

Why Women Wear What They Wear? Exploring Young Adults' Attitude towards Western Attires of Women in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh has different religious beliefs, diverse socio-economic backgrounds, and some distinct cultural practices. Diversity among people is reflected in their attitudes and behavior in every aspect of their lives, including their attire. The research aims to explore the attitude of the young adults of the capital city (Dhaka) towards the Western attires of women as well as the factors that shape their attitude in a time when women wearing Western attires are facing restrictions due to people's concerns about their social and cultural beliefs and religious identities. Primary data for this study were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire and in-depth interviews with the young adults of Dhaka. The quantitative data were analyzed using a descriptive statistical technique (percentage analysis), and the qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the five key factors that shape the attitude of young adults towards the Western attires of women's factors include the various social, cultural, economic, and religious aspects, as well as the influence of modernization. Their attire choice varies based on age, gender, marital status, educational qualifications, religion, professions, and economic conditions. While women, unmarried, educated, wealthy, people working in the corporate sector, and the younger people of Dhaka are more likely to support Western attires, the Muslims, male, married, and the respondents of older age groups oppose provocative dresses. They emphasize social, cultural, and religious norms and maintain decency in overcoming dress-related disputes in Bangladesh.



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1. Introduction

Bangladesh is a country with a rich cultural heritage. It possesses a mixed culture practiced by people of different regions, religions, and economic backgrounds, which is commonly known as the "Bengali culture." People of Islam, Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, and other faiths have peacefully lived here for centuries, sharing the distinct Bengali culture (Watkins, 2016). Nowadays, western culture is spreading all over the world due to globalization (Raikhan et al., 2014). Hence, the inception of a foreign culture (western culture) is evident in the developing countries (Hossain, 2022). However, the takeover of Western culture is not always welcome in other countries, which is evident in Bangladesh as the Western culture conflicts with the Bengali culture in many aspects. In terms of clothing, the clash between the two cultures is more apparent, as reported by different Bangladeshi national dailies (Dhaka Tribune, 2022; Hassan et al., 2023; The Daily Star, 2022). Since Bangladesh is a Muslim-majority country with a 90 percent Muslim population (Scroope, 2017), Islamic beliefs and practices dominate Bangladeshi culture. As a result, western practices, including Western attires (provocative dresses such as sleeveless tops and jeans), clash with the traditional Bangladeshi culture and, most often, speculate controversies.

In the latter part of 2022, Bangladesh witnessed a countrywide protest in favor and against Western attires (Dhaka Tribune, 2022; Kanya & Supriya, 2022). Consequently, women who wear Western outfits face many challenges and restrictions, as reported by various national dailies (Dhaka Tribune, 2022; The Daily Star, 2022). While some parts of society, especially the youth and the aristocratic families, welcome Western dresses, the conservative part does not. Some people emphasize preserving their culture, while others perceive the choice of attire as an individual's right. So, according to them, no one can be forced to wear a particular dress. The given situation rationalized the study as it became essential to understand people's attitudes towards Western women's attire and the factors that influence them. Moreover, a scarcity of literature on this cultural aspect provides significant scope for this research.

The study focuses on the young adults of Dhaka city as almost 28% of the total population in Bangladesh are youth, and the number is approximately 46 million, according to the latest report of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS, 2022; Hossain, 2024). Youth is gradually increasing (Kabir & Ahsan, 2023; The Daily Star, 2023). They are the drivers of change (Rivers et al., 2015) and are mostly influenced by global trends such as the Western attires. Therefore, exploring their attitude regarding the issue is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that shape people's views and perceptions towards Western attires. This is crucial to avoid the recent disputes over women's attire in Bangladesh.

Among the previous studies, some researchers have studied female attire from religious and psychological perspectives, while others have studied it from public perception and sexual perspectives. D. O. et al. (2024) have developed a framework narrating the different social, physiological, economic, and environmental factors that influence the dressing sense of people. The social factors are culture, social values, norms, religion, and fashion; the economic factors include people's affordability; the environmental factors indicate the place of residence (i.e., urban and rural); and finally, comfort, appropriateness, and age are the physiological considerations in choosing attires. These factors have also been revealed in previous studies. For instance, Tajuddin (2018) has talked about social and environmental factors, arguing that culture, community and family values, environment, media, and fashion trends influence a person's choice of attire.

Age, education, religion, family values, culture, profession, and global fashion greatly influence people's attitudes towards attires. The influence of age in choosing attires was revealed by Arubayi (2010). Again, the study of Pasha-Zaidi (2015) has testified to the influence of religion in selecting dress among Muslim women living in the USA and the UAE.

It was also corroborated by Khondkar (2021) and Zabeen et al. (2017) in the case of Bangladeshi Muslim women. So, people are influenced by religion in choosing attires (D. O. et al., 2024). Besides, their families can also influence people's purchasing behavior (Etuk et al., 2022). So, the values and norms of a family can influence people's choice of attire as well. In addition, the choice of attire can be shaped by their faith, which is deeply rooted in culture, as La Fornara (2018) argued. Moreover, purchasing power significantly influences the clothing behavior of women (Otunaiya et al., 2020). Even the nature of the profession determines the type of dress a person should wear, which was found in the study of Aldrich (2008). Western attire has also been perceived as a tool of modernization (Kavas, 2015). Fashion trends significantly contribute to this (D. O. et al., 2024).

The influence of education on clothing style is thoroughly investigated by VR et al. (2019), who have identified that the educated youths of India opposed restricting women from wearing Western outfits. At the same time, they spoke against the vulgarity of Western attires. So, educated youths expect decency in clothing. In conducting a study on Bangladeshi males' perception of female attire, Akter (2018) also argued that maintaining decency while wearing Western outfits is essential. She concluded that male's perception in this regard is shaped by their family, moral values, their level of education, socialization, and circumstances (professions). Therefore, social, cultural, economic, and religious factors, as well as the trends of modernization, are likely to influence young adults' attitudes towards Western attires in Bangladesh, and the study focuses on exploring their perception while keeping these factors in mind.

Most previous studies on female attires have been conducted in other countries. Only a scanty of literature is available in Bangladesh. The most pertinent to this research is the study of Akter (2018), which focuses on the perception of male students of Dhaka University towards women who wear Western attire. So, there is ample scope to study this cultural aspect in the context of Bangladesh, one of which is the attitude of the young adults of Dhaka city towards the Western attires of women. As such issues have been a source of controversy in the country in recent times (Afifa, 2022; Dhaka Tribune, 2022; The Daily Star, 2022), this study intends to understand the actual reasons for such dilemmas among the people. In doing so, the research revolves around the following two research questions that can help to explore the young adults' attitude towards the Western attires of women in Bangladesh:

1. What is the attitude of the young adults of Dhaka city towards the western attires of women in Bangladesh?
2. What are the factors that influence the attitude of young adults towards Western attires?

