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THE ROLE OF COMFORT, FIT, AND FABRIC IN SHAPING PANTY CHOICES OF GHANAIAAN YOUNG WOMEN

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to identify the physical factors influencing young women choice of panties in Ghana. The study purposively selected 217 final year students in the University of Cape Coast for the study. The data was collected from the respondents using a Likert scale questionnaire, and it was descriptively analysed using mean, standard deviation, and percentages. The study's findings showed that young women primarily considered comfortability, fit, garment type, type of fabric, style, colour and body type as the most significant physical factor when selecting panties and patterns and design, finishing, brand and fashion were the least significant physical factors. It was also discovered that Ghanaian young women frequently worn comfort style of pantie. Also, in terms of comfortability and the level of pleasure, comfort, highwaist, boyshorts were preferred. In terms of fibre content, cotton, cotton/polyester and cotton/lycra were the most comfortable fabric type for panties. The study therefore recommended that lingerie industry should consider comfortability, cotton fabric type, comfort pantie style and outer garment type during production and most especially when the products are for the Ghanaian market.

Keywords: physical factors, underwear, panties, Ghanaian young women

Introduction

For centuries, panties have been a component of the clothing market. It serves as the foundation for all clothing and aids in maintaining the cleanliness of outer garments by absorbing liquids (oils and sweat) from the skin. The use of panties is significantly associated with female personalities (Giongo, Linden & Bernardes, 2017). Nowadays, every woman wants to feel safe, stylish, seductive, and comfortable in their clothing and that includes panties. Panties are varied and prolific, whether it is concealed or shown, discreet or provocative (Barbier & Boucher, 2003). According to Datta & Agrawal (2018) panties relates to our body, comfort, sense of self and sex appeal. Panties are small and sometimes under things but are categories of apparel that gets us down to the bare bones of ourselves (Giongo et al., 2017). Panties are worn next to the skin beneath a person's clothing, just like any other undergarment. It serves as the foundation for all of our clothing and keeps our outerwear in good condition. In cold climates, it also aids in maintaining warmth (Datta & Agrawal, 2018).

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Panties are thought to have existed in antiquity. According to historians, the ancient Greeks, Romans, and Egyptians all wore panties (Tsaousi, 2011). However, it was not until the later 19th century that panties started to look good (Loh, Hendricks, Hsiao & Shi, 2019). Panties were typically unmentionable and bulky in 19th century society (Tsaousi, 2011). Up till the 20th century, the three main reasons women used for panty choice were for maintaining modesty, enhancing and perfecting shape, and for hygiene reasons (Banasam, 2019). Over the course of the 20th century, panties got smaller and more form-fitting (Barbier & Boucher, 2003). Producers of lingerie (lightweight undergarments) started adorning panties in the 1960s, and the concept of panties having a sensual appeal slowly grew.

It seems logical to assume that panties have some impact on how the body functions given how close they are to the body and the significance they play in women's lives (Craig & Gray, 2020). It provides women with an identity and spreads the concept of femininity throughout time and space. However, little research has been done on the factors influencing panties choice in Ghana. This article identified the physical characteristics that affect a young Ghanaian woman's choice of panties.

Literature Review

The physical appearance of panties appears to be what draws customers' attention first. All of the distinguishable elements, including texture, colour, and style, are included in the overall appearance. When making decisions, people will take appearance into consideration. According to studies, physical attributes such as fabric type, colour, style, and comfort are some of the factors that influence underwear choices (Banasam, 2019; Ghunney, 2013; Jrajssati & Douven, 2018; Sujatha et al., 2016). The literature review discusses some of the physical factors that influence the choice of undergarments.

Fabric Type/ Fibre Type

A fibre is a very fine or very small structure that resembles a hair and has properties that allow it to be made into a fabric (Ghunney, 2013). The performance of the pantie depends on the durability or quality of the fibre because different fibre types have peculiar characteristics that affect the product being made. Panties can be made out of a variety of materials. Being so close to the skin, panties require a fabric that is comfortable. In general, there are two types of fibres: natural and synthetic. Cotton, jute, sisal, hemp, asbestos, silk, linen, cashmere, mohair, and wool are examples of natural fibres. Man-made fibres include polyester (terylene), polyamide, rayon, olefin, viscose, and acrylic (Ghosh et al., 2014). When various fibres are blended or mixed, they combine their strengths and reduce their weaknesses, giving them desirable properties for use in the production of underwear. Cotton and polyester are combined to create fabrics that are cool to wear, wrinkle resistant, and simple to clean. While polyester produces wrinkle resistance, cotton produces cooling qualities. According to other researchers, the choice of a fibre is influenced by factors like climate, occupation, fashion trends, comfort, and durability (Sujatha et al., 2016). Forster (2014) reaffirmed that the weather has an impact on how comfortable fabrics are to wear. For instance, cotton is more comfortable in a warm climate, whereas wool feels better when worn in a cold climate. According to Datta and Agrawai (2018), when customers shop for clothing, they also consider the fabric type. The choice of panties made by young women in Ghana may depend on the fabric type.

