



MARKO SAKSA

Unisex clothing market research

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ABSTRACT

Saksa Marko Unisex clothing market research

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This thesis researches the history and marketing of unisex clothes and the best ways to approach the style in which it should be handled. The idea originated from the authors own life experience and changing attitudes around the world to meet the changes and new perspectives that younger generations have towards self-expression and fashion.

The main point was to give ideas and to help understand the complexity of unisex styles and its relations with LGBTQI+ communities around the world. To successfully and respectfully market such items a whole range of ideas and events must be understood and that's why the history is also involved in the research.

Current businesses and companies are used to highlight the reasoning and motives for the style and creation for unisex styles and how it reflects in the changing times and how it can be relevant to all clothing markets no matter what type of clothes they are currently selling.

Questionnaire was also sent out through social media to also research the attitude that people view on the clothing market and to see the possible views on the current matter.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Generations after generation following all the way back to traditionalists, meaning people born before 1946, have seen a rise in LGBTQ identifying members and the society is becoming ever more accepting of people freely expressing their gender identity. (Jones, 2022.) This goes in some relation with the clothes and the identity that clothes create for people and the way people want to express themselves through their fashion and clothing items. To keep relevance in this changing world companies should align with the needs of the consumers to stay relevant and meet these needs in ways that can give mutual benefit for both the company and the consumers. Even if people don't personally identify as a member of the LGBTQ member, they can and should be offered more freedom and choices rather than fixed silhouettes and styles that have become standards in the markets. (Reilly, 2020.)

1.1 Conceptual framework

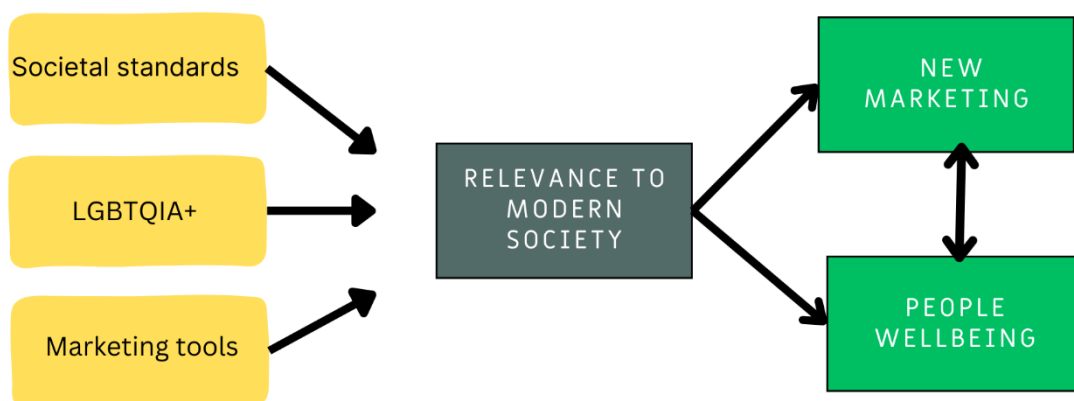


Figure 1. Conceptual framework (Saksa, 2023.)

Conceptual framework of this thesis is represented in figure 1. and it reflects the concepts from marketing to societal standards and its relevance to modern society and its effects at the moment. All of these concepts can be inspected individually but this thesis goes to inspect is there a relevance to marketing and how it might affect.

All of these concepts can be applied to any business that works with clothing items and on how people express their identity and its relationship with modern marketing. The idea is to find the main factors and concepts surrounding the marketing and peoples self-expression. Should the marketing change and if it should change, to find out in what way it changes.

2 WHAT IS UNISEX

Unisex is a concept of genderless, stepping away from the gender conception and need for dividing things binary, as male or female. Not separating things, objects, or concepts into gender or sex and rather looking at things as uni, a loanword from Latin meaning one and combined with sex, meaning one sex. Not differentiated as male or female. Unisex can then be applied to clothes, styles, hairstyles etc. Most items and services we use in modern world are unisex and aren't tailored to different genders but in some areas this division still remains. Gender equality has been improving in recent years and with the creation of more business services and products this gap can be narrowed even more. (Reilly 2020.)

2.1 Unisex clothing

Unisex clothing basically means clothes that are gender free, fit for all by cut and design. Styles can vary and the real unisex meaning comes from the lack of the

binary gender roles of male and female. Overall, unisex clothing is for people with gender fluidity or people who don't feel the necessity to conform into the traditional gender roles. Unisex then is more about stepping out of the norms rather than stepping into a predetermined form that most of the clothing markets sells. Through body positivity and the will to freely express one's identity comes the true concept of unisex where there are no binary roles. (Reilly 2020 & Luther, 2015)

Unisex clothing has relied on making the silhouette, cuts, and designs to give less gender expression than traditional typical male or female clothes. However, some people have viewed this as too limited a way on creating unisex clothes and that it only caters to slim and able-bodied people. (Reilly, 2020.) Unisex doesn't mean that everything is made to look the same, the concept rather enforces the freedom to choose on how to express and how people want to show themselves. Unisex clothing shouldn't be bland where nothing indicates typical gender expectations such as narrow waist for women, broad shoulders for men, but rather the freedom and concept that all is free and not limited to choose these binary roles that are traditionally forced upon them but also not creating a new singular concept where no individuality is allowed. (Luther, 2015.)

2.2 Western binary concept

When talking about traditional binary concept of clothes, it should be noted that this concept applies almost only to the western world, which was then spread through the world in the last centuries through colonization. Still during this time there has been gender fluidity throughout the times and a lot of gender breaking concepts all around the world and even in western world. From the first western woman to wear pants, Frances "fanny" Wright who was a great supporter of equality and feminism to the rise of sexual revolution in the 60s and forward. So, one could argue that unisex and freedom of dressing isn't only for gender expression, it is also to step out of the social concepts that people are forced into by society standards. (Jarrett, 2021 & Reilly 2020.)