The paper is divided into four sections. The study starts with an introduction. The second section explains the methodology. The third section analyzes the findings and also discusses the study. The final section concludes the paper.

2. Methods

The study follows a mixed research approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. The mixed method approach was used to understand the young adults' attitudes towards the Western attires of women. Primary data for this research were collected through In-depth interviews (IDI) and a semi-structured questionnaire survey to elicit information from the respondents (young adults). The survey collected data about the pattern of their views and perceptions towards Western attires, and the interviews gathered detailed information about their experiences and contextual insights. Both the survey and the interview data have been validated with each other to attain more profound insights into the issue. Secondary data were collected from available books, published research works, newspaper reports, and various

websites and journals relevant to attaining the research objectives. The types, numbers, and sources of the secondary data are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Secondary sources of data

Name of Materials	Number	Source
Books	1	Online
Journal Articles	14	Online (Google Scholar, Scopus, and others)
Newspaper	10	Online and Library
Blogs/Websites	2	Online

Due to resource and time constraints, all the young adults of Dhaka city could not be involved as the respondents. Therefore, the study deliberately applied the stratified random sampling technique to choose respondents from different subgroups for the questionnaire survey. The study population was divided into two strata: men and women aged 18 and 35 who lived in Dhaka. Then, data were collected from the respondents of each stratum. The division enabled the investigation of gender-specific attitudes towards Western attires of women in Bangladesh.

2.1 Sample Size

2.1.1 Questionnaire Survey

For the research, 200 respondents were chosen from two strata for the questionnaire survey. Table 2 shows the composition of the respondents.

Table 2 Distribution of respondents for the questionnaire survey

Study Area	Stratum	Number of Respondents
Dhaka city	Male Respondents	100
	Female Respondents	100
	Total	200

The two strata were determined by considering the proportional representation of men (50.84%) and women (49.16%) in Dhaka city (BBS, 2022). From each stratum, six groups of young adults were chosen, including college and university students, job holders, job seekers, married and unmarried people, and respondents of the four major religions in Bangladesh. It was done to understand people's attitudes towards Western attires, considering the perspectives of both genders, religions, marital statuses, job seekers, and job holders.

2.1.2 Interview

The study interviewed 20 young adults from Dhaka among the survey respondents. The respondents were purposively selected, and both men and women were involved in the interviews to make the analysis representative from a gender perspective. Table 3 shows the composition of the interviewees.

Table 3 Distribution of interviewees

Study Area	Respondents	Number of Interviewees
Dhaka city	Male Respondents	10
	Female Respondents	10
	Total	20

All the respondents involved in the study communicated the research objectives. Most of the interviews were recorded after obtaining their permission. Nevertheless, field notes were collected when the interviewees requested that their interviews not be recorded.

2.2. Data Analysis Tools

The data of this research were analyzed by using statistical tools and instruments. The quantitative data were analyzed through a descriptive statistical technique (percentage analysis) using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel. Relevant graphs and charts are added to present the findings. The results of the quantitative data were then interpreted to conclude. The qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. It involved the identification of the initial codes, which were then organized into five broad themes from the interview transcripts to explain the attitude of the young adults towards Western attires.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

Primary data from the questionnaire and Interview have revealed that the attitude of the young adults of Dhaka city towards Western attires of women is influenced by various social, cultural, economic, and religious factors and by the influence of modernization. These are the five broad themes derived from the interview transcripts validated by the survey responses. People perceive Western attires based on their beliefs, which are shaped and driven by these factors. This section analyzes the findings from the social, cultural, economic, and religious perspectives through the lens of modernization.

3.1.1 Social Perspective

A society influences almost every aspect of human life. Clothing is one of them. Society shapes the attitude and behavior of the people living within it, and these, too, differ from one society to another, such as in Eastern and Western cultures. In Bangladesh, people are family and community-oriented. Different social factors, such as gender, education, and profession, can influence people's choice of attire. It was also validated through the data from the Interview and questionnaire. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of the respondents by gender.

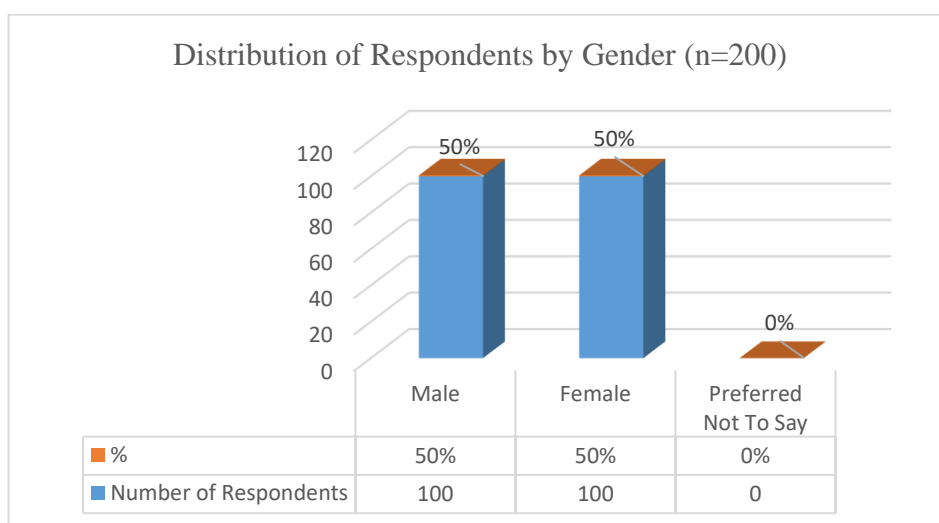


Figure 1 Distribution of respondents by gender (n=200)

The Figure demonstrates that men and women comprise 50% of the total respondents. All the survey respondents inquired whether they support women wearing Western attire. The finding is displayed in Figure 2.

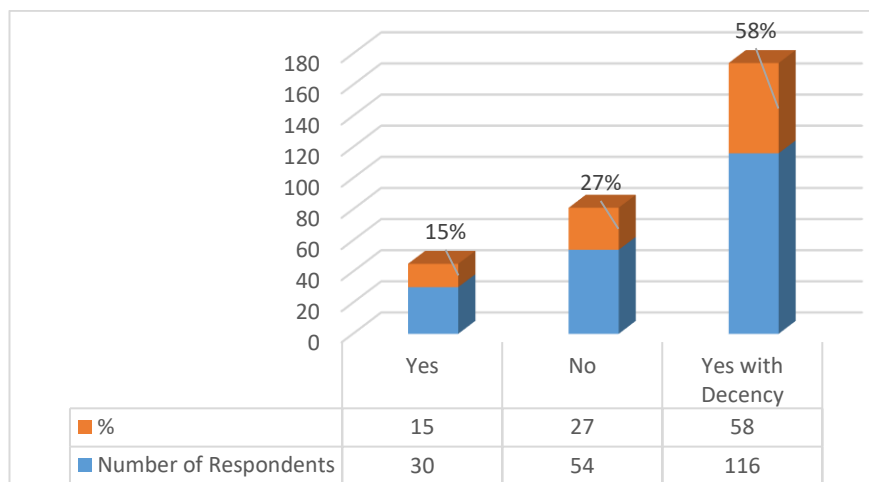


Figure 2 Western clothes preference among the respondents (n=200)

A significant 15% of the respondents (30 out of 200) said they support women wearing Western attire. The majority (58%) replied that they preferred women to wear a Western dress if they maintained decency. Lastly, 27% opposed Western attires. They perceived Western attires as conflicting with the existing societal norms and values. In the latter section of the paper, the finding of this Figure is further interpreted in terms of age, gender, marital status, and religion.

