

UNDERSTANDING CLOTHING LABELING ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

With boom in retailing, increased disposable income of the Indian consumer and higher interest in clothing the expenditure on apparels is increasing manifold. The awareness among retailers and consumers about labeling includes the different aspects like the origin of the country or manufacturers name, fiber content, fiber symbols and care instructions of the apparel. Knowledge of retailers is important as they convey it to the consumers while they are making selections and so resort to them for help. In turn the enlightened consumer will make the right choices by collecting information through labels. Hence the knowledge of salespersons and consumers about labeling is assessed. A total of 150 respondents, 90 consumers and 60 salesperson were administered a questionnaire to draw information pertaining to the different aspects of labeling. Results depict that consumers have better knowledge regarding content of the label compared to retailers and fiber content was least known among various aspects to the retailers as well as consumers.

KEYWORDS – *Labeling, Stamping, Care instructions, Consumers, Retailers*

Introduction

Consumerism has gained momentum in India and Multinationals like Wal- Mart, Zara, H& M and Mark and Spencer have made inroads in the country. More and more of buy and sell activities demands product rules and regulations so the buyer has a common understanding of the norms which the seller in the case of textiles the producer or the manufacturer proposes. These need to be mentioned on a label which is attached to the textile. The need was sensed by the label manufacturers and the result was Label summit in 2007 in New Delhi to cater the ever growing demand and the need for effective and efficient label designs.

The product legislation becomes important to those involved in selling and buying the products. This is evidenced through products being labelled following the norms set by the governing bodies. Thus the manufacturers should strive to place their products in the correct position to the consumers and others involved in the trade by labelling them and thus informing. Consumers need to be well versed with the label details and their interpretations.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) of USA in an article “Threading Your Way through the Labeling Requirements under the Textile and Wool Acts” has given the labeling norms for textile, wool and fur items where the fiber content, country of origin and the name of the manufacturer needs to be mentioned. Besides these Care labels for wearing apparel are required under another Federal Trade Commission rule. According to this rule the clothing items should have a permanent care label that provides written information about their regular care. The aim of this rule is to give the consumer accurate care information to extend the useful life.

There is no uniform labeling system, two prevalent systems in use are ASTM Care Labeling System and International Care Labeling System (GINITEX) The symbols used in Indian care labeling systems are same as of International care labeling system. The five basic symbols are washtub, triangle, iron, circle, circle inside a square for the process of washing, bleaching, drying and tumble drying process respectively (Chatterjee, 2006). Nadigar (2007) in a paper “Care

labeling of textile apparels” gives an account of various countries requirements of labels. Hementions the composition, origin and size are mandatory and care instructions are optional in India. Amidst this the well informed consumer can make a desirable choice appropriate to his requirements by intelligently matching his requirements to the information provided in the labels attached to the apparels. Awareness regarding the content of the label, its meaning and implications are important step towards not being cheated by making wrong purchases.

Thus it is imperative to execute a study which records the understanding of the labels by the consumers as well as by those engaged in selling the products. How far the labels become effective in guiding the consumers is also of relevance to study. The vigilant consumer depends on the information provided on the label attached to the apparel. Less aware consumers should seek from the salesperson for help. Therefore both retailers and consumers should be familiar to the labels and knowledgeable enough to interpret and make use of them. They serve as the best guide in making selections. Hence the study is planned to assess the understanding and knowledge of the salesperson and the consumers about labeling of clothing items.

Methodology

The study was planned to assess the knowledge of salespersons and consumers about labeling, 60 salesperson and 90 young consumers were randomly selected from Jaipur District. Jaipur is one of the highly planned cities so the access to the shops was easy. For this a list of all the local markets was prepared and the shops selling ready-mades and piece cloth were identified. Thirty salesperson from readymade garments shops and thirty sales people selling the piece goods were selected. The owner was the source of information in the case of shops selling the cloth and the most experienced salesperson from the readymade store was selected as the respondent. For consumers 90 female university students were selected since they cater to the clothing needs on their own and would be the prospective housekeepers to manage the clothing needs of the family, so their knowledge assessment would help in developing an insight in to the present day youth about knowledge related to labeling.