One example of how standards and fashion ideas change are also the fact that high heels which became a femininity symbol in mid-18th century, but originally high heels were created for men in 10th century. As such the standards and expectations are only temporary and tied down to the social constructs of the time and highly dependent on the culture it is viewed in. As an example, Japanese kimonos are very similar to both male and female and creates a similar silhouette for both genders as does Korean hanbok. Both of which are long flowing dress type clothes which breaks the traditional male and female silhouettes western fashion was expecting. The two photographs below from late 19th and early 20th century clearly shows the similarity between silhouettes and styles between male and female Korean clothing. Someone without knowing details and cuts, at a glance, could easily mistake the clothing to be same for both genders. In figure 1 are presented the court ladies for empress Sunjong and in figure 3 Korean men in Russia at 1863. As such the concept and realization of fashion and unisex is highly dependent on the cultural and timeframe it is observed in. (Bass-Kreuger, 2021, Reilly, 2020 & Kim, 2022.)



Figure 2. “Postcard featuring Empress Sunjong (1894 – 1966) and her court ladies dressed in hanbok with voluminous chimas, in 'Joseon-cho Gungjung-pungsok Yeongu' by Kim Yongsuk, published by Iljisa (1987)” (Kim, 2022)



Figure 3. “One of the earliest known photographs to feature Koreans, photographed by the Joseon diplomatic mission during their stop at the Old Russian Legation, 1863. Image: London Missionary Society collection, SOAS Library” (Kim, 2022)

2.3 Modern concept of unisex

Modern concept of unisex got its beginning in 60s and 70s. After WW2 the binary roles were being forced or rather suggested by images of men in suits, women in dresses and high heels, as the typical stature one should conform. However, the change started to become in the 60s with the sexual revolution and challenging the liberties of individuals and their self-expression. The movement, as expected, received a backlash from parts of the society but at the same time a lot of support, and in a sense, it was the early beginnings of LGBTQ movement, but it was not known by that name at the time. One example of the many ways people protested and required freedom was when men slowly started to wear longer hair against the expectations and dress codes, and in one case 53 students opposed the schools dress code for boys and girls and took the case all the way to court. The students lost the case but the concept of what was acceptable and against civil liberties was being challenged ever more often. (Hillman 2015.)

In the late 60s men started wearing ever more colourful clothes, bell-bottom pants and changing away from suits and flat bottom shoes that was expected from men at that time, and women also started to wear more pants and shorter hairstyles. New York times and other news sources started talking about the unisex fashion which then caused a lot of confusion and also praise at the same time. Some viewed it as a destruction of social constructs and societal norms as other praised it as a freedom of choice and liberty. From all of these movements the iconic styles of 60s and 70s were created but the societal changes were set and the beginning sexual revolution that started is still continuing in one form or another. (Hillman 2015.)

3 LGBTQIA+

Is an abbreviation of the Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual and other identities and ways people identify. It is a impression of ones sexual orientation and gender identity. LGBTQI in itself is only the abbreviation

of those people and as such is only an identification. Lgbtqi rights on the other hand mean that all people despite their gender identity or sexual orientation receive equal treatment and should be freed from systematic racism and economic injustice. The views and abbreviation still keep changing as understanding and the lgbtqi community grows all the time. (Morgan, 2020.)

3.1 Growing community

The rise and beginning of the modern LGBTQ movement started in the 1951 when the first notable groups started to form. The beginning was slow, and many didn't want to participate in LGBTQ activities and groups for fear of being persecuted and a lot of people were afraid of losing their jobs. LGBTQ groups were slowly growing but the oppression from the government and people were still keeping the movements fairly small and oppressed. The key change that many regards as the most important moment in human right development came from the Stonewall riots in 1969, June 28th when a police force was called to shut down a bar that was serving for LGBTQ members. The shut down of the bar didn't go as planned and people started to resist, and the incident went on for 5 days where people were rioting for their rights and resisting the arrests aimed to suppress the LGBTQ community. (Morgan, 2020.)

Over the years more and more people are identifying themselves as LGBTQ and as such the needs and requirements of those people should be more closely evaluated in social life and in business culture. The legal stigmatisation and oppression from laws has largely gone at least in western societies and societal freedom has allowed more people to truly express themselves and to identify more freely. (Morgan, 2020.)

In a survey made in 2021 in USA accompanying more than 12000 adults shows clear results. 7,1% of adults in the survey identified as LGBTQ and it had risen from the previous survey percentage which was 5,6% in 2020. The rise of the lgbtqi identity is most prominent in the generation Z who are born in 1997 to 2003. Generation Z showed 20,8% of that generation identifies as LGBTQ and for millennials born between 1981 to 1996 10,5% of them identified as part of the

LGBTQ. The survey clearly shows that each generation has ever increasing percentage and as such the needs of the LGBTQ community becomes ever more prominent in business, social culture and ultimately in clothing as a self-expression for people. (Jones, 2022.)