Colour

People express their emotions and moods through colour and it is the most important aspect of fashion. A customer is typically drawn to an item by its colour. However, when it comes to panties, it is sometimes dicey. According to Sujatha et al. (2016), panties are mostly hidden beneath outerwear unless they are worn for other

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reasons, like going to the beach. Despite panties being concealed, it is significant to the wearer because colours have symbolic meanings that convey messages. According to Wallace (2019) the colour of pantie depends not only on personal preference but also on the outerwear being worn. The chosen colour of the pantie must blend with the outerwear or should not be visible through the outerwear. There are however occasions where it is fashionable for panties to be seen through outer garments. In this case, the colour of the pantie and that of the outer garment should resonate. Furthermore, Jrajssati and Douven (2018) asserted that people use colours to express their moods and emotional feelings and even for identification. Colours make panties serve different purposes. Colours like red and brownish-red are stimulating colours and have a more erotic appeal (HerWorld, 2010). This is evident in pornographic videos and images of sensual women (Schultz, 2004). According to Bottom Drawer (2014), a festival was organized named “New Year’s Eve” where people wore different colours of underwear. The idea behind it is that the colour of underwear worn at the beginning of the year will be an indication of what will happen within the year. The red colour means passion and erotic appeal; white signifies joy and happiness; blue conveys good health; pink is for luck in love; and yellow signifies wealth and prosperity; black is a symbol of bad luck (The Bottom Drawer, 2014). On the contrary, other studies stated different meanings for colours. In their view, red signifies life, courage and self-confidence; green is balance, love and self-control; yellow means knowledge, intellect and wisdom; blue is for good health and positiveness; violet is beauty, creativity and inspiration (Kumar, 2017). The meaning of colours is society bound. Societies may have different meanings for different colours. The choice of colour affects individuals emotionally, physically, and mentally. These characteristics and meaning of colour make it an important physical factor when considering the selection of panties.

Style

Different styles of panties are worn by women for different reasons and occasions. Sujatha et al., (2016) argued that people purchase panties based on panty styles. For instance, Datta and Agrawai (2018) stated that some panties styles are worn to stimulate one’s feeling for sex whiles other studies have shown that panties are worn for hygienic reasons. In other meanings some styles minimize the spread of infections and provides support in regulating the body shape and others easily spread infections. Thongs and tanga are noted to speed up the spread of infections because of the thin strings connected from the waist to the crotch (Ryan, 2017). Data and Agrawai (2018) revealed that underwear mostly depends on the style of the outer garment, social situations and weather conditions, comfort and hygiene. Datta and Agrawai (2018) also found out that boyshorts pantie provides more comfort, support and does not restrict freedom. The common style of panties includes Bikini, comfort, string, highwaist, tanga, thong and boyshorts (Giongo et al., 2017).

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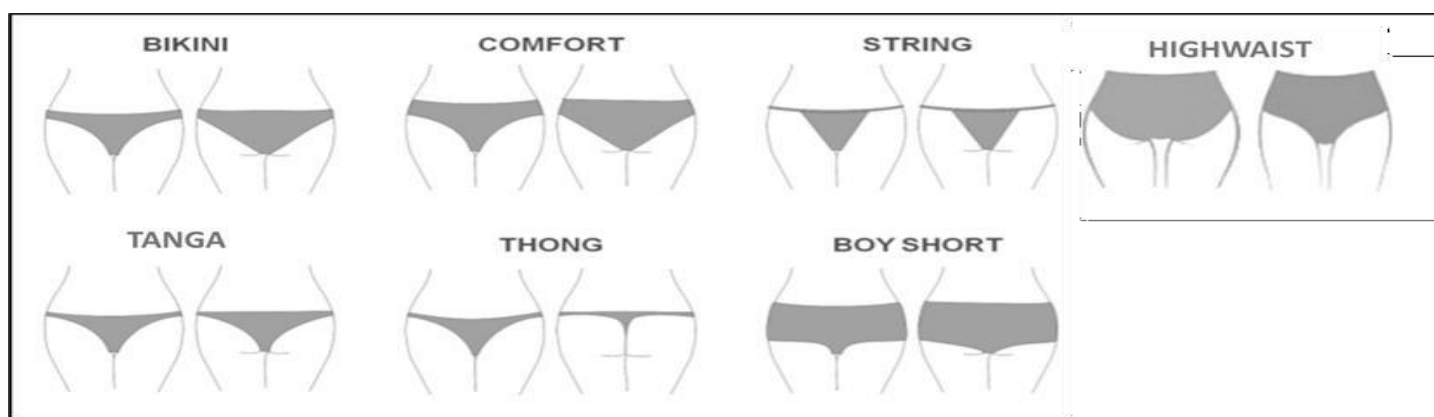