Results and discussion

Results depict the understanding and knowledge of retailers of ready-mades and piece goods regarding labeling. These are followed by results for consumers on the same issues.

Retailers Understanding about Labeling of Ready-mades

Literacy background is important in this context and it was found that nearly one third of the shop keepers were senior secondary and graduates and the two third of them were either secondary or upper primary pass. Readymade shopkeepers rest the popularity of ready-mades among customers on certain factors like (30%) variety in design and easy availability, (20%) time saving, (3%) economical and remaining believed that many customers (47%) consider all these factors.

To know how much is labeling of concern between salesman and customers, responses from the salespeople were collected on related activities and are shown in table-1. Majority (67%) of the salesman believes in conveying the information on labeling and 97% convey about goods which need to be dry-cleaned. They (90%) believe that customers must know about labeling. Roughly half of the (43%) salesman opined that customers see labels and 70% are inclined to see the labels because of the popular brands that they are searching for. This result is most likely similar to the findings of a study where the authors claim that females rests “brand” as the prime factor compared to others while judging the quality of the apparels. Thus this could be a reason for customers to see labels so as to find the manufacturer which is the mandatory requirement in a label (Huddleston, 1983)

Retailer’s knowledge about labeling

In this section salesmen knowledge regarding what labels means and how it is attached to the garment, its content and various sizing and care details are presented here in table - 2

(a) Meaning and way of attaching the label.

Salesperson selling readymade garments from last ten years were interrogated about the details they know regarding labeling. It was found that close to all (93%) know that garments are labeled, but only 57% know what label means. Around half of them 47% knows the way it is attached to a garment.

(b) Content of label

Only one salesman (3%) knew the complete content of the label. Manufacturers name and size were the two aspects which were known to 73% and 60% of salesman respectively. This was followed by aspects like care instructions (53%) and place of origin (43%). Fiber content was least known to the salesman as information provided on the label. Probably the customers were interested in the manufacturer of the apparel and they demanded size specifications so the salesman's were familiar with these two categories.

(c) Details of sizing, care labels and fiber symbols.

As regards to the sizing information and its symbols three fourth of the salesman (76.66%) were informed about the most frequently used S, M and L symbols. XL, XXL and XS were known to 67%, 50% and 47% of salespersons. Surprisingly out of the five symbols in care instructions about washing, drying, ironing, bleaching and dry-cleaning, 50% of the salesman knew only the symbol of ironing probably the symbol of iron is inevitably understandable. Next known symbol was of washing to 37% of the salesman, least known were the symbols of bleaching, drying and dry cleaning. Fiber composition was understood by 33% of the respondents. None of the respondents knew the meaning of all different fiber symbols. Pure wool and pure cotton symbols were known to around 43% of salesman. Almost all storekeepers (93%) knew that shirt and trousers were amongst the garment most labeled.

Cloth merchants knowledge about stamping

Equally important is the literacy level of those who are involved in selling the piece goods. Almost all of the cloth merchants were secondary pass and above, only 7% were upper primary pass. They were of the opinion that consumers buy piece goods because the fabric is of better quality and costs less (10%), color and design of the garment can be of choice (17%), better fitting (7%) and the rest (57%) felt that all these were the reasons for the consumers to buy cloth and then make apparels. The knowledge of the cloth merchants about stamping is very important as these are the people on whom the buyers depend. Table -3 shows that though all the salesman know that the cloth rolls are stamped but only two third of them knows that stamping entails the description of the cloth, length and width, trade mark and the fiber content. Eighty percent knows the meaning of the trade mark, 73% about fiber information and only 60% knows the correct place of stamping.