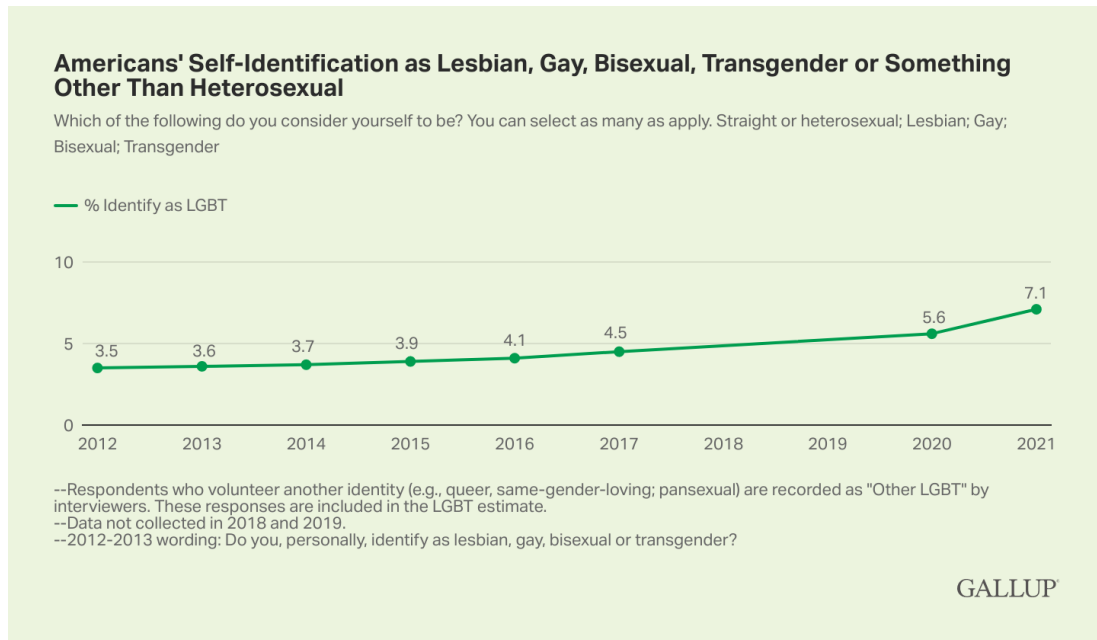


Figure 4. showing the steady rise of LGBTQ identifying members. (Jones, 2022)

Not all who identify as LGBTQ feel the need or want to express themselves as genderfluid or feel the need for unisex clothing but to cater this growing population, people should be asked what they want and need. Overall, as the surveys shows a clear change in the traditional binary roles changing, continuing to provide clothes only in the same traditional binary method as male and female clothes in stores might do more harm than good. Also, if the growth of people who identify as LGBTQ keeps growing and as older generations pose less and less market value, the needs and social constructs of the younger generation should be looked into more carefully. Clothing becomes more of self-expression and less constricted by old social constructs. (Paoletti, 2015.)

With the rise of the LGBTQ community, it should then be asked do these old values that the marketing has been placed upon really work anymore and what changes could be made. As such the more gender-neutral approach has been looked upon in this paper and researched with interviews and questioner forms have been used to

find out the opinions of people and what they think about unisex approach on the clothing market. The gender fluidity with many LGBTQ people is apparent and thus the binary female/male clothing marketing style is challenged by many members of the LGBTQ community and also by people outside of the community. As such if the marketing of the clothing items are based on the old principles of the binary system it has the real possibility of becoming very soon outdated and irrelevant in the consumers eyes and as such loosing possible sales by not meeting the needs of the consumers. (Reilly, 2020.)

4 CLOTHING MARKET

4.1 Size and value

Clothing markets are truly worldwide markets and its one of the most important necessities that basically every single person in the earth uses. As such the global size of the markets are 1,53 trillion U.S. dollars in 2022 and estimated to grow up to 1,94 trillion U.S. dollars. The potential and size of the clothing market overall creates a huge possibility to generate revenue and as such it's crucial to know the consumer needs. (Smith, 2023.)

Global brands as Nike, H&M, Levi Strauss are mostly dominating the market but currently there is no monopoly and as an example new company called Gymshark managed to rise from 2012, it was founded by a single person named Ben Francis. He started creating gym clothes and by social media marketing managed to become a successful gym clothes seller and one of the youngest billionaires to enter the Forbes billionaire listing in 2023. This shows the flexibility and possibilities of the changing markets and the true possibilities of a smaller company creating a product for a need and how it can rise up to be a significant player in the clothing business. (Tognini, 2023.)

4.2 Sustainability and EU

Clothing industry is currently one of the biggest polluters in the world and creates around 10% of the global greenhouse emissions. 60% of the clothing ends up in a landfill after just one year of being produced. As such the emissions and trash created by the clothing industry is a growing problem and businesses and influencers over social media still promote fast fashion despite the environmental rises. (de la Motte, 2022 & European Commission, 2023.)

EU is currently tracking down fast fashion business and trying to establish a legislation that would require the clothing industry to create more sustainable clothing. The recommendations currently tackle with issues such as emissions and clothing durability. The European commission news report also wants to drive fast fashion out of the market and drive the businesses to rely more on longer lasting, repairable, and easily recyclable clothes. Such methods as destroying unsold stock would be denied, and clothing industry would have to rely more on quality over quantity. Microplastics and chemical usage is on the list of issues being addressed. (EC, 2023.)

EU plans for sustainable fashion would drive such brands as shein and other fast fashion businesses out of the European union market. The clothing industry as such is under a pressure to create ever more sustainable clothes and clothes that have a higher second-hand value. This includes but is not limited to sustainably produced fabrics and longer lasting clothes that can be worn for a long time without breaking down from frequent washing. However, this goes directly against the current business plans of fast fashion companies that want to pump out as many new styles as possible in a sort of amount of time. Every season and fashion style currently lasts only for a short period for these companies and the small profit margins are being overcome with the excessive amount of clothes being sold. In many cases the unsold clothes are being burned or dumped into landfill to make room for new clothes and styles. As such the fast fashion industry is facing problems from many environmental organizations. (EC, 2023.)