Figure 1: Types of panties according to Giongo et al., 2017

Comfortability

Comfortability is key when considering the choice of panties. No woman will like to exhibit signs like pulling up their panties, inserting their fingers into their buttocks cleavages to pull out panties that are riding up, fidgeting when panties do not fit well. Panties have direct contact with the skin. Hence, it should fit properly and a poor fit can cause discomfort. A woman pushing her hands into her buttocks and pulling her pantie is a disgusting scene, this happens when she is not comfortable in what she is wearing. Alves, Martins and Martins (2013) asserted that wearing the wrong size (too tight or over-size) of panties will not give the maximum comfort needed by the wearer and tight panties can leave blood marks on the skin. Sujatha et al., (2016) stated that wearing fitted panties does not only provide relief but there are health benefits. Datta and Agrawai (2018), outlined small, medium, large and extra-large as standard measurements that conform to certain underwear waist sizes, all in the quest for comfort. Datta and Agrawai therefore suggested that the choice and selection of an undergarment is largely dependent on the size or fit.

Patterns and design

The decoration and patterns of women's panties were entirely restricted by social and moral factors and no philosophers would study and criticize women's pantie (Tsaousi, 2011). Young youth in today's generation would like to affably display all sorts of ideas and elements such as landscapes, positive patterns, immortals, myths, opera characters, and lively characters in their panties. The patterns used for decoration have auspicious meanings, for example, pomegranate means many descendants, peony flower, which is endowed with stunning beauty and love, is the symbol of affluence (Stone, 2019). All these patterns express the desire and pursuit of a lovely and happy lifestyle. The creative art of the patterns in panties was not only expressed by the independent patterns or symbols, but also by the originality of the pattern layout. These patterns enriched the humanistic atmosphere of panties and increase beauty, decoration, and add more fun to them as well.

Methodology

The study population constituted level 400 regular student on the main campus of University of Cape Coast in Ghana. A total of 217 respondents were conveniently sampled for the study. A questionnaire was used to collect the data from the respondents. The data were then entered and processed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (v.25) software and the results attained were displayed in tables. Also, the processed data were analysed using descriptive statistical tools consisting of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations.

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Results and Findings

Table 1: Physical factors that influence Ghanaian young women choices of panties

Factors	Mean	SD
Comfortability Fit	1.41	0.664
	1.58	0.820
Garment type	1.6	0.807
Type of fabric	1.62	0.886
Style	1.66	0.831
Colours	1.76	0.845
Body shape	1.88	0.52
Patterns and design	2.0	0.945
Finishing	2.16	1.008
Brand	2.32	1.187
Fashion	2.47	1.131

*Ratings=Strongly Agree-1, Agree-2, Undecided-3, Disagree-4. Strongly Disagree-5

Table 1 shows the physical factors that influenced the respondent's choice of panties. The respondents considered all the physical factors as relevant with the mean below 2.5, however, given priority or scale of preference, comfortability, fit, garment type, type of fabric, style, colour and body type were the most considered physical factor when selecting panties and patterns and design, finishing, brand and fashion were the least important physical factor.

Table 2: The frequency, level of comfort and pleasure derived from a particular style of panties

Panties	Frequency of wearing a particular style of pantie		The level of comfort of the style of panties		The style of panties and the derived pleasure	
Panties	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Comfort	3.80	1.190	4.11	1.068	3.99	1.048
Boyshorts	3.05	1.323	3.72	1.335	3.71	1.117
Highwaist	3.04	1.346	3.55	1.387	3.71	1.186
String	2.13	1.191	3.04	1.329	3.21	1.197
Bikini	2.12	1.267	2.71	1.312	2.82	1.293
Tanga	2.06	1.186	2.58	1.309	2.66	1.206
Thong	1.87	1.454	2.25	1.314	2.2	1.121

Ratings: *Frequency (Never = 1, rarely=2, Neutral=3, Often=4, Very often= 5). *Comfort (very uncomfortable= 1, uncomfortable=2, indifferent=3, comfortable=4, very comfortable = 5). *Pleasure (very unpleasant= 1, unpleasant=2, indifferent=3, pleasant=4, very pleasant = 5).

