



Today's Consumers: Past and Present

Previous issues of the *Textile Consumer* have focused attention on the importance of understanding the idiosyncrasies of specific generations of consumers, such as Generation Y, Generation X, and the Baby Boomers. Yet consumer research also reveals that attitudes and behaviors change as people age or move into different life stages. Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™, now in its ninth year of tracking consumers' attitudes and behavior, offers an opportunity to compare consumers' responses past and present, to learn whether consumers are changing how they shop for apparel as they mature and age.

In this issue, we compare survey responses from 1994 with those from 2002 on several consumer issues. Comparing these survey results over time helps to answer a critical question about today's textile consumers: are they approaching clothes shopping in the same way they did eight years ago?

Consumers Enjoy Clothes Shopping Less

According to the Lifestyle Monitor, infatuation with clothes shopping is a life-stage trait that consumers tend to grow out of—not into. Overall, consumer attitudes toward apparel shopping have changed slightly, with 46% liking or loving to shop in 2002, compared with 47% in 1994. However, the changes within age categories (cohorts) over the eight-year period have been less subtle.

In 1994, 60% of consumers aged 16 to 19 said they loved or enjoyed shopping for clothes, but by 2002, only 47% of this cohort of consumers, now aged 24 to 27, said they loved or enjoyed apparel shopping. This downward trend was seen in six of the seven age groups profiled. As consumers age, their enjoyment of apparel shopping clearly declines.

Infatuation with clothes shopping is a life-stage trait that consumers tend to grow out of—not into.

Percent of Consumers Who Enjoy or Love Shopping for Clothes, by Cohort

Then (1994)		Now (2002)	
Age	%	Age	%
16–19	60	24–27	47*
20–24	56	28–32	45*
25–30	47	33–38	49
31–36	47	39–44	35*
37–42	40	45–50	33*
43–48	36	51–56	33
49–54	35	57–62	33

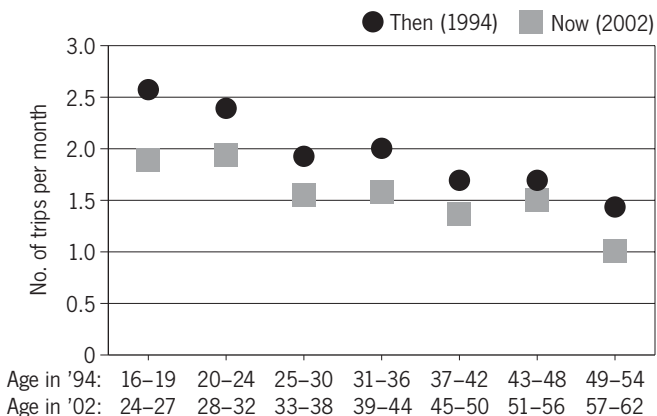
*Significant change.

Source: Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™.

One key measure of how much consumers like apparel shopping is the time they spend in stores. Consumers today are spending less time shopping for clothes than they did in 1994. Eight years ago, they shopped an average of 1.9 times per month, compared with 1.4 times today, for a loss of six shopping trips annually. In the all-important youth market, the decline was more dramatic. The largest fall-off in shopping time was for consumers aged 16 to 19 in 1994 and 24 to 27 today. Among these consumers, shopping trips declined by 0.7 times per month, for a loss of about eight trips per year.

As enjoyment and time spent shopping for apparel have declined within consumer cohorts, so has the percentage of consumers who prefer to shop for clothing. When consumers were asked to choose among shopping for apparel, furniture, shoes, electronics, or jewelry, their preference for apparel shopping showed the largest decline with age. The magnitude of this decline among consumers aged 16 to 36 in 1994 and 24 to 44 in 2002 is staggering. But of more concern is the fact that declines were not evident in non-apparel shopping preferences.

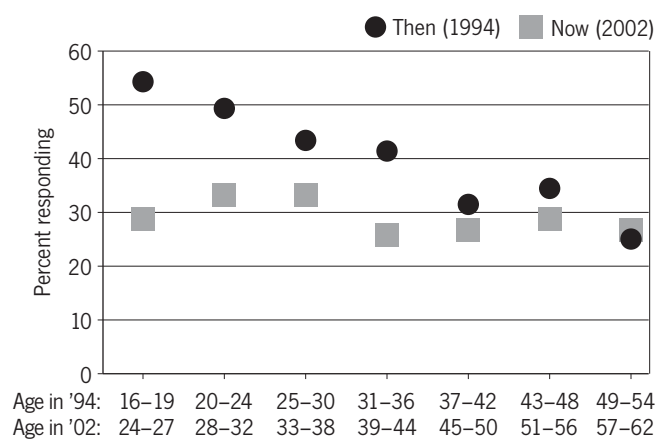
Number of Times per Month Consumers Shop for Apparel, by Cohort



Source: Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™.