Customers' knowledge about labeling

All the customers were post graduate students involved in purchase of their apparels. As regards to their purchase patterns thirty percent bought garments from branded company shops, 13% bought cloth piece, 6% bought garments from ordinary shop and the rest were sorting all options. The main reason for purchasing 'readymade' s is within less time one can buy ready to wear clothes, next due to choice of color and design and also because of right size. Knowledge regarding various aspects is presented below in table-4

(a) Meaning and way of attaching label

Most of the customers (84%) knew that apparels are labeled and 78% and 63% knew the way it is attached to the garment and its meaning respectively

(b) Content of the label

Out of the entire content of the label significant number of the customers (88%) knew about care instructions, this makes it clear that the young girls are noticing and making use of them. Next to it maximum customers knew about name of the manufacturer (82%), followed by place of origin (71%) and size (69%). The least known aspect in the content was the fiber type and its percentage (34%). This shows that though the customers are all pursuing their higher studies yet they are ignorant about the aspect which governs the performance and serviceability of the apparel. Sadly only 14% of the entire group had the complete knowledge of all the aspects covered in labeling. Origin is an important attribute as the results of this study reveals this is supported by a study conducted where consumers participated in simulated shopping experiment to rank garments on the relative importance of price, origin, care, quality and style. Origin was the attribute ranked first among others by the consumers. Removal of original labels and the substitution of experimental labels may, however, have encouraged consumers to evaluate garments on origin in the absence of brand and store identification (Dickerson, 1987)

(c) Details of sizing, care labels and fiber symbols

Almost fifty percent of the young consumers knew about garments available in different sizes with slightly higher percentage for S, M and L (59%) sizes as compared to XL, XXL and XS (47% - 50%) sizes. Ninety percent of young consumers know what care label means, among

them 57% know different aspects covered under care labels, but only 2% are familiar with all the care label symbols. Individually the most known symbol is of iron (56%), followed by washing (36%) and the least understood symbol is of bleaching, drying and dry cleaning.

Interrogating further on the fiber composition 68% revealed knowing about it, though the same number could not recollect that it is an essential aspect to be mentioned on the label. Further two third of them (63%) could identify the pure wool symbol, followed by cotton (39%) and least familiar symbols were of silk, wool and cotton blend (13-17%). Most (80-97%) of the respondents knew that shirts, trousers, skirts and tops are labeled but only around one third were knowing socks, handkerchiefs and ties are also labeled on their packaging.

Comparison of Retailers and Customers Knowledge

When the knowledge of the customers is compared with that of retailers it is seen that almost on all parameters the customers scores are high (Table-5). Only 3% retailers have complete knowledge of the content as against 14% of the customers. The retailer's knowledge on other aspects such as fiber type and its percentage, origin of the country and care instructions was around 27%, 43% and 53% as against customers scoring 34%, 71% and 88%. A striking observation is that origin of the country and care instructions are more known to customers as compared to retailers as wide gap is seen in the percentages. Manufacturer's name in the content was known to 73% of retailers as against 82% of the customers.

Conclusion

Assessment of knowledge of retailers about labeling of Ready-mades depicts an eye opening scenario where around half of them know what labeling means and just 3% know the entire content of the label. Customers rely on retailers for information and unawareness of this kind where even sizing details are not known completely shows that understanding of labeling and complying with the labeling laws and regulations is very poor. Even assessment of cloth merchants knowledge about stamping shows only two third of the salesman knows the entire details of stamping. Hence it is essential that owners/manufacturers should pay attention in helping the retailers/salesman to build their capacity as salespersons. Training programs, workshops should be organized where retailers and cloth merchants should be informed about labeling laws, regulatory bodies and other labeling details

Customers represent that group, which is involved in the higher education, surprisingly the fiber content being an important aspect on which the durability and serviceability of the garment depends is known to only one third of the sample. Many of them did not know the fiber symbols also. In the present consumer era where labeling seems to be so important if we want that the consumer to be aware, we should plan systematically to disseminate this kind of information. This can be given through planned curriculum early in schools and other learning centers.