4.3 Excessive consumption

A lot of the problems in excessive consumerism also stems from the promotion that shopping is a form of therapy to people and as such it has become normalized through the society that excessive consumption is seen as a healthy option for the consumers. Marketing and ever-changing trends also drive the fast fashion industry forward. However, consumers are becoming more aware of sustainability and the polluting effects clothing industry has on the planet which can be seen on online searches. “Sustainable fashion” search has tripled from 2016 to 2019. (de la Motte, 2022.)

4.4 Unisex clothing a sustainable choice

Unisex clothing is seen by many as a form of solution to the clothing industry pollution and as a way to create a more sustainable industry for clothing market. Unisex clothing has a massive benefit over traditional clothes as unisex clothes have a lot larger possibility for second hand market for the simple reason that the clothes would fit for all genders. Unisex clothing can be a partial solution in aiding more sustainable fashion as sustainability requires also more uses from individual pieces of clothing and relies more on stable choices rather than multiple individual pieces of clothing. (de la Motte, 2022.)

Wardrobe staples, meaning key elements of one’s wardrobe could be more easily accessed and created by using more versatile unisex choices as those could give more freedom and usability in everyday life. Repairability could also help to create diversity throughout the products life cycle however as such services aren’t that readily available for people currently it can’t be seen as a feasible option. (de la Motte, 2022.)

5 MARKETING

Marketing starts with understanding the marketplace and the consumer needs. Businesses these days have to create value to customers and to create value one must understand what the customers want. Customer satisfaction happens when those values and needs are met by the products or services that companies provide. To meet the desires and wants of customers a wide range of information must be used from buying behaviour to the values customers hold. Not all needs can be fulfilled by certain products and as such markets divide into segments. (Albrecht, 2023.)

Business marketing relies mostly on set of rules and expectations that are there to predict how consumers think. These rules have been used in the past and they can and will differ from product category and based on the consumer base and style of products. Now sometimes these predictions work really well, and on some products the marketing hasn't changed much. However, the societal and technological changes are also changing how consumers think and its challenging and making it harder to predict how consumers think as Gerald Altman from Harvard business school points out in his book about how customers think. "Among consumers, the experience of a problem, the search for goods and services to solve it, and the evaluation of these offerings derive from the mind-brain-body-society partnership. For instance, the social context assigned to an object can produce markedly different physiological reactions." (Zaltman, 2003.)

5.1 Value creation

For a business to have a satisfied customer the company has to meet a lot of criteria's and one of the main points is value creation. Understanding that the most important thing in company's microenvironment is its customers can help companies engage and create better value and nurture the customer relationships. By creating value, a company also has to carefully choose a value proposition. What is the value the company brings into the market and how it separates itself from the competing

companies. How it all ties together is understanding the mind of the consumer and creating a connection to meet these values accurately enough to do business with the consumers. The value consumers want in exchange are all related to their societal status, age, cultural differences etc. and only by understanding these can companies start to create mutually beneficial relationships with the consumers and start to create loyal and long-lasting consumers. Value connects closely with customer satisfaction and even with the right value proposition the company can lose sales to competitors if they give out better overall experience to the customer. The balance and interconnection of the whole experience must be understood and as such market research is a key element to keep the communication open between consumers and the business to truly understand and meet the requirements customers expect. (Kotler, 2021.)

5.2 Buyer behaviour

For a business to properly create revenue and to do accurate marketing it has to know the customers, what they want, why they want, and what they value. That's why understanding the societal changes that are happening is extremely important. To understand the reason why customers buy products and understanding the driving force behind customers is key to successful business. (Armstrong, 2021.)

The human mind can be described as a black box and understanding the inputs that then create the outputs can help unravel the buying behaviour of customers. Some inputs are uncontrollable by businesses and others are controllable. The key uncontrollable factor that is researched in this paper is the social factor and its changes by the rise of the LGBTQ community and the more open outlook and disappearance of the traditional binary male and female model. By changing the marketing and opening the business styles some products can open markets for the rest of the 50%, in this case male or female audience and potentially create a lot larger customer base. (Armstrong, 2021.)

Harvard MBB, Mind – brain – body society, depicts four elements of humans as, brain, body, mind, and society and its interconnectivity on how all they relate to each other and humans' decision making. It also shows and highlights the importance of all the elements working together. How our society and expectations and memories also affect how we perceive things. Realizing and using these concepts and social structures for marketing can create certain outlooks but ignoring this, one can accidentally create marketing campaign that puts customers off. (Zaltman, 2003.)

Knowing why consumers want certain products or designs is more important than knowing what they prefer. Knowing why the customer wants certain product allows for a business to create and develop more insight into the products and mind sets of the consumer. Knowing why is also crucial for product testing and finding out will it work for the designed purpose. Finding out why people prefer certain products helps out in designing and solving the actual problem customers face. Thus, deeper understanding of the customer mind will help marketers give out the right signals and avoid waste of money and time on ineffective marketing. (Walter, 2015 & Zaltman, 2003.)

5.3 Market research

Marketing research is important for businesses to stay relevant and through the societal changes it is an important tool to keep marketing information up to date. Societal and cultural changes force the marketing environment to update its marketing style and ways to stay relevant. (Stokes, 2008.)

Market and customer research is a way to investigate the buyer behavioural influences and how they react and what values the customers and customer segment holds. Market research can be done in many different ways and information can be collected from sales reports or questionnaires. Multiple different approaches are possible and big global businesses can even draw very specific data from the sales figures to find out more on peoples preferences. The data is still only useful if the analysis is done correctly, and the proper reasoning is revealed. In different

countries same product marketed the same way can yield different results due to the cultural expectations behind the way the product is being perceived and as such the sales results might not reveal everything. Therefore, the analysis of the data and understanding the consumers and cultural differences are key factors in successful market research. (Albrecht, 2023.)