Consumers aged 16 to 19 today exhibit the same enthusiasm for clothes shopping as did their counterparts in 1994—suggesting that a preference for apparel shopping peaks early and declines as consumers grow older. Interestingly, this decline occurs against a pattern of increasing disposable income. In general, as consumers gain in spending power over their lifetimes, they move away from clothes shopping as a spending option.

Percent of Consumers Who Prefer To Shop for Apparel, by Cohort



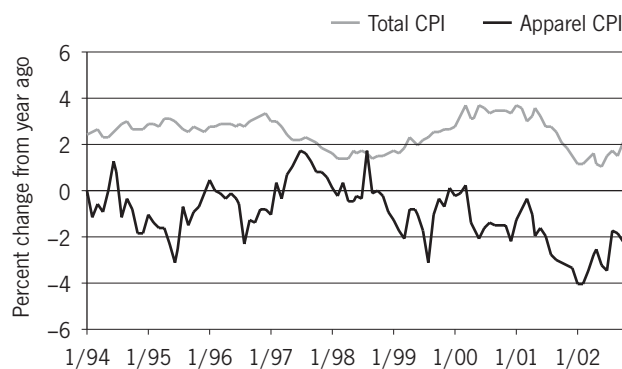
Source: Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™.

Changing Attitudes Put Pressure on Prices

Since 1994, deflationary pressures have affected the prices of many goods, but few have shown a more pronounced deflationary trend than apparel prices. In only 21 of the last 105 months has the consumer

price index for apparel been positive, indicating a rise in clothing prices. In most months, prices have fallen, leading to falling prices for suppliers throughout the textile pipeline. Several factors have contributed to the downward pressure on apparel prices: the move by consumers toward purchasing apparel at lower-priced venues, such as mass merchants like Wal-Mart, Kmart, and Target; the influx of less-expensive imported apparel; and increased markdowns at retail.

Deflationary Pressure on Prices



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.

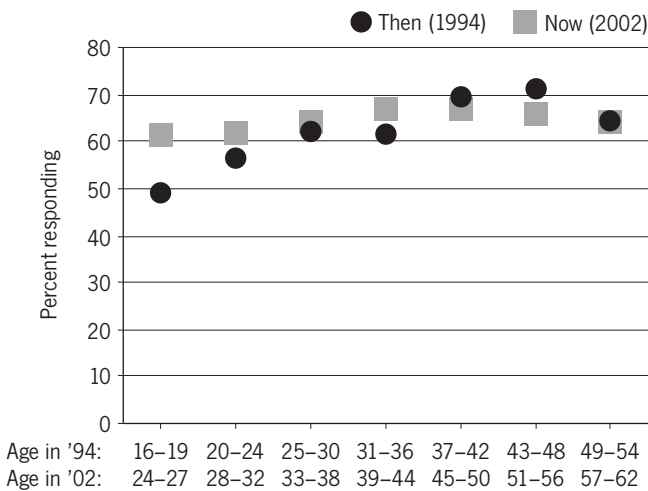
Possibly the most critical factor for the decline in prices is the increase in sales at discounted prices: over 62% of apparel purchased in 2002 was on sale, according to data from STS Market Research. This trend is consistent with consumers' attitudes about waiting until apparel items are marked down before buying. According to the Lifestyle Monitor, the percentage of consumers who buy the latest styles on sale at the end of the season has increased significantly since 1994 among the cohorts aged 16 to 24 then and 24 to 32 now, while remaining relatively stable among older consumers. These results suggest that by the age of 25, consumers tend to establish a pattern of either paying full price or buying on sale, a pattern that they will follow for the rest of their lives. This pattern indicates that through numerous fashion cycles, apparel retailers generally have not succeeded in enticing consumers to buy at full price.

Consumers Demand More Information

Consumers' desire for information about the apparel they buy has only increased over the past eight years. Although clothes shopping is not as important



Percent of Consumers Who Buy the Latest Styles on Sale at the End of the Season, by Cohort



Source: Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™.

to consumers in 2002 as it was in 1994, today's shoppers want to be better informed. This quest for information tends to manifest itself as consumers age.

Information Important To Know Before Buying Clothing (Percent Responding)

	1994	2002	Change
Price	68	80	12*
Fabric content	47	57	10*
Laundry instructions	34	48	14*
Where it was made	45	41	-4
Brand name	29	35	6*
Environmentally friendly	27	35	8*

*Significant change.

Source: Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™.