There have been significant differences between males and females regarding choosing Western attire. Female respondents were more likely to support Western attire. It is interesting to observe the respondents' Western clothes preference and their gender. Table 4 shows the gender vs. Western clothes preference matrix.

Table 4 Western clothes preference vs gender group Matrix (n=200)

Western Clothes Preference/ Gender Group	Male	Female
Yes	12	18
No	42	12
Yes, But Maintaining Decency	56	60
Total Respondents	100	100

Among the 100 respondents, each male and female, 12 men and 18 women supported women's wearing Western attires. In opposition to Western dress, 42 men and only 12 women did not support Western dress. Lastly, 56 men and 60 women opined to maintain decency in clothing. So, women prefer Western attires more than men. Interview data revealed similar findings. For instance, a woman during the Interview mentioned:

“Clothing is an individual’s choice. Society should not restrict this individual right.” (Interview 11).

In contrast, a male university student opposed the progressiveness of women and urged them to maintain decency in clothing. He criticized the revealing dresses such as slitless skirts, tank tops, and bikinis. According to him, women should wear non-revealing dresses in public places. He elucidated:

"We live in a collective society where we prioritize our societal norms and values. Women can wear what they want but they should avoid the provocative (revealing) dresses." (Interview 3).

Another woman respondent further triangulated it. She registered:

"I think women are welcome to wear western dresses unless they reach the point of obscenity. Most of the western dresses do not represent modernity. They represent indecency that contradicts our society and culture." (Interview 15).

During the survey, the respondents were asked about the dress they preferred the most. Their response is presented in Figure 3.

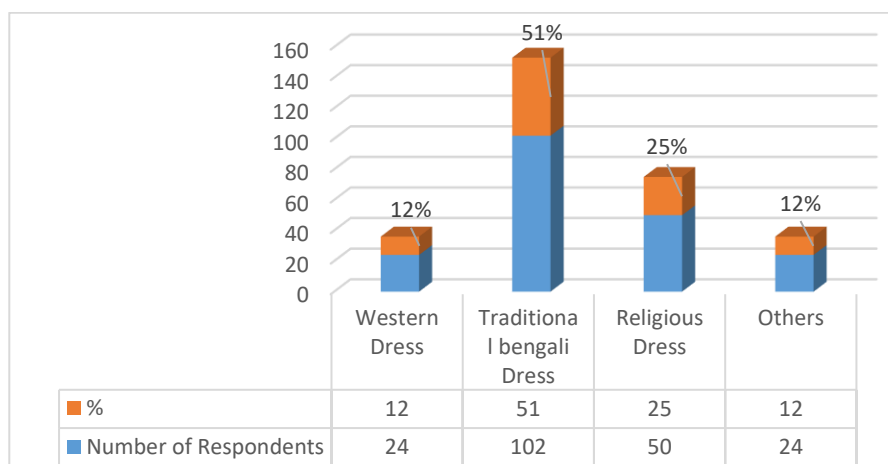


Figure 3 Choice of attires among the respondents (n=200)

Figure 3 demonstrates that the choice of attire varied among the respondents. The majority of the respondents (51%) revealed that they preferred traditional Bengali dresses (saree, shalwar, etc.), followed by religious dresses (25%; mainly Muslim respondents), western dresses (12%), and others (12%).

The findings have revealed that educational background and the nature of jobs significantly impact people's choice of attire. Young adults studying in universities have expressed a liberal standpoint towards Western attire. In terms of profession, 59% of the respondents were students. 17.5% were university graduates, followed by job holders (14.5%), businesspersons (5.5%), and homemakers (3.5%). Figure 4 depicts the distribution of the respondents by profession.

Interviews and questionnaires have revealed that the respondents engaged in corporate jobs are more likely to support Western attires. They have to maintain formal attires compared to other jobs. For this purpose, they choose Western dresses as they are attractive and comfortable. Moreover, those who wear Western dresses are perceived as more confident. For instance, one of the female respondents working in the corporate sector mentioned:

"The corporate world is competitive. You have to maintain a professional outlook all the time. In doing so, western attire is the best. They are light and comfortable. I feel more confident in western outfits." (Interview 17).

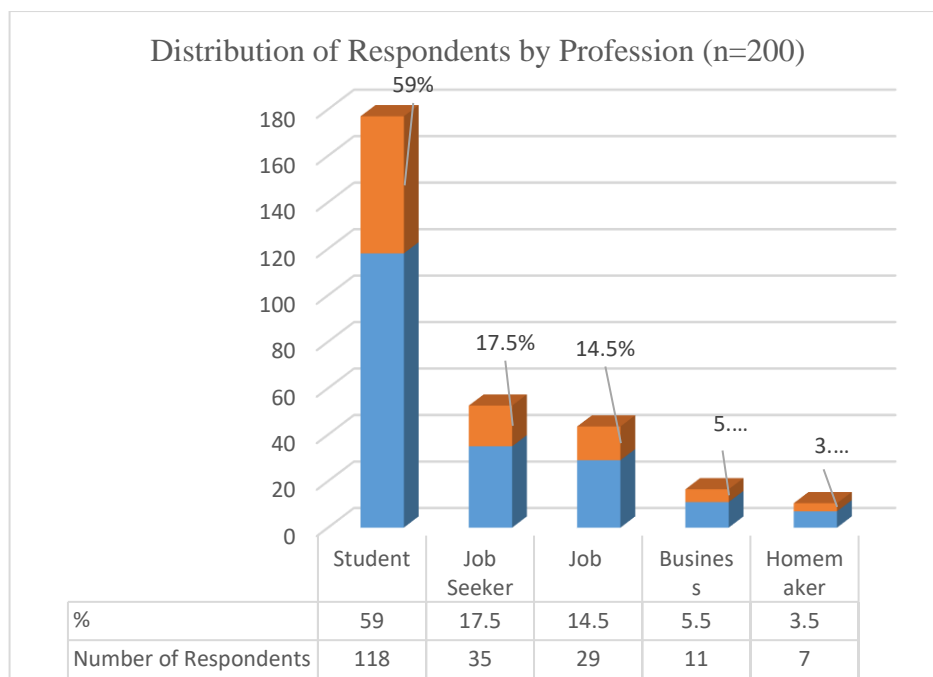


Figure 4 Distribution of respondents by profession (n=200)

3.1.2 Cultural Perspective

Culture influences people's feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior. It can substantially impact men's and women's dress preferences. Survey and interview data have identified cultural factors such as age, marital status, values, and norms. Shape young adults' attitudes toward Western attire.