Surveys are an effective way to research and pinpoint more accurately the research problem and as such surveys conducted through questionnaires are most common way of doing market research to find primary data. Questions should be thought carefully, and their relevance should be evaluated. Is the main research question about the market, specific product, brand image or something else. Questions can be anything between open/close ended to multiple choice questions. Good questionnaire should also build up the questions in right order and shouldn't lead the questions too much in any direction to avoid bias in the answers. (Stokes, 2008.)

Surveys and interviews should also be conducted in a neutral environment to get truthful and honest answers. The current mindset and previous events can have an impact on how people answer the survey/interview. Conducting interviews on a place where people don't have much time or are aggravated can create a large bias on the answers and more negative outlook. As such using several different locations, different people interviewing or just by creating more neutral surveys can have a positive effect on the actual answers received. (Zaltman, 2003.)

5.4 Market segmentation

Market segmentation means dividing the consumer base into smaller groups depending on their preferences and needs concerning the marketed products or services. These divisions don't have any set of rules and the segments can be divided in multiple different ways, but the reasoning and accuracy of the information that the segmentation is done, are key factors to provide satisfactory value to the chosen segments. The main point is to find the connecting elements and to understand why those are important for the consumers, only then can a company

begin to cater the needs that fit for the chosen segment. As such the segmentation is only as useful as the data it is based on, and wrong assumptions and lack of data can create miscommunications on the values that the chosen segment truly needs. (Albrecht, 2023.)

Market segmentation must rely on a proven market and the consumer base and buying power must be large enough for a business to utilize specified marketing tactics for that segment. Market segments can exist without consumer buying power, and as such it is most likely not a good return on investment to design a product fit for the segment. Market segmentation has its benefits to create and provide a niche market with very specific product that cater to the exact needs. Unisex in some ways falls for both the market segment and outside of the segment in being useful for all but still catering the needs for people who are more fluid in their gender expression. (Kotler, 2021.)

Market segmentation also helps to define more tailored products or services for specific audiences. With knowledge of the basic needs and requirements more adjustments can be made to specifically suit the targeted segment and as such also creating a possibility to gain more loyal consumers. However, the products or services have to be properly managed and too specific or too broad designs or properties, can reduce the consumer base and hinder sales. The knowledge is key when evaluating and calculating the possible size of the market segment, its possible profitability and is it suitability to specifically tailor the products or services. (Albrecht, 2023.)

5.5 Customer centric marketing

Customer centric ideas reject the old fashion idea of forcefully selling to people and accepts more about how customers think and what they want, rather than using tricks and aggressively selling products that the customers might not even need. Main points being creating understanding between the customer and the company by doing proper research, asking the right questions, and saving money in the long

run by targeting the right key elements in marketing tactics and in the changing environment. (Zaltman, 2003.)

Customer centric ideas can also help develop consensus maps which basically means that a group of people share the basic ideas and values that control their individual mental models. Market segments often share these same consensus maps and thus knowing the ideas that reflect the segment, despite involving a lot of different and individual people, can help improve marketing and reach out to people more effectively. (Walters, 2015.)

Consumer power have been realized more in marketing in the last years and with the rise of the internet more value has been put on to the consumer power. By valuing consumer power and their way on using the products and what is on consumers' minds can increase the connection between business and consumer. Thus, research and being open with the consumers and listening to them can help draft and create more engaging products in long term basis. Not handing out ready finished products but having the consumers' minds and ideas effect the design or use of products can increase market share. Even the pleasantness of the shop, location and layout can have a large impact. By also showing that consumers have impact on business can increase the engagement and appreciation for businesses but only when it is truly done in a continuous way and appreciation is shown to consumers. (Walters, 2015.)

5.6 Behavioural marketing

Behavioural marketing relies more on the connection with the customer and requires marketers to understand more about the human you are marketing towards. Its about cherishing your current customer base and listening to your customers and developing methods for it. Behavioural marketing concentrates a lot of its value on well-articulated value proposition and value exchange where the company's value is exchanged for the data customers share. (Walters, 2015.)

Behavioral marketing relies a lot with the orientation with customer and helps marketers see things from customers perspective with customer journey mapping and gives more relevance to creating more personalized and user centred designs for businesses. Data can be collected from user behavior, based on previous shopping history and even on the items left in the internet store basket. (Walters, 2015.)

Reminders and personalized messages can be personalised inside the company and divided in different categories and whatever behaviour the customer fits best, lands them in a specific category for one of the predesigned emails or marketing messages. Companies can use this strategy to achieve more sales and create more loyal customers in the process. Generating enough proficient data is key to successfully implement detailed messages and in successful times to actually connect with the customers at the right time. (Walters, 2015.)

Shops can offer also benefits and sign-up options for cards and loyalty programs and give discounts for customers using those cards while shopping. Data is usually collected on shopping behaviour and can then be used to create more targeted advertising especially if the data shows significant differences regionally or by other factors. In practise the information collected should contain and include key words that drive clicks and different offer testing to know how the customer base reacts to different changes and elements offered through the marketing and especially email marketing or software usage. Once enough data can be collected to be used the current customers can be segmented more accurately based on their shopping behaviour. (Walters, 2015.)

Tools like email reminders, browse abandon campaigns, welcome messages etc. The successful rate of all these should be monitored and automated to make the data collection effective and useful. Welcome campaigns can also be used to drive the first sale that creates more deeper connection with the customer. (Wright, 2006.)

6 MARKETING UNISEX CLOTHING

Marketing unisex clothes is not a simple business and has to account the history, styles, ways of approaching and media used. The subjects and models should all reflect the ideas and values behind the clothes and as such it is a deeper subject than simply selling clothing that are unisex. Unisex for some people is just a clothing style but for some it is a deeper part of self-expression where the ideals and human rights meet. (Paoletti, 2015.)