Since 1994, the Lifestyle Monitor has recorded significant increases in the percentages of consumers wanting to know a garment's price, fabric content, laundry instructions, and brand name, and whether it is environmentally friendly. Eighty percent of today's consumers say it is critical to know an item's price before purchasing it (compared with 68% in 1994). However, the importance of brand name has increased

By age 25, consumers have established a pattern of paying full price or buying on sale.

little over the eight-year period, and the percentage of consumers wanting to know where an item was made or manufactured has declined slightly, suggesting acceptance of imported apparel.

The need-to-know mentality is less prevalent among younger than older consumers for information such as laundry instructions, fabric content, and environmental friendliness. As consumers age and gain experience in taking care of their clothing, their specific interest in both laundry instructions and fiber content increases significantly, as the two items are closely related. Knowing whether an item is environmentally friendly also has become more important, especially among consumers over the age of 39—suggesting an increase in altruism and concern about their legacy to future generations.

Information Important To Know, by Cohort

(Percentage-Point Change, 1994 to 2002)

Age then	16-19	20-24	25-30	31-36	37-42	43-48	49-54
Age now	24-27	28-32	33-38	39-44	45-50	51-56	57-62
Price	6.2	14.0	12.8	13.8	10.3	8.9	19.2
Fabric content	14.3	12.0	13.4	17.7	13.0	17.6	16.4
Laundry instr.	17.0	14.4	15.8	17.1	18.6	25.1	18.7
Where made	-1.0	2.5	-2.3	4.3	1.2	8.2	2.1
Brand name	2.5	-3.3	1.1	3.9	1.4	8.3	4.0
Envir. friendly	-1.2	3.3	7.1	10.8	10.7	15.8	13.8

Source: Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™.

Consumers' use of apparel idea sources has grown significantly since 1994. From 1994 to 2002, use of each source shown in the table on page 4 increased among almost every cohort of consumers, suggesting that shoppers want more ideas from almost anywhere they can get them. The most notable increases were in percentages of consumers looking inward for apparel ideas—that is, seeking ideas from what they already own or from family members. These changes, noted among all consumer cohorts, are consistent with a trend toward "cocooning," identified by futurist Faith Popcorn as the desire to surround oneself with what is familiar and safe.

Sources of Clothing Ideas, by Cohort

(Percent Responding in 1994 and Percentage-Point Change, 1994 to 2002)

Age then (1994)	16-19		20-24		25-30		31-36		37-42		43-48		49-54	
Age now (2002)	24-27		28-32		33-38		39-44		45-50		51-56		57-62	
People you see regularly	48.1	-2.1	42.8	2.9	42.9	1.9	38.7	1.8	33.4	-2.6	34.6	2.1	29.4	-3.5
Fashion magazines	28.4	4.3	26.9	7.9	24.8	-0.1	20.5	8.5	22.3	2.1	17.2	9.4	17.5	1.9
Catalogs	25.2	9.1	30.2	10.5	33.7	2.4	34.4	10.1	35.3	4.6	31.5	13.0	30.7	5.3
Commercials and ads	28.6	9.9	32.7	4.4	29.8	4.4	27.6	8.4	28.1	3.0	23.7	9.9	22.4	2.8
Celebrities	18.6	2.8	14.8	3.4	9.5	5.2	8.6	2.7	8.1	-0.8	6.5	0.1	4.0	1.8
Salespeople in stores	18.4	1.7	18.1	0.1	17.8	1.5	18.7	-3.2	18.3	-1.5	19.8	1.3	16.5	-1.4
Store displays	45.9	12.7	51.2	11.4	52.4	13.4	55.4	2.8	52.3	9.0	54.2	1.3	50.5	2.0
Family members	24.1	13.4	27.6	11.3	26.9	12.8	28.5	6.0	24.9	7.4	25.5	6.1	22.1	8.8
What you already own	57.0	17.8	62.2	18.6	58.6	17.8	60.2	19.4	63.4	16.5	63.0	12.8	58.7	13.2

Source: Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™.

For clothing retailers and advertisers, it's just as important to know where consumers are *not* getting their clothing ideas. Celebrities and store personnel remain at the bottom of the list of idea generators, and their impact is essentially minimal as consumers age. Based on this analysis, marketing strategies that rely on celebrities should be undertaken with care. Furthermore, it appears that retailers could make more effective use of their in-store personnel, by training them in customer-friendly marketing approaches.

Past, Present, and Future

As consumers age, an evolution occurs in which they become more focused on family and convenience, and this shift tends to come at the expense of apparel shopping. Consumers' enjoyment of clothes shopping declines, they spend less time and money on acquiring apparel, and they look home-ward for clothing ideas. Understanding of this evolutionary process must form the basis of strategies for maintaining consumers throughout *their* life cycle—not the product's life cycle.

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Textile Consumer™ is published quarterly by Cotton Incorporated as a service to the textile and retailing industries.

