

Fashion Consumption among Women Aged 40 to 60: Behavior and Style Perspectives

Helena Kahrбек Bachmann¹, Márcia Regina Bronnemann², Rafael José Bona³

Universidade Regional de Blumenau, Brazil

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to analyze the factors that influence clothing consumption among aging women, aged between 40 and 60 years, as well as to understand the profile of B1-class women in this age group within the fashion market, based on the reality of Blumenau, Santa Catarina, Brazil. The research also seeks to relate the aging process to elements that impact the clothing preferences and needs of these consumers, in addition to examining the role of media in shaping and influencing their choices. This is a qualitative, descriptive study. Thirteen interviews were conducted with B1-class women, aged 40 to 60, residing in Blumenau. The main results indicate that bodily and psychological changes associated with aging and menopause directly affect their clothing choices, with a preference for garments that, in addition to offering comfort and aesthetics, help conceal certain body areas. Although they value fashion as a tool for self-esteem and social inclusion, most report difficulties in finding products that fully meet their needs and desires. The participants also express dissatisfaction with the underrepresentation of their age group in the media, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and realistic approach in the fashion market.

Keywords: fashion; consumption; clothing; middle age; aging; media.

INTRODUCTION

Clothing consumption is influenced by factors such as identity, lifestyle, age, social class, and media. According to Cobra (2015), fashion is shaped by behavior, offering consumers a means of social acceptance. Mazon (2023) notes that consumer behavior is dynamic, marked by constant shifts in consumption patterns.

In the case of women aged 40 to 60, aging imposes physical and social changes that directly affect their clothing preferences and needs (Das Neves & Paschoarelli, 2016). These choices are also impacted by factors such as social class and media representations (Cobra, 2015). This study focuses on B1-class women in Brazil (ABEP, 2022), who have high purchasing power but remain underrepresented in the fashion market. According to Fittipaldi, Marques, and Silva (2021), this group values fashion as a tool for well-being and social inclusion. As Morace (2018) emphasizes, this is a relevant and growing consumer segment. In Blumenau, Santa Catarina, Brazil, they represent 17% of the local population, according to the 2022 Census (IBGE, 2022).

The relevance of the research topic is reinforced by the economic importance of the textile industry, which accounts for 2.4% of Brazil's industrial GDP and employs around 1.5 million people (ABIT, 2020). Blumenau, a traditional textile hub, is home to more than 360,000 inhabitants and is known for its German heritage and consolidated fashion sector (IBGE, 2022).

By investigating the consumption behavior of middle-aged women, this study aims to address gaps related to a growing segment in the global market (Prodanov & Reinke, 2016; Morace, 2018). The methodological approach is qualitative and descriptive, using semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection technique. The research analyzes fashion consumption among women aged 40 to 60, considering the aging process, the role of media, and the specific characteristics of the B1 class in Blumenau.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the factors that influence clothing consumption among aging women aged 40 to 60. The specific objectives are to understand the profile of B1-class women aged 40 to 60 in

the fashion market, based on the context of Blumenau; to relate the aging process to the elements that impact these women's clothing preferences and needs; and to examine the role of media in shaping and influencing their clothing choices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fashion is a social phenomenon that communicates individual and collective identities through clothing, reflecting behaviors, values, and cultural contexts (Silva & Façanha Neto, 2023; Bueno & Souza, 2024). More than covering the body, garments express ideologies, status, and worldviews. According to Araújo and Barbosa (2016), fashion carries meanings such as gender, power, and style, and is also influenced by economic, psychological, and anthropological factors.

Understanding consumer behavior in fashion requires observing motivations, cultural contexts, and expectations. For Solomon (2016), consumption is a process that goes beyond purchasing, involving the fulfillment of desires and emotional satisfaction. Kotler and Armstrong (2007) emphasize that by understanding how, why, and what consumers buy, companies can align products with their demands. Cobra (2015) argues that fashion both influences and is influenced by society, with clothing choices linked to self-esteem and social acceptance.

Purchase decisions are guided by utilitarian and hedonic factors (Solomon, 2016). The former involve functionality, quality, and price, the latter, pleasure, self-confidence, and fantasy. These needs, when shaped by culture and personality, are transformed into wants and, with purchasing power, into demands (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007).

Culture, subculture, social class, age, and lifestyle significantly influence consumption (Galvão, 2023; Araújo, Rocha & Pakes, 2023). Age groups, for instance, develop distinct behaviors: younger consumers prioritize trends, while older ones seek durability and value (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007).

In the case of women aged 40 to 60, Morace (2018) coined the term *singular women* to describe this group, whose consumption behavior is marked by a balance between aesthetics, functionality, and representation. These are socially and professionally active women who value comfort, authenticity, and connection with brands that reflect their experiences.

Furthermore, Barletta (2003) and Kotler, Kartajaya and Setiawan (2017) indicate that the female purchasing process is more detailed and susceptible to external influences such as media and social networks. Research by Pinheiro (2023) shows that women view these networks as essential channels for brand interaction. Santos et al. (2024) highlight the growing influence of bloggers.

Social class, family structure, life stage, and lifestyle also shape preferences (Kotler & Armstrong, 2007). Middle-aged women often experience career peaks and greater financial autonomy, redirecting spending toward themselves (Borges et al., 2020; Das Neves & Paschoarelli, 2016).