Table 5 Distribution of respondents by Age (n=200)

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-24	120	60%
25-30	40	20%
31-35	40	20%

Table 5 demonstrates that 60% of respondents (120 out of 200) were chosen from the age group 18-24, 20% were selected from between 25-30 years, and another 20% were chosen from the age group 31-35. The age groups and the respondents' support for Western attires can be observed. Table 6 shows the young adults' support for Western attires vs. their age group matrix.

Table 6 Western clothes preference vs age group matrix (n=200)

Western Clothes Preference/ Age Group	18-24		25-30		31-35	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	20	16.67	4	10	4	10
No	28	23.33	24	60	20	50
Yes, But Maintaining Decency	72	60	12	30	16	40
	120	100.0	40	100.0	40	100.0

The Table shows that 16.67% (20 out of 120) respondents aged between 18 to 24 supported Western attires. But in the age group 25-30 and 31-35, the percentage was 10% each. This indicates that younger people are more likely to support Western dress than older people. Again, 23.33% (28 out of 120) respondents did not support Western attires aged between 18 to 24. For the age groups 25-30 and 31-35, it was 60% and 50%, respectively. Thus, western attire is more acceptable to younger people, who are mainly college and university students. Statistical analysis has found that marital status also influences people's attitudes towards Western attires. Figure 5 portrays the marriage status of the respondents and is further used in the marital status vs. Western clothes preference matrix in Table 7.

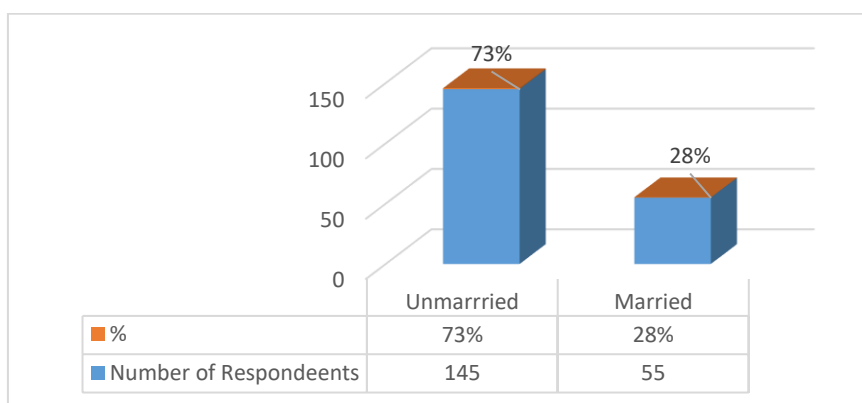


Figure 5 Distribution of respondents by Marital status (n=200)

Among the respondents, 73% (145 out of 200) were unmarried, and the rest, 28% (55 out of 200), were married.

Table 7 Marital status vs Western clothes preference matrix (n=200)

Western Clothes Preference/ Marital Status Group	Married		Unmarried	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	9	16.36	29	20
No	19	34.54	31	21.38
Yes, But Maintaining Decency	27	49.1	85	58.62
Total	55	100.0	145	100.0

The Table demonstrates that unmarried people were more likely to support Western attires than married respondents. 16.36% married respondents (9 out of 55) supported western attires whereas 34.54% (19 out of 55) did not. For the unmarried informants, 20% (29 out of 145) supported western attires whereas 21.38% did not. It can be inferred from the findings that choice of attires varies between the married and the unmarried people.

People's choice of attire can be heavily influenced by the prevailing cultural norms and values. As culture is an identity for every individual, everyone wants to preserve and practice their own culture. During the Interview, the respondents mentioned that Western attire is a by-product of Westernization and conflicts with Bangladeshi culture. One of them disclosed:

“Western attire is a product of the western societies. It is contradictory with Bangladeshi culture. As a Bangladeshi, I will try to uphold my culture.” (Interview 5).

Most of the respondents opined the same. Figure 6 further reinforces the findings. The women respondents were inquired whether they wear western dresses. The Figure describes their responses.

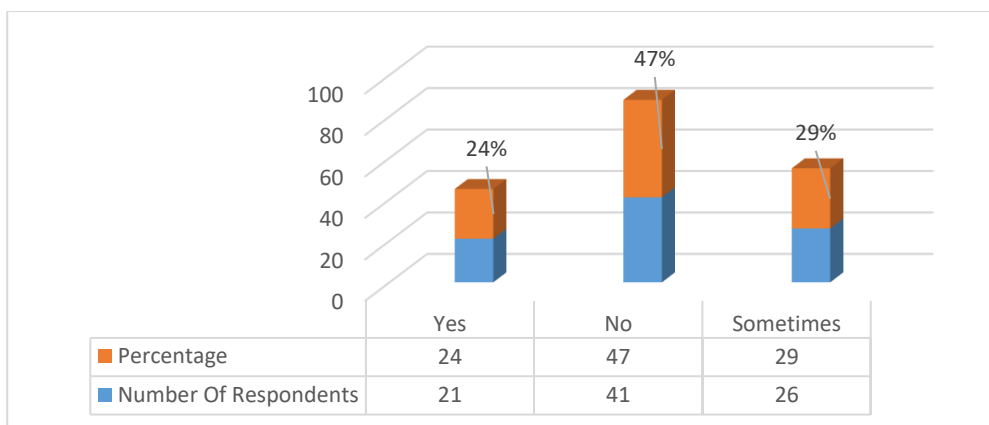


Figure 6 Do you wear Western attires (n=88)?

24% (21 out of 88) of female respondents to the survey used Western attires. 47% did not wear, and the rest 29% of them used to wear such dresses sometimes. Those who did not wear Western attire may have done so due to their concern about the preservation of the social and cultural values and norms and religious acceptance of dress. The respondents were asked two questions to inquire about the cultural identity and the cultural acceptance of Western attires from their point of view. In the first question, they were asked whether Western attire clashes with the Bengali culture. The finding of this question is quite interesting.

