

Trend setters or fashion frumps

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Findings of an international GfK survey on the fashion awareness of Europeans and Americans

Nuremberg/Frankfurt am Main, June 29, 2007 – Parisians are usually dressed in the latest fashions. One third of Europeans and Americans are fashion-conscious, with shoes a very important fashion accessories. These are the findings of a survey on "Fashion" carried out by GfK Custom Research for the Wall Street Journal Europe in spring this year covering a total of 19 countries in Europe and the USA.

Which town in Europe has the most fashionably dressed people? As might have been expected, Paris was named by a third of all Europeans and Americans and more than half the French as the city with the greatest fashion sense. Even just under one in two Poles, Czechs and Hungarians were convinced of Parisian chic, although only one in four Italians named Paris, with one in three opting instead for Italy's own fashion capital, Milan, which is ranked in second place by West Europeans. However, the Russians, Swedes, Poles and Turks believe that people living in the biggest towns in their own countries are more fashionably dressed than those in Italy's center of designer fashion.

Ignoring the trend or setting it

Another question delved into personal attitudes towards fashion trends and how important people considered being dressed according to the latest trends. Around one third of the respondents said that in principle, they were interested in wearing the latest fashions, and 8% even ranked this as very important. In an international comparison, the Romanians and Russians emerge as particularly fashion-conscious and here, half believe that being fashionably dressed is important. Conversely, the French, Danes, Swedes and Americans seem not to care as much about the latest trends in fashion, with just one in four here giving clothes particular significance. In Germany, only 30% of respondents said that they believed a fashionable outfit was important.

In every country, women tended to go more for the latest trends. On average, 40% of women and 30% of men said they took note of current trends. However, at 15 percentage points, the difference between fashion-conscious men and women is most pronounced in Sweden, Austria, Russia and Germany.

Interest in the latest trends also decreases in proportion with advancing age. While in the 15 to 29 year old age group around half felt that being fashionably dressed was important, the figure in the 30 to 49 year olds drops to just 36% and even 23% in the 50+ age group.

Fashionable shoes are a must

Not all clothes and accessories in the wardrobe need to be bang up to date. But at 35%, most respondents placed the highest value on trendy shoes and the figure for women was as high as 40%. Ranked second at 25% are jeans, although Americans, Dutch, Danes and Belgians are even more aware of the latest designs when it comes to their jeans than they are for their shoes. Shirts and blouses are in third place, followed by suits, pants (excluding jeans), coats, dresses and sweaters/sweatshirts. Bags come a surprising eighth place and women have a markedly higher interest in the design of bags than men, with 14% of them saying they felt it important to have a trendy bag and just one percent of men agreeing. This gives bags 5th ranking among women, after shoes, jeans, shirts and dresses.

Inspired by the media

The majority of those surveyed (28%) said that their fashion inspiration came from TV. However, almost as many regarded billboards, friends and family as sources of information on the latest trends. One in five obtained information from fashion magazines or from the general public out and about in the streets or in clubs. One in ten specifically mention stars and wannabe celebrities as their inspiration for the latest fashions. Only 5% find their inspiration on the Internet.

The survey

Respondents in 19 countries were surveyed for the "Fashion" survey as to which European town or city had the most fashionably dressed inhabitants, how important fashion trends were to them, which item of clothing or accessory absolutely had to be the latest fashion and from where they drew their fashion inspiration. For the current survey, carried out by GfK Custom Research for The Wall Street Journal Europe and with the financial assistance of GfK-Nürnberg e.V., a total of 19,793 people aged 15+ in 19 countries were surveyed over March and May 2007.

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