Table 2 shows the frequency of wearing the style of panties. The table showed that comfort style of pantie was the most worn style of pantie with the mean 3.8. Also, comfort, Boyshorts and Highwaist were the most comfortable and pleasant style of pantie with the means above 3.5.

Table 3: The comfortability of different Fabrics

Fabric type	Mean	SD
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Cotton	4.67	0.983
Cotton/polyester	3.79	1.160
Cotton/lycra	3.54	1.170
Silk	3.08	1.158
Wool	3.02	1.193
Spandex/Nylon	2.78	1.096
Lycra	2.59	1.044
Nylon	2.57	1.036
Polyester	2.50	1.030
Rayon	2.47	0.999

Rating: Level of Comfort (very uncomfortable= 1, uncomfortable=2, indifferent=3, comfortable=4, very comfortable = 5).

The results as shown in table 3 showed cotton, cotton/polyester and cotton/lycra were the most Comfortable fabric type with a mean above 3.5.

Table 4: Fabric construction method of the panties in terms of comfort

Fabric construction	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lacing	4.55	1.172
Netting	4.53	1.104
Knitting	4.25	1.071
Woven	3.24	1.024

Level of Comfort (very uncomfortable= 1, uncomfortable=2, indifferent=3, comfortable=4, very comfortable =5).

Table 4 revealed that all the fabric construction were considered comfortable with the exception of woven.

Table 5: Brands of panties in relation to comfort

Brands	Mean	Std. Deviation
Calvin Klein	3.6	1.141
Tommy John	3.23	0.52
Knix	3.23	0.962
ThirdLove	3.20	2.257
Chantelle	3.16	1.056
Wacoal	3.15	0.953
Natori	3.11	0.957
Skims	3.11	0.974
Everlane	2.98	0.956
Naja	2.96	1.041
Athlete	2.95	1.006
Yummie	2.92	0.904

Level of Comfort (very uncomfortable= 1, uncomfortable=2, indifferent=3, comfortable=4, very comfortable=5).

Table 5 showed that Calvin Klein was highly preferred brand with a mean of 3.6.

Table 6: Type of Outer Garment and the panty style that is most preferred with it

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	Skinny/Stretchy outfit %	Jean's trouser %	Gathered/flared dress %	Pencil/close-fitting dress %	Smock %	Slit and Kaba %	Sport wear %
COMFORT 	11.6	35.1	26.7	7.6	8.4	7.6	3.0
BOYSHORT 	16.2	28.1	28.1	8.0	6.3	5.3	8.0
G. high waist (Retro) 	13.8	23.8	26.4	14.7	7.6	4.9	8.8
BIKINI 	26.0	27.7	18.2	9.3	4.4	8.0	6.4
STRING 	22.9	31.3	19.6	15.1	6.2	3.1	1.8
TANGA 	20.9	33.8	16.4	19.1	6.2	2.7	0.9
THONG 	23.2	28.1	19.7	20.1	6.2	1.8	0.9

Table 6 showed that with stretchy garments the panty style used most is bikini. Comfort panty style is mostly worn under jeans trousers. Boyshorts was noted to be worn more under gathered and flared dresses (full garment). Thong was frequently used under pencil or fitted dress. Again, comfort panty style appears to be worn more under smocks. Slit and Kaba were used with bikinis regularly. In regards to the use of sport wears, highwaist was the most used.

Discussion

Physical factors

Physical factors that were rated by Ghanaian young women included comfortability, fit, type of fabric, style, health, colours, body shape or figure type, patterns and design, finishing, brand, and fashion. It was found that all the factors were considered by the respondents to influence their choice of panties, however, comfortability was highly considered by the young women when selecting panties. Tsousi and Brewis (2013) posited that people select underwear that will create the sensation of comfortability in their skin both physically and psychologically. Apart from comfortability and fit, the type of garment and type of fabric were also seen to be of good determinant of selection of panties. According to Brakus, Schmitt & Zarantonello (2009), underwear gives great support to

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outerwear therefore wearing inappropriate underwear can affect the outer garment. Also, fabric type was considered because some fabrics used for panties weaken and fade due to their contact with body fluid (Barbier & Boucher, 2003; Crisnaro, 2014). Other fabrics also provide heat naturally and do not allow free circulation of air (Crisnaro, 2014). Fabric not being absorbent can be irritating to the skin. This could be why respondents highly consider cotton and the blend of cotton with other fabrics. The least concerning factors were fashion and branding. According to Tsaousi (2011), fashion and branding have become one important factor for the young adult in their outer wearing. However, the study revealed that it was not of major concern to respondents when it comes to panties. This could be that it is worn and hidden under the garment and people may not necessarily see it.