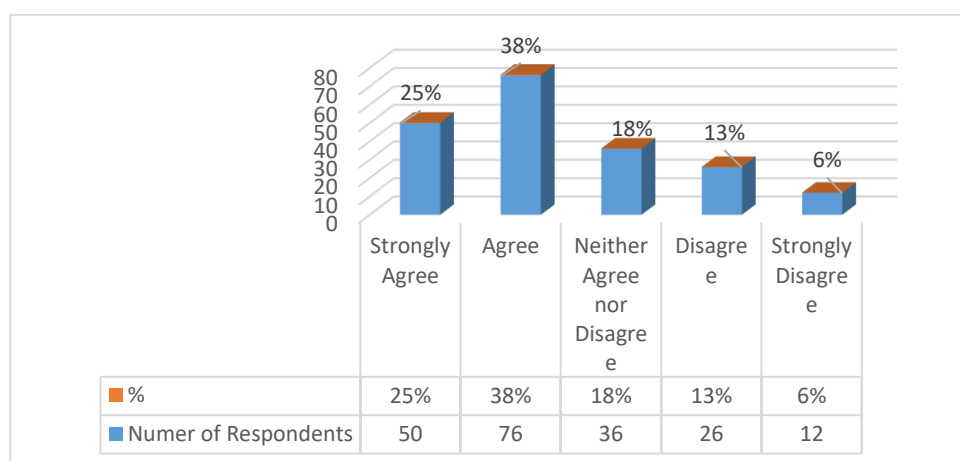


Figure 7 Do You Think That Western Attire Is Conflicting with Bangladeshi Culture (n=186)?

As depicted in Figure 7, 25% of the total respondents has “strongly agreed” and 38% “agreed” that western attire is conflicting with Bangladeshi culture. In contrast, 13% “disagreed” and 6% “strongly disagreed”. 18% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed in this regard. So, it seems that majority of the respondents (63%) have perceived western attires as conflicting with their culture.

The respondents were again asked whether the prevailing socio-cultural values or norms could be maintained through Western attires. Their response is presented in Figure 8.

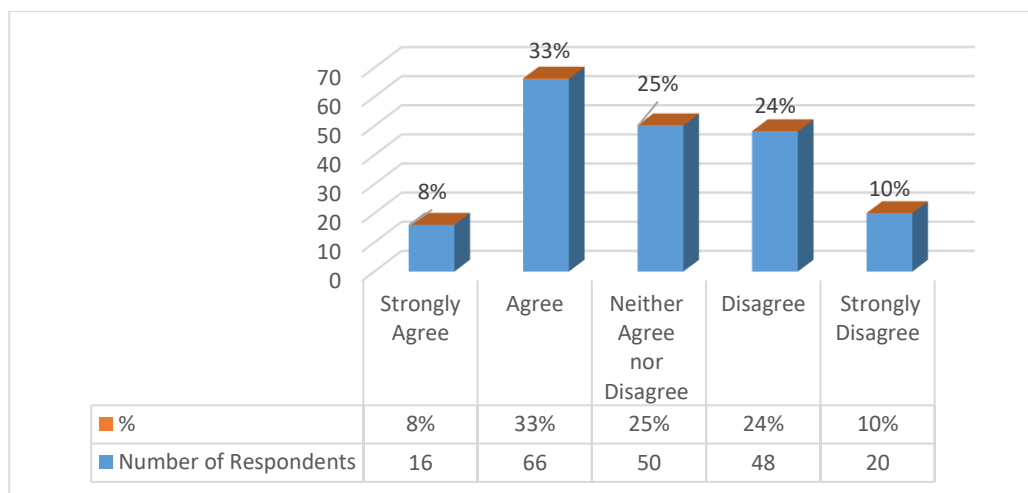


Figure 8 Do You Think That Our Socio-Cultural Values and Norms Regarding Clothing Can Be Maintained By Western Attires?

It is interesting that 8% of the respondents "strongly agreed" and 33% "agreed" that their socio-cultural values and norms regarding clothing could be maintained in Western attire. However, 24% of respondents "disagreed" and 10% "strongly disagreed" with their opinion. Interview data validated the importance of socio-cultural acceptance of attires. The respondents revealed that the women who wear revealing clothes can be badly perceived by others. One of the female informants elucidated:

"When a woman wears revealing clothes, she might receive abusive comments." (Interview 12).

The findings reiterate that one of the prime reasons for people to oppose western attires is because of the preservation of their own culture.

3.1.3 Economic Perspective

People's affordability shapes their choice of attire. It is a general misinterpretation that Western attires are costly. However, the women respondents during the survey and the Interview have revealed that the western attires are available in all price ranges. It is important to note that expensive brands are not affordable for everyone, considering their economic backgrounds. The financial perspective of Western attires is analyzed based on two indicators. The first one is the perception of young adults on people's affordability of Western attires. After that, western attire is perceived as a symbol of social status.

The perception of the respondents varied when they were asked how people's affordability is linked to their clothing preferences. Their perception is depicted in Figure 9.

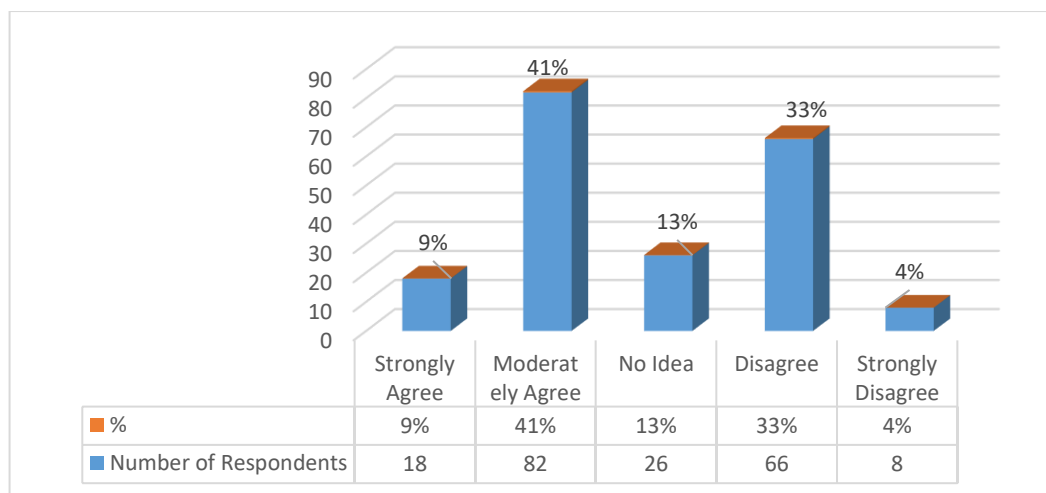


Figure 9 Do You Think That Wearing Western Attires Depends On Affordability?

It shows that 9% of the respondents "strongly agreed" and 41% "moderately agreed" that choosing Western attire depends on people's affordability. However, 33% "disagreed" and 4% "strongly disagreed" with the link between affordability and choosing Western dresses. It can be interpreted from the Figure that 50% of young adults agreed that choosing Western attire is related to people's affordability. Face-to-face interviews with the young adults provided similar findings. For instance, a woman used to wear Western attire from childhood. She mentioned that although Western attire could be cheaper, there are many well-recognized brands that are expensive. Thus, many women could not afford those dresses. But women from wealthy families can easily afford such clothes. A female respondent who uses Western clothes reported:

"Purchasing western attires is a matter of affordability." (Interview 11).

Dress is an indicator of social status, and those who wear Western dress are considered wealthy. The majority of the respondents had the same perception. One of the female respondents provided crucial insight into this. She mentioned:

"Western attire is perceived as a dress code of the rich. I have not seen any poor women in western dresses." (Interview 20).