Clothing marketing has subtly but successfully forced its silhouette and colour palettes for both genders and has affected on what is considered suitable for both genders to wear. In the early 20th century, the colour palette was turned upside down when marketing started to push blue for boys and pink for girls. Before this there was a universal consensus in western society that pink was considered masculine and that it was a derivative from red, what was again considered the colour of royalty. Blue on the other hand was considered to be feminine and designated more for girls. Although the designation of colours was in place even before widespread capitalist marketing in the last 100 years, considering the current climate and continuing to push the agenda that one colour is more suitable and/or that one silhouette is more proper for one gender than the other, can create more harm to people than good. Several testimonies and attacks have taken in place towards people who don't feel the need to step into the marketed and societal standards and if the origin of the assignment in these colours and clothes, originate from the marketing, it could be possible that marketing can also help to alleviate these societal pressures and relieve the strictness of societal standards. (Åkestam et al., 2020 & Reilly, 2020)

By creating free and inspirational places in shops, businesses can help and create more stress-free spaces for people trying to find their style and for those people who are still looking for their own style. One example of such project to create a safe space and to fight against the norms was Saint Harridan, a company that wanted to create custom suits for transmen and women in an effort to change the stereotypes on how women should dress and create more variety on what was even available for

different shaped bodies. Another company that also works to create a safe space for people is the Phluid company that has created a nonbinary concept for people where they can shop freely and where everything is genderless. People are free to shape and create the image of themselves that they want and what represents what they want to show to the world. This type of design in shops lets the customer create their own journey through shopping and relieves the pressure and expectations set by society. (Reilly, 2020.)

Companies that are creating and currently marketing the unisex clothing style are all based on the same concept of inclusivity and as such are welcoming and are open to new ideas and are always listening to their customer base. By creating this welcoming and inclusive space is one of the key elements on giving freedom to the consumers and letting their creativity and preferences guide their shopping. Not labelling the shop or dividing it in male and female sections also helps customers feel more freedom in experiencing and trying on items rather than just creating spaces that are limited and divided by gender. (Reilly, 2020 & GetPhluid, 2022.)

Company values are also important to keep in mind as some consumers see the pride month and other LGBTQ issues as just rainbow capitalism. If companies want to participate in pride month and increase their unisex clothing or create more LGBTQ friendly spaces, they have to fully support the LGBTQ movement. Disingenuous marketing and just profiting from pride month etc. is both bad for reputation and harmful towards people. For truly being honest and truthful the company agenda and ideas that it supports has to align from ground up. It begins from hiring diverse people, to placing unisex spaces, services and even gender-neutral toilets available for everyone. It is all tied down to customer service and the whole experience that customers receive when shopping. (Olsen, 2021, Reilly, 2020 & Albrecht, 2023.)

Online stores should also create more gender-neutral approach and good selections, selecting diverse models to represent a large variety of people, shows actual support and immediately increases the inclusivity needed to create a good platform for gender neutral marketing. Sorting clothes under feminine, neutral, and masculine are also good choices and keeping a wide variety of sizes to not exclude certain sizes.

Companies should rather give opportunities, create a journey for consumers to explore and create their own unique style and not push something ready-made. Email marketing and other channels should also place importance on neutral approach and even small things as letting customers choose their pronouns is important. (Åkestam, 2021 & Reilly, 2020.)

From a customer service perspective one of the most important things is also being respectful and respecting pronouns. Educating the staff is also a key part of selling and company cannot just decide to start selling without doing the groundwork, and as well keeping the staff informed on behavioral demands and on how to approach customers. Being open, respectful, and nonjudgmental are key elements on how to approach gender neutrality and remembering that it isn't a marketing opportunity, it is also a human rights issue that has to be handled with the respect that it deserves. (Morgan, 2020.)

7 SURVEY RESULTS

Questionnaire was shared publicly on social media to which people were free to answer and the questionnaire form was created using Typeform platform. 80 replies were received overall from where data was received to observe the main points in public opinion to see connection with the secondary data and to find out more on the thoughts about unisex clothing. Main point of the research was kept on how people perceive unisex clothing and do people find it relevant or important. Questions were positioned in a way that the first questions were about clothing industry and shopping preferences and only after couple questions were questioning moved to unisex and opinions on unisex.

7.1 Age distribution

Age range of the participants was wide but over 80% of the replies were from people under the age of 34 which gives a good representation on specifically younger generations and their preferences on gender representation and visibility on clothing market.

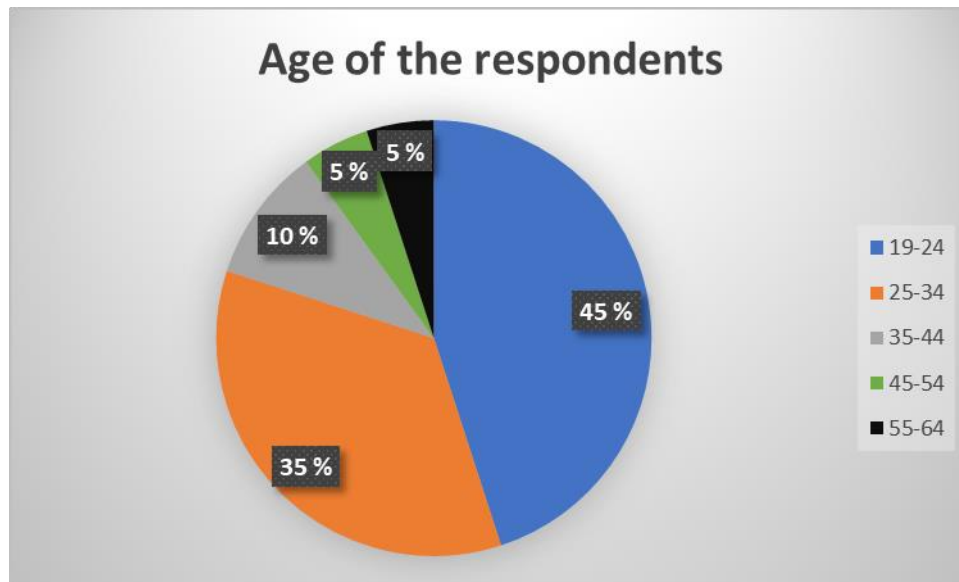


Figure 5. representing the age distribution.