Frequency, level of comfort and pleasure derived from a particular style of panties

People wear what they like most, hence how frequent the respondents wear a certain style of panties would provide evidence of their choice of style. It was revealed in Table 2 that the comfort style of the pantie was worn frequently. According to Datta and Agrawal (2018) comfort style of the pantie performs almost all the fundamental functions and uses of panties. On the other hand, string, bikini, tanga and thong were rarely worn. According to Sujatha et al., (2016) such a styles of panties (string, bikini, tanga and thong) are worn on special occasions. Data and Agrawal (2018) found out that pantie styles that were mainly worn were those that have designs that cover most of the buttock's area and also have a wide area to cover the vaginal. The current study also found out that comfort, boy shorts and high waist were selected as comfortable and pleasant for Ghanaian young women.

Fabric type and comfort

The study found that cotton, cotton/lycra and cotton/polyester fabric type were rated the most comfortable. According to Ghunney (2013), panties produced from natural fibers provides more comfort than synthetic fibres. Dogbey, Kpobee, Dedume and Osei (2015) revealed that cotton was the preferred fabric in clothing because it allows air circulation around the body and helps absorb body moisture. According to Dogbey, et al., (2015) cotton fabrics are soft, washable and durable and was noted as the best choice for apparel. Similarly, other fabrics that were blended with cotton, (cotton/polyester and lycra/cotton) were also preferred. Fabric blends enhance the performance of the fibers and offer desirable properties (Ghosh et al., 2014). Blends of fibres combat the weaknesses of the fibers and strengthen their good characteristics (Riungu, 2009).

Fabric construction and comfort

The study revealed that lacing, netting and knitting were noted to be comfortable. McLoughlin and Paul (2018) described fabric construction as the process by which yarns or fibres are composed into a fabric that can be used for production. The construction of the fabric affects the texture, appearance and durability of fabric (Dogbey et al., 2015). It is therefore an ideal factor to consider when selecting panties. It plays a significant role in determining comfort, wearing qualities of the fabric and many more qualities of an item. For example, loosely woven fabrics are prone to sagging contrary to the close-woven ones that stand firm when worn (McLoughlin & Paul, 2018). The construction of lacing and netting leaves spaces or holes in the fabric, this permits the free flow of air around the skin and thus prevent heat which makes people feel comfortable (Dogbey et al., 2015). This might account for the comfort ability of using laced, netted and knitted panties. Strictly woven fabrics on the other hand have very little elasticity, therefore, do not stretch (restrictive) to conform to the shape of the buttock.

Brands of panties in terms of comfort

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The study revealed that Calvin Klein was the dominant brand when it comes to comfort. There was a great gap between the Calvin Klein brand and the other brands. The majority of the respondents were comfortable with the Calvin Klein brand and the assumption is that people normally stick to the first brand and shifting to the use of other brands becomes like a trial to them (Singh, 2014). According to Caru and Cova (2007), high switching from a brand is less when consumers have positive experiences and are satisfied with the product. Apart from Calvin Klein, the respondents were indifferent to the other brands when it comes to comfort. This support what was revealed in Table 1 where the branding was not a priority when it comes to physical factors?

Outer garment and the most preferred corresponding pantie style

The study found out that comfort, boy shorts and high waist were preferred with jean's trousers and flared apparel whiles string, tanga and thong were preferred under skinny, stretchy, pencil and close-fitted outfits. According to Schofield and LaBat (2005) panties with great amount of fabric like comfort, boy shorts and high waist have their outlines seen when worn with skinny, stretched and fitted outfits and it is then become part of scrutiny and monitoring by others. Warren and Brewis (2004) asserted that a person is termed indecent when the pantie is shown through outerwear and this might be the reason why most respondents selected the panties that do not fully cover the buttocks for skinny trousers or stretchy outfits.

Conclusion

Panties are not seen; however, their fits can affect the wearer to the extent that sometimes observers can sense it. The study revealed that comfort ability, fit, type of fabric, style, health, colors, body shape or figure type were the most preferred when considering the physical appearances of panties. The study also found that panties that covers the buttocks such as comfort, high waist and boy shorts were highly considered comfortable and pleasant. Therefore, lingerie industry should consider comfort ability, cotton fabric type, comfort pantie style and outer garment type during production.

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