The statement was further validated by a male respondent who stated:

"Western attire on a woman is a visible yet silent representation on her social status. It indicates the economic status of her family...and they are considered to be wealthy." (Interview 7).

3.1.4 Religious Perspective

Religion is an essential factor in influencing people's attitudes towards Western attires. Preferences to Western dresses vary across religions. Each religion has its own ideologies that the people of that particular religion generally follow and want to preserve. As a Muslim-majority country, Bangladeshi culture mainly reflects Islamic culture and ideologies. Therefore, Islamic culture restricts Western attires, as revealed by the Muslim respondents. Interestingly, people of other religions have also perceived Western attires as a violation of their religious identity. Figure 10 shows the distribution of the respondents based on religion.

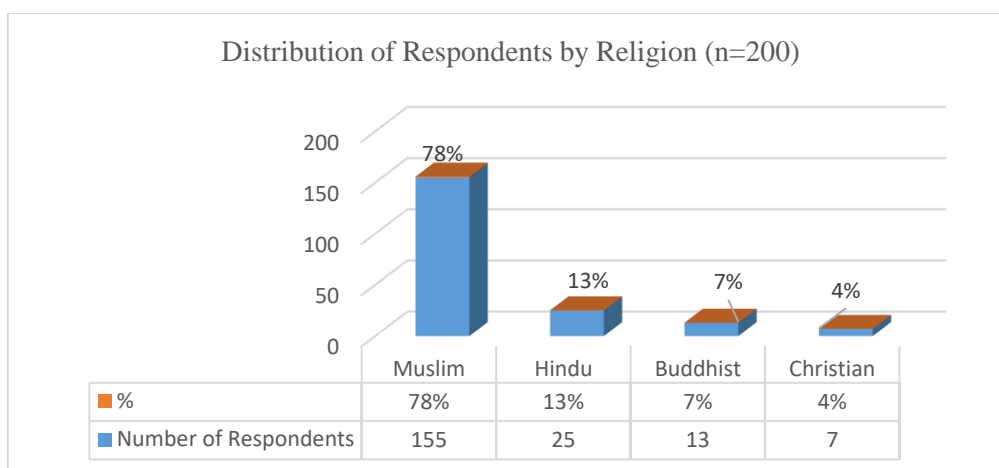


Figure 10 Distribution of Respondents by Religion (n=200)

As the Figure demonstrates, a significant 78% of the respondents were Muslims, followed by Hindu (13%), Buddhist (7%), and Christian (4%). The impact of religion on clothing preference is further triangulated by the religion vs Western dress preference matrix presented in Table 8.

Table 8 Western clothes preference vs religion group matrix (n=200)

Preference to Western Clothes/ Religion Group	Muslim		Hindu		Buddhist		Christian	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Yes	18	11.61	8	32	2	15.38	3	42.86
No	45	29.03	4	16	3	23.07	0	0.0
Yes, But Maintaining Decency	92	59.36	13	52	8	61.53	4	57.14
Total	155	100.0	25	100.0	13	100.0	7	100.0

It is interesting to observe that among the four major religions, the Muslims were less likely to support Western attires. Only 11.61% (18 out of 155) of the Muslim respondents supported Bangladeshi women to wear western attires. Buddhist respondents occupied the second lowest position in supporting Western attires, which is 15.38% of the total (Buddhist) respondents, followed by Hindu (32%) and Christian (42.86%). Again, Muslims had the highest percentage of respondents among the four religions opposing Western dress. More than 29% of the Muslim respondents did not support Bangladeshi women wearing Western dress, followed by Buddhists (23.07%) and Hindus (16%). However, only seven respondents were surveyed from the Christian religion, and none of them opposed women's Western outfits.

It can be inferred from the Matrix that Muslims are more conservative about their dress, followed by Buddhists and Hindus. Some of them preferred the burqa, niqab, etc. (Islamic dress), but they had no problem with saree, salwar, and even with Western attires that were not provocative (revealing). Moreover, 59.36% of the Muslim respondents emphasized maintaining decency while wearing a dress. Depicting a similar attitude, one of the Muslim respondents elucidated:

"Islam is a complete lifestyle. It has given guidelines in all aspects of life. It has also instructed to wear Islamic attires. As a Muslim, we have to follow our religious guidelines. Hence, I do not support western dress. I am okay if someone wears it. But they should maintain decency." (Interview 2).

The statement was further validated by a female respondent. She mentioned:

"I am a Muslim. I have to dress myself in a certain way. I have to choose the dresses that are not revealing, and that do not go against my religious obligations." (Interview 13).

People in Bangladesh are influenced by religious institutions and religious leaders, too. It was previously mentioned that Bangladesh has a family and community-oriented society. Thus, social, cultural, and religious institutions have significant influence over their attitude and behavior. The respondents reinforced the impact of religious institutions and religious leaders in shaping their dress preferences. For instance, one of the informants stated:

"We live in a society where we are taught to rely on the religious leaders as they guide us in many aspects. They have great impact on our social, cultural and religious life." (Interview 8).

Data from the survey have revealed similar findings. While asked whether the religious institutions and the religious leaders have any role regarding people's choice of attires, 67% of them replied in favour of such influence, and 15% denied such influence. Their perception is depicted in Figure 11.

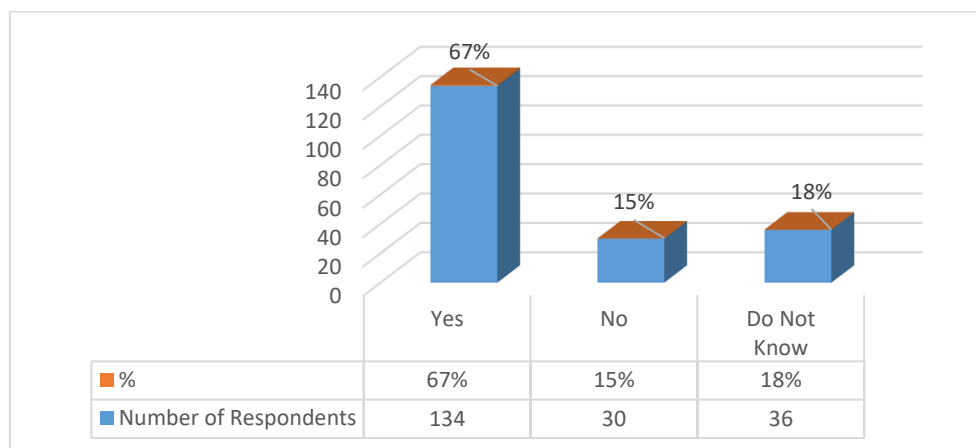


Figure 11 Influence of the religious institutions and religious leaders in choosing attires

A woman who wears a Western dress faces barriers. They are restricted by their families, religious beliefs, society, and so on. In the survey, the women who used to wear Western attire were asked whether or not they felt restricted in wearing Western clothing. Their response is portrayed in Figure 12.

