were 120 people (N) who responded to the "comfortable wearing BCA" question. They gave a mean response of 3.5667 (between Neutral and Agree) with a standard deviation of 1.14300 (although this number may not be meaningful as standard deviation is not a valid statistic for an ordinal scaled variable). From the mean score calculated in Table 6a, it was evident that people mean responses were between Neutral and Agree except for few which were between Disagree and Neutral.

The second section of the output shows the number (N) of responses in each condition (24 female and 23 male do) and the mean rank and sum of ranks

Table 6a

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum
Comfortable wearing BCA	120	3.5667	1.14300	1.00	5.00
Makes workplace friendlier	120	3.4167	1.05785	1.00	5.00
Improves Communication b/w mgmt & employees	120	2.8500	1.18570	1.00	5.00
Improves Productivity	120	2.6083	1.07918	1.00	5.00
Improves Morale	120	2.7833	1.14630	1.00	5.00
Prefer to dress casually for work	120	3.1083	1.09080	1.00	5.00
Dress casually for work is confusing	120	3.1250	1.12692	1.00	5.00
BCA policy is an important employee benefit	120	3.1333	1.14447	1.00	5.00
Saves me money	120	2.9417	1.19731	1.00	5.00
Some take dressing casually too far	120	3.7000	1.10461	1.00	5.00
Employees are respectful to managers when dress casually	120	3.2000	1.22714	1.00	5.00
Gender	120	1.8000	0.40168	1.00	2.00

for each group (Refer Table 6b). It is evident that female are more agreed than male on majority of questions on perceptions of wearing business casual attire to work.

The final section of the output (Table 6c) gives the values of the Mann-Whitney U-test. The observed Mann-Whitney U-value is given at the intersection of the row labelled Mann-Whitney U and the column labelled with the variables. The Mann-Whitney U-value is 1107.500. There is p-value given on the row labelled Asymp. Sig (2-Tailed).

As the p-value is greater than the specified α level (0.05) for all the variables, we fail to reject H_o. Thus, we have insufficient evidence to conclude that there is significant difference between the genders in terms of their perceptions towards wearing business casual attire to work.

Table 6b

Mann-Whitney Test (Ranks)

	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Comfortable wearing BCA	Female	24	62.35	1496.50
	Male	96	60.04	5763.50
	Total	120		
Makes workplace friendlier	Female	24	62.50	1500.00
	Male	96	60.00	5760.00
	Total	120		
Improves Communication b/w Mgmt. & employees	Female	24	63.65	1527.50
	Male	96	59.71	5732.50
	Total	120		
Improves Productivity	Female	24	60.27	1446.50
	Male	96	60.56	5813.50
	Total	120		
Improves Morale	Female	24	63.08	1514.00
	Male	96	59.85	5746.00
	Total	120		
Prefer to dress casually for work	Female	24	58.79	1411.00
	Male	96	60.93	5849.00
	Total	120		

Table 6b (Contd.)

Dress casually for work is confusing	Female	24	54.06	1297.50
	Male	96	62.11	5962.50
	Total	120		
BCA policy is an important employee benefit	Female	24	61.75	1482.00
	Male	96	60.19	5778.00
	Total	120		
Saves my money	Female	24	55.75	1338.00
	Male	96	61.69	5922.00
	Total	120		
Some take dressing casually too far	Female	24	61.83	1484.00
	Male	96	60.17	5776.00
	Total	120		
Employees are respectful to managers when dress casually	Female	24	56.54	1357.00
	Male	96	61.49	5903.00
	Total	120		

CONCLUSION

The Mann-Whitney U-test results revealed no significant differences (<.05) between female and male in their perceptions of various aspects related to wearing business casual attire to work in all the eleven statements. The male and female irrespective of genders felt that they were more productive when they were wearing casual clothes. Irrespective of gender, majority of employees perceive comfortability in wearing business casual wear, it makes workplace friendlier, improves communication between management and employees, improves productivity, improves morale, it is an important employee benefit, saves money, majority of employees are respectful to their managers irrespective to business casual attire, they prefer to dress casually for work and many of them are confused regarding dressing casually. The review of the literature suggests that business casual dress can either encourage or discourage greater productivity. However, this study survey results suggest that majority of employees perceive that business casual dress causes positive impact in work performance. Therefore, there is reason

Table 6c
Test Statistics (a)

	Comfortable wearing BCA	Makes workplace friendlier	Improves commn. b/w mgmt. and employees	Improves Producti-vity	Improves Morale	Prefer to dress casually for work	Dress casually for work is confusing	BCA policy is an important employee benefit	Saves my money	Some take dressing casually too far	Employees are respectful to managers when dress casually
Mann-Whitney U	1107.5	1104.0	1076.5	1146.5	1090.0	1111.0	997.5	1122.0	1038.0	1120.0	1057.0
Wilcoxon W	5763.5	5760.0	5732.5	1446.5	5746.0	1411.0	1297.5	5778.0	1338.0	5776.0	1357.0
Z	−0.305	−0.328	−0.513	−0.037	−0.419	−0.280	−1.049	−0.203	−0.773	−0.219	−0.648
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.760	0.743	0.608	0.970	0.675	0.780	0.294	0.839	0.439	0.827	0.517

a Grouping Variable : Gender

to believe that casual dress may simply allow employees to complete their work effectively, without prompting them to give out extra effort.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As with previous research, the use of a non-probabilistic sample places limits on the generalizability of the results. The results cannot be generalized to the whole country as the number of respondents were limited to one twenty, though care has been taken to include some key variables. Since the data collected was through questionnaire, the limitation of this instrument applied to the study. Due to absence of sufficient studies on business casual wear and gender, not much of the available materials relevant for our study from the secondary source could be collected.

In this study, comparison between generalized perception of male and female regarding different factors of business casual wear is taken care of. In the continuation of this study, it would be interesting to study the gender related perceptional differences between cultures, income classes, age groups, region and other categories regarding different factors of business casual wear. A study should be conducted to determine whether or not dress codes have a positive effect on a person's motivation and attitude.

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