7.2 Frequency on shopping

Respondents were asked on when did they last purchase clothing and the relevance comes rather on how active the respondents are. Correlation with the frequency of shopping means more active consumers and as such gives more weight to the answers. Over half of respondents are very active buying clothes in a time span that is less than 6 months ago. Surprisingly majority of respondents had bought clothing within last month, now here one possible effect was that the questionnaire was conducted during summer and people might be more active during that time but that is purely speculation and would require more research to know seasonal changes in shopping preferences.



Figure 6. When the participants last bought clothes.

7.3 Opinions on unisex

The main point of the survey was to question the opinions, importance, and interest in unisex clothing. One of the questions trying to find out the opinions was a personal question on how interested the respondents were in unisex clothing and the trend is clear. 60% of respondents answered their interest being in 4 or 5 in 1-5 scale showing that over half of the respondents were very interested in unisex clothing.

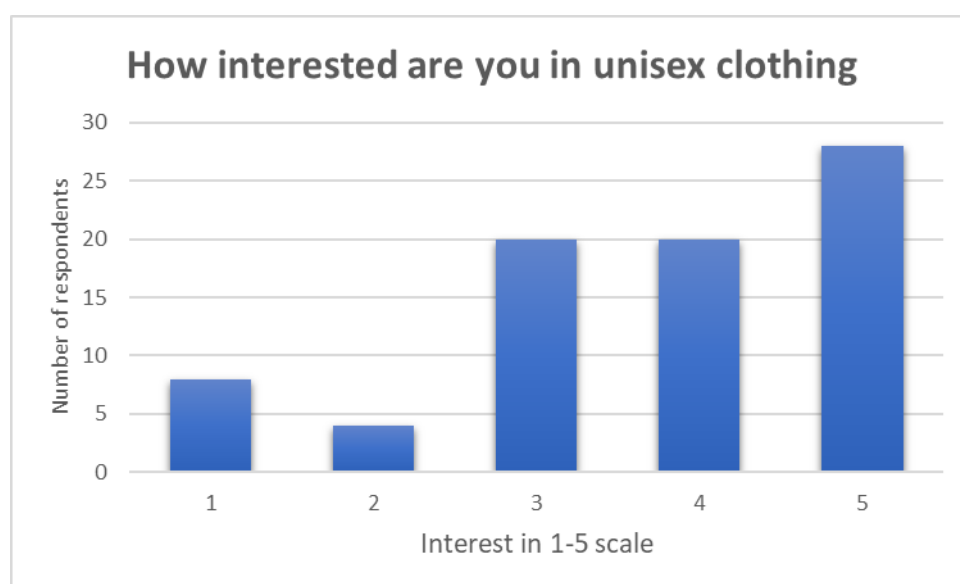


Figure 7. Interest in unisex clothing from 1-5.



Figure 8. Do you want to see more unisex clothing in stores.

Follow up question was on do the respondents want to see more unisex clothing in stores. 80% of the respondents also answered, yes, when asked did they want to see more unisex clothing in stores. All of this goes in align with the secondary data and the perceived interest in non-gender conforming clothing that are shown clearly in other sources. (Jones, 2022) (Reilly, 2020) (GetPhluid, 2022)

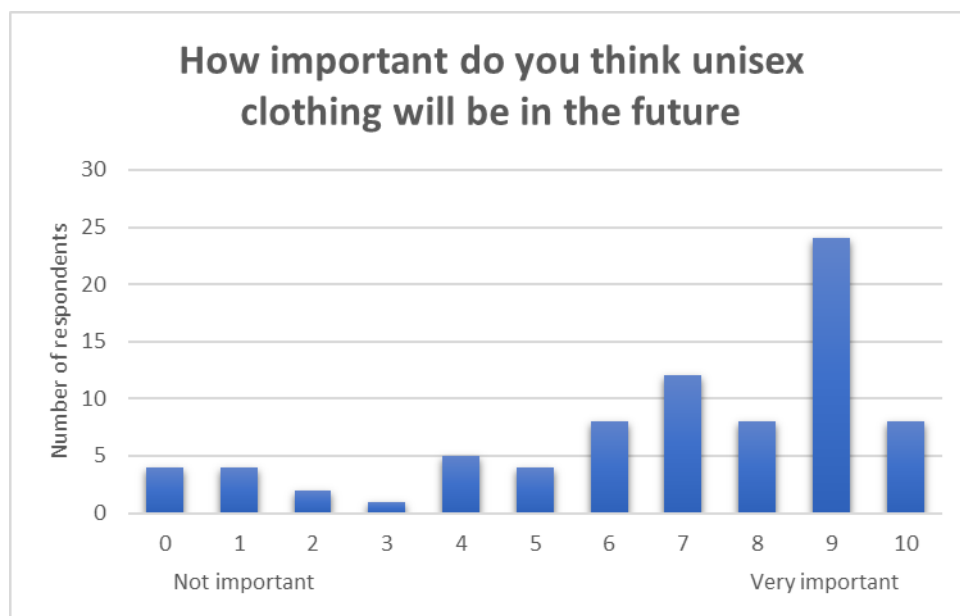


Figure 9. Perceived importance of unisex clothing in future.