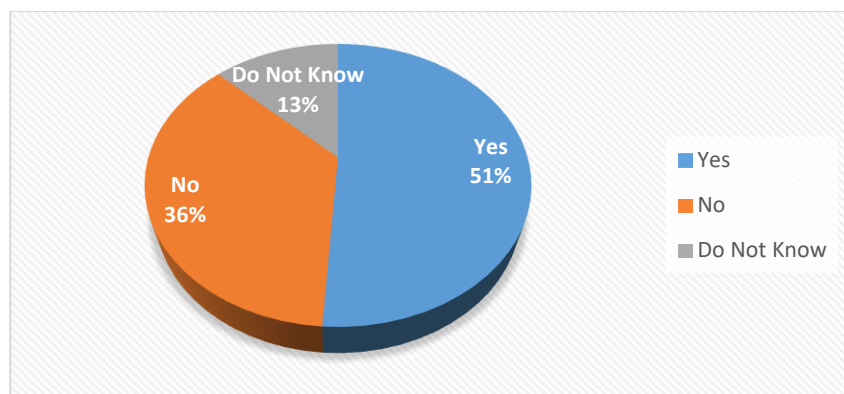


Figure 12 Restrictions in Wearing Western Attires (n=47)

A significant 51% of women informed that they felt restrictions. 36% of them felt no limits, and 13% of them had no idea about such restrictions. The respondents who faced restrictions have further identified the most dominant factors that have restricted them. The factors are highlighted in Table 9.

Table 9 Factors restricting women from wearing western attires

Restraining factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Family	3	6.38
Social values and norms	9	19.14
Religious beliefs	20	42.55
Cultural identity	9	19.14
Economic conditions	2	4.25
Others	4	8.51

The Table demonstrates that the most dominant cause of restrictions was religion, which was mentioned by 42.5% of respondents. Both cultural identity and social values and norms were rated as the second most dominant causes (19.14% each) of obstructing women from wearing Western attires. Family (6.38%) was the third most dominant factor, followed by economic conditions (4.25%). However, it is essential to note that these reasons are not isolated. They all are connected and jointly constitute the root causes that refrain women from wearing Western attires.

3.1.5 Modernization Perspective

Globalization has developed the concept of modernization and Westernization. It has exposed the people to the global fashion trends. Western attire is a catalyst of Western culture, and Western attire is considered a sign of modernity. Moreover, the use of information technology has widened people's access to global brands, blurring geographical boundaries. The respondents stated that globalization has a direct influence on their choice of attire. Those who wear Western attires have revealed that the glamour and comfort of Western attires have allured them to wear those dresses. All the respondents were asked whether women wear Western attire to be perceived as modern. The finding is graphically portrayed in Figure 13.

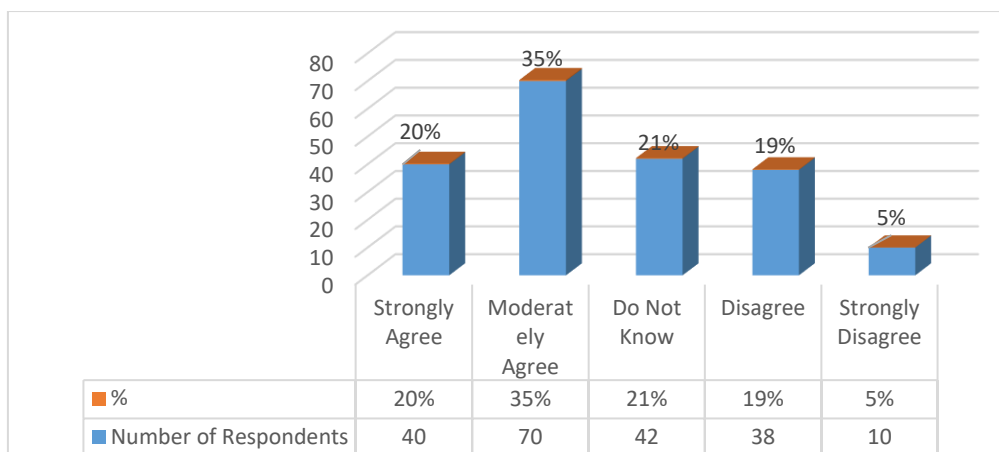


Figure 13 Do you think that Bangladeshi women wear Western attire to be perceived as modern and progressive?

Among the respondents, 20% "strongly agreed" and 35% "moderately agreed" that women wear Western attire to express modernity and progressiveness. 19% "disagreed" and 5% "strongly disagreed" with their idea. Interview data have revealed that women with Western attire are provocative, modern, and bold. A male respondent elucidated:

"Women who wear western dress are more modern, brave and progressive. It takes a lot of courage to wear western dress in this society." (Interview 6).

It was further validated by most women. One of them triangulated the finding by saying:

"Western dresses are attractive, and I am more confident and comfortable in those dresses." (Interview 11).

Both men and women are also influenced by Western celebrities, their dress preferences, and the media. Younger people follow celebrities from different countries and are influenced by their dress preferences. Data from the survey reinforced the influence of Western celebrities and global fashion trends on choosing Western attires when they inquired about such influence. Their response is displayed in Figure 14.

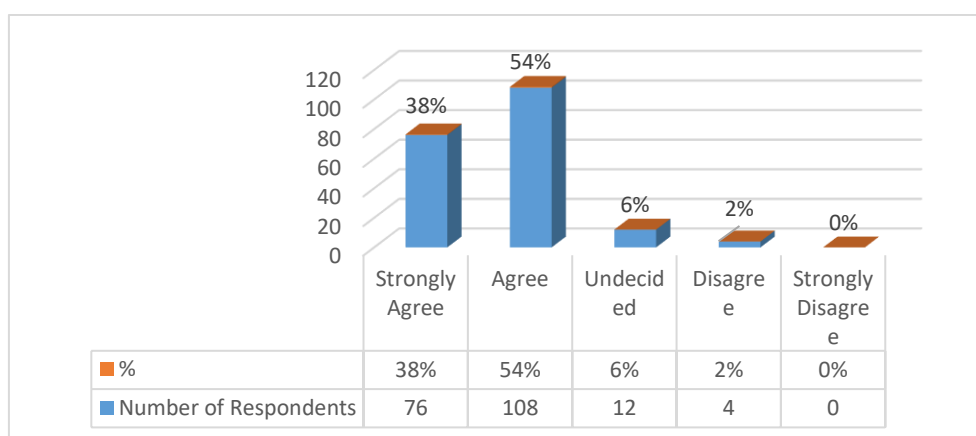


Figure 14 Influence of media, celebrities, and global fashion trends on People's Choice of Western Attires

38% of the total respondents have "strongly agreed," and 54% "moderately agreed" about the influence of the media, celebrities, and global fashion trends over their dress preferences. So, almost all the young adults were unanimous about the influence of Western celebrities,

media, and global fashion trends in shaping their clothing preferences. Indicating a similar experience, a female university student mentioned:

"I watch a lot of Korean movies and series. I watch Hollywood movies too. I like the way they dress. They are so much attractive." (Interview 20).