References

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Table-1 Activities related to labeling among salesman and customers N-30

Activities	Frequency (Yes)	Percentage
1.Salesman convey the information about labeling to customers	20	66.77
2.Salesman convey the information about dry-cleaning to customers	29	96.67
3. Do customers see labels?	13	43.33
4. Salesman believes that customer must have knowledge about labels	23	90
5.Customers more inclined towards famous brands	21	70

Table-2 Knowledge of retailers about labeling

N=30

	Knowledge Dimensions	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Knows whether apparels are labeled?	28	93.33
2.	Know about Meaning of label	12	56.66
3.	Knows the way of attaching label	14	46.66
4.	Knows the entire content on label	1	3.33
	Manufacturer's name	22	73.33
	Size	18	60
	Care instructions	16	53.33
	Fiber content and its percentage	8	26.67
	Place of origin	13	43.33
5.	Details of all sizes and their symbols	14	46.66
	Knows about S,M,L, symbols	23	76.66
	Knows about XL symbols	20	66.67
	Knows about XXL symbols	15	50.00
	Knows about XS symbols	14	46.67
6.	Recognizes and knows about meaning of all care symbols	2	6.66
	Knows the symbol of iron	15	50
	Knows the symbol of washing	11	36.67
	Knows the symbol of bleaching, drying and dry-cleaning	2-5	7-17
7.	Fiber composition	10	33.33
8.	Knows about meaning of all fiber symbols	0	00
	Pure wool and cotton	13	43.33
	Silk	4	13.33
	Wool blend and cotton blend	0	00
9.	Garments labeled (Shirt and Trousers)	28	93.33
	Garments labeled (Skirt and Tops)	14-16	53.33

Table-3 Knowledge of cloth merchants about stamping

N = 30

S.No	Knowledge Dimensions	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Knows whether fabric rolls are stamped	30	100
2.	Meaning of Stamping	20	66.67
3.	Place where cloth is stamped	18	60
4	Meaning of trade mark	24	80
5	Fiber composition	22	73.33

Table- 4 Knowledge of Customers regarding Labeling

N= 90

S.No	Knowledge Dimensions	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Knows whether apparels are labeled?	76	84.44
2.	Know about meaning of label	57	63.33
3.	Way of attaching label	70	77.77
4.	Knows the entire content on label	13	14.44
	Manufacturer's name	74	82.22
	Size	62	68.89
	Care instructions	79	87.78
	Fiber content and its percentage	31	34.44
	Place of origin	64	71.11
5.	Details of all sizes and their symbols	51	56.67
	Knows about S,M,L, symbols	53	58.89
	Knows about XL symbols	50	55.56
	Knows about XXL symbols	47	52.22
	Knows about XS symbols	49	54.44
6	Meaning of care labeling	81	90
	Aspects of care labeling	51	56.67
	Recognizes and knows about meaning of all care	2	2.2

	symbols		
	Knows the symbol of iron	50	55.56
	Knows the symbol of washing	32	35.56
	Knows the symbol of bleaching, drying and dry-cleaning	6-8	6-9
7	Fiber type and its percentage	61	67.78
8	Knows about fiber symbols		
	Pure wool	57	63.33
	Cotton	35	38.89
	Silk, wool and cotton blend	12-15	13-17
9	Knows shirts, trousers, tops and skirts are labeled	72-87	80-97
	Knows ties, socks and handkerchiefs are labeled	24-31	27-34

Table-5 Retailers and Customers Knowledge regarding Content of Label N=120

S.No	Content of label	Retailers (30)	Customers (90)
1	Name of manufacturer	22(73.33)	74(82.22)
2.	Size	18(60)	62(68.89)
3	Origin of country	13(43.33)	64(71.11)
4.	Care instructions	16(53.33)	79(87.78)
5.	Fiber type and percentage	8(26.67)	31(34.44)
6	All of the above	1(3.33)	13(14.44)