One question about perceived importance on consumers was, “How important do you think unisex clothing will be in the future” on a scale from 0-10, 10 being the most important. The idea was to see how consumers perceive the changing times and how relevant do they think unisex clothing will be in the future. 75% respondents here chose 6 or higher showing again clear linear line with the earlier questions. Few strong opinions against unisex were clearly seen in the answers and those are the ones that landed at 0 or 1, but in bigger scale that is to be expected. Still showing huge positivity and openness to unisex overall.

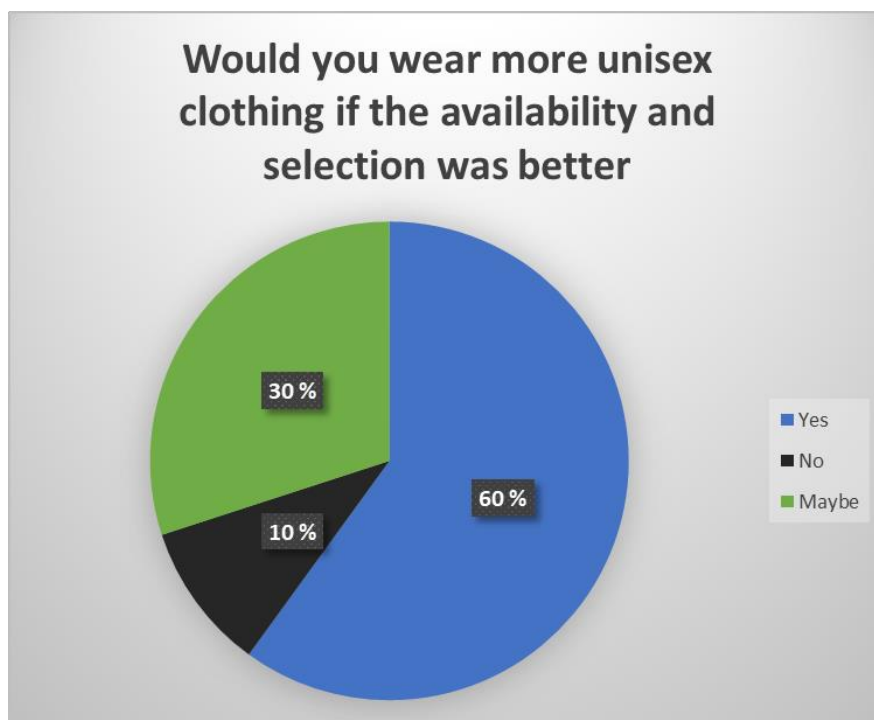


Figure 10. Would you wear more unisex clothing if the availability and selection was better.

Question about willingness to wear unisex clothing shows that 60% or the respondents would wear more unisex clothing would the selection and availability better. Question shows that according to the consumers own opinions there is a clear lack of unisex clothing both in selection and availability. On consumers mind then clearly there is a lack of marketing and availability of what they would want or would do if given the possibility. Only 10% said they wouldn't wear unisex clothing even if the selection was made better and 30% selected maybe as their answer.

8 CONCLUSION

Overall, the relationship between the societal expectations and people preferences in what they want to shop, and wear is quite clear. More outgoing society has opened and relieved many societal pressures that have been implemented by marketing and other factors and is helping to create more freedom of expression in daily life. Businesses can utilize and support this as has been done in many places including USA and by the companies mentioned in this thesis. By showing example and going forward and trying new concepts many of the current businesses have become almost a lifeline to many who has difficulty of staying in traditional gender norms.

Businesses should venture out, cater for people, and follow more closely the societal changes and by tapping into the sources that are available and through modern channels like social media it can be done at a very low cost to keep the businesses relevant and up to the times. There is a very real possibility when looking at the research and how people identify themselves that the gender norms will dismantle in the near future.

Businesses also have to revise the market research and if one expects and asks the same questions time and time again it might be that some ideas and thoughts get left behind. Questions like how would you identify yourself? Are there societal restrictions that are holding you back? Etc. If the market research is based on the old principles that there are only men and women and the concept that we need to do different products styles and services for each gender and don't even try to open these lines, who knows what is missed and what could possibly be achieved by being more open. Classification and societal lines can only be dismantled if people choose to do it, it's a line in the water that is only held there in peoples thoughts.

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APPENDIX

Questions used in the survey.

1. How many clothing items do you usually buy?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2-3
 - c. 3-4
 - d. 4-5
 - e. More than 6

2. When did you last buy clothes?

a. Less than one month ago	b. Between 1 and 6 months ago
c. Between 6 months and one year ago	d. More than one year ago
e. I don't remember	

3. What type of clothing would you like to see more?

4. How interested are you in unisex clothing on a scale from 1 to 5?

5. What appeals to you most about unisex clothes?

6. And what puts you off in unisex clothes?

7. Which of the following would influence your decision the most if you were to buy unisex clothing?

a. Brand	b. Quality	c. Value	d. Price
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8. What type of unisex clothing would you want to see more?

9. Do you want to see more unisex clothing in stores?

a. Yes	b. No
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10. Would you wear more unisex clothing if the selection was better?
a. Yes b. No c. Maybe
11. How important do you think unisex clothing will be in the future on a scale from 1 to 10, 10 being most important?
12. What's your age range?
a. 19- 24 b. 25 – 34 c. 35 – 44 d. 45 – 54
e. 55 – 64
13. Do you identify as a member of the LGBTIQ+ community?
a. Yes b. No c. I prefer not to answer