3.2. Discussion

The research has explored the attitude of the young adults of Dhaka city towards the Western attires of women in Bangladesh as well as the factors that shape their attitude. The findings have revealed that various social, cultural, religious, and economic factors, along with modernization, have considerable effects on young adults, and these factors influence their perception and attitude toward women's Western attire. Firstly, the paper has found that social factors such as gender, education, and profession have substantial impacts in shaping young adults' attitudes towards Western attires. Between men and women, the women in this study are more likely to support Western dress than men. Again, the educated youths and those working in the corporate sector are more liberal to women's western attires than those of others. Secondly, cultural factors, including the age of the respondents, marital status, and the prevailing cultural norms and values, influence people's choice of attire. For instance, younger people, who are mainly college and university students, are more open to women wearing Western outfits. Again, the majority of married people emphasize maintaining decency, whereas unmarried people are more supportive of provocative dresses. Besides, a significant number of the respondents revealed that their choice of attire is influenced by the prevailing Bangladeshi socio-cultural norms and values that mostly stress maintaining decency in clothing. Thirdly, half of the young adults in the study perceive women's Western attires as a symbol of high social status, linking it to people's affordability. Fourthly, religion is an essential catalyst in shaping people's dress preferences. Among the four major religions, Muslims are less likely to support Western dress, and they emphasize social, cultural, and religious norms as well as maintaining decency. The religious institutions and religious leaders influence the dress preferences as well. However, without a few exceptions, the people of either religion do not strictly advocate religious dress; instead, they focus on maintaining decency in clothing, even if that can be ensured by wearing Western attire. Lastly, both men and women are exposed to global fashion trends due to globalization and Westernization. Hence, they are easily influenced by Western and Eastern celebrities and their dress preferences, which promote Western clothes. Younger people are more likely to follow those celebrities, which consequently makes them the most influenced group to support Western attires compared to people of other age groups.

The findings of this paper are primarily in line with the previous studies conducted on female attires. For instance, Pasha-Zaidi (2015) has identified that immigrant Muslim women wear a veil as a religious symbol and to maintain their religious identity. The influence of religion in choosing attires also matches with the study of Khondkar (2021) and Zabeen et al. (2017). The findings also corroborate with Etuk et al. (2022) that people are influenced by the value system of their families. Moreover, Tajuddin's (2018) work has identified dress style as being influenced by culture, family and community values, environment, media, and fashion trends similar to this study. Western attires have been perceived as a tool of modernization by the respondents, which validates the study of Kavas (2015). The influence of culture on dress selection has also been revealed in this study, similar to La Fornara (2018). Furthermore, the paper also supports the influence of economic conditions identical to Otunaiya et al. (2020). Besides, the findings also comply with VR et al. (2019), who identified that educated youths are more liberal towards Western attires, and they also spoke against the indecency of Western

dresses. So, education has an influence on the choice of attire. Not only that, the influence of age in choosing attires was revealed by Arubayi (2010), who complies with the findings. Additionally, the profession influences a person's clothing (Aldrich, 2008; D. O. et al., 2024). The findings further corroborate Akter (2018), who found the role of family values, education, socialization, and circumstances (professions) in shaping people's attitudes toward female attires.

The research results also match with the framework of D. O. et al. (2024). However, the current research did not attempt to study the influence of environmental factors in choosing attires, such as locational differences (rural/urban), climatic conditions, etc. Moreover, this paper specifically studied the young adults of the capital city, Dhaka. Future research can be conducted to explore the attitude of the people towards Western attires from the perspectives of adolescents and older populations employing robust theoretical frameworks. Again, studies can be undertaken to explore the attitude of the people of rural and semi-urban areas as well towards women's western attires.

The findings indicate that the recent dress-related issues in Bangladesh are the result of the concern of some people deeply rooted in their social and cultural beliefs and religious identities. As a Muslim-dominated, family-oriented, and community-based country, provocative dresses are still not accepted among the larger population, which has been discussed in the findings section. Thus, the majority of the respondents have opposed Western attires and emphasized maintaining decency in clothing while going to public places to avoid unwanted circumstances that Bangladesh has witnessed in recent times over women's attires. Moreover, almost all the respondents have emphasized respecting others' choice of attire in this regard. So, on the one hand, it is essential to comply with the existing social, cultural, and religious norms and values while choosing attires, and on the other hand, those who wear such dresses should avoid revealing clothes that do not go with our society and culture to resolve disputes over attires.

Previous studies on women's attire were conducted in different countries, focusing on other perspectives. No research has been specifically conducted in Bangladesh on understanding young adults' attitudes towards the Western attires of women, let alone identifying the factors that shape their attitudes. This paper is the very first attempt in this regard. Thus, it significantly contributes to understanding young adults' attitudes towards the Western attires of women and the factors that influence their attitude from a scholarly perspective in the context of Bangladesh. Moreover, this paper, being the first one, shows that the traditional social, cultural, and religious factors intersect with modernization and explains the root causes of the recent dress-related disputes that stem from these factors. Consequently, the findings can help policymakers and community leaders adopt strategies to balance cultural protection with individual rights to resolve such conflicts in the future.

4. Conclusion

The paper has explored the attitude of young adults towards the Western attires of women in Bangladesh and explained how the various social, cultural, religious, and economic factors, along with modernization, influence their views and perceptions in this regard. The social factors, including gender, education, and profession; the cultural factors, such as age, marital status, and the prevailing cultural norms and values; the economic factors, such as people's affordability; the religious factors, including the prevailing religious practices, the influence of religious institutions and religious leaders, and finally the global fashion trends coupled with the influence of celebrities shape the dress preferences of the young adults of Dhaka city. These are the key factors that influence their attitude towards the Western attires of women.

Their choice of attire varies based on their age, gender, marital status, educational qualifications, religions, professions, and economic conditions. While women, unmarried, educated, wealthy, people working in the corporate sector, and the younger people of Dhaka are more likely to support Western attires, the Muslims, male, married, and the respondents of older age groups oppose provocative dresses. They emphasize social, cultural, and religious norms as well as maintaining decency. Even most of the young adults who support Western dresses put greater emphasis on decency, and their stance in this regard has stemmed from their concerns about the maintenance of the prevailing social, cultural, and religious practices. The recent disputes over women's attires in Bangladesh are the result of wearing provocative dresses that, according to the respondents, are against Bangladeshi culture. Changing people's mindset and respecting others' choices of attire, as well as maintaining decency in clothing and avoiding revealing dresses in public places, have been emphasized by the respondents in response to the recent disputes over women wearing Western outfits in Bangladesh that have speculated countrywide controversy.

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