Physiological changes caused by the climacteric and menopause affect body image. According to Fittipaldi, Marques and Silva (2021), these transformations directly influence the choice of clothing that provides comfort and enhances specific body areas. Araújo and Barbosa (2016) show that these consumers prefer loosefitting cuts, neutral colors, and light fabrics, aligning aesthetics with well-being. Such demands reinforce the importance of the textile industry considering the impacts of aging.

Aging also brings emotional and social changes. Borges et al. (2020) point out that Brazilian society values youth, which places aesthetic pressure on women. Guimarães (2020) highlights the double bias of age and gender that affects female self-esteem. Nevertheless, studies suggest a positive shift in this context, with women identifying as "ageless," active, confident, and unconcerned with age-related labels (Pinheiro & Monarcha, 2019; Prodanov & Reinke, 2016).

In this context, fashion becomes a tool for reclaiming self-esteem, expressing identity, and achieving social inclusion. Araújo and Barbosa (2016) report that women aged 45 to 64 attribute to fashion the power to make them feel updated, good about themselves, and socially included. In a study with 145 women, Das Neves and

Paschoarelli (2016) found that this group is more willing to pay for clothing that combines beauty and comfort, demanding greater attention from companies to their needs.

The consumption behavior of women aged 40 to 60 is shaped by biopsychosocial and symbolic factors. This is a demanding audience, with growing purchasing power, who value comfort, representation, and authenticity. Meeting their needs requires sensitivity to the physical, emotional, and cultural transformations that characterize this stage of life.

Procedures and methods

The methodology of a scientific study corresponds to the set of methods and techniques employed to conduct research, ensuring the validity and reliability of the results. It encompasses everything from the definition of the research problem, as described in the introduction of this study, to data collection and analysis. It is essential for ensuring objectivity and reproducibility, allowing other researchers to verify and validate the presented findings (Bloise, 2020). According to Marconi and Lakatos (2022), the methodology helps define the scope of the study, the methods to be used, the necessary resources, and the location of application.

This research combined bibliographic and qualitative approaches. According to Minayo (2007), qualitative research aims to understand social phenomena in depth, analyzing values, actions, and attitudes of individuals, groups, or organizations within their contexts, based on the participants' perspectives, without being limited to quantification. Bibliographic research, as described by Gil (2022), consists of analyzing secondary sources to provide theoretical support for the study. It is a selective, analytical, and interpretive reading of the topic, from a historical and conceptual perspective (Nascimento, 2016). Integrating these approaches contributes to a broader and more consistent analysis, while also helping to identify gaps in the literature (Guerra et al., 2024).

The research is also characterized as descriptive. According to Gil (2022), this type of study seeks to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon, or to establish relationships between variables, using techniques such as questionnaires and interviews. Nascimento (2016) points out that descriptive research is suitable for gathering opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and preferences, as well as for investigating correlations between variables, such as leisure and income or education and consumption style.

The technique adopted for data collection was the semi-structured interview. Guerra et al. (2024, p. 9) define the interview as an "organized process of questioning, guided by a script that directs the researcher's work". Semi-structured interviews are flexible and allow for adaptation depending on the responses, making them suitable for gaining a deeper understanding of a particular subject. In this format, both interviewee and interviewer have the freedom to interact and explore various aspects of the topic.

As a support tool for the interviews, a questionnaire was developed with three sections and 26 questions: "Profile" (6 questions), "Body information" (7 questions), and "Fashion, clothing, and media" (12 questions). All questions were open-ended to maintain the semi-structured character of the interviews. Answers that differed from the listed options and additional comments were recorded in the "other" option of the form and in the audio recordings, with participants' consent.

The questionnaire was based on the studies by Das Neves and Paschoarelli (2016) and Araújo and Barbosa (2016), as they align with the topic, age range, and objectives of the research. Das Neves and Paschoarelli (2016) investigated mature consumers' perceptions of clothing products and changes in their consumption habits due to aging. Araújo and Barbosa (2016), in turn, analyzed the influence of fashion information on the behavior of middle-aged women. Some questions were adapted, and others created to expand the fluidity and depth of the interviews. Before implementation, a pilot test was conducted with a 52-year-old woman whose profile matched the target group, to assess the adequacy of the instrument to the research objectives.

The sample group was defined by the following criteria: being a woman, aged between 40 and 60, residing in Blumenau, and belonging to the B1 social class, according to the classification by the Brazilian Association of Research Companies (ABEP, 2022), which indicates an average income of just over seven minimum wages in Brazil for this category. Eighteen women were invited to participate, but after the eleventh interview, response saturation was observed. For this reason, data collection was concluded with thirteen interviews, a number consistent with the scope of a qualitative study, which prioritizes depth over quantity (Minayo, 2007).

Most interviews were conducted in person between October 14 and 22, 2024, with an average duration of 20 minutes. Four participants requested virtual interviews due to scheduling conflicts. All participants signed an informed consent form, which ensured the confidentiality of the information and explained the nature of the research, including potential discomfort related to sensitive questions.

Data analysis was based on the content analysis methodology proposed by Bardin (2010). This method involves systematic coding and categorization of data based on recording units, which may include themes, words, or phrases. In the case of responses recorded in Google Forms, part of the coding was performed automatically by the platform, facilitating the organization and interpretation of the data.

Applied research presentation

The data obtained through interviews with women aged 40 to 60, residents of the city of Blumenau and belonging to the B1 social class, reveal a diversity of profiles within the sample group. Participants' ages range from 48 to 60, with 50 being the most frequent age, representing just over a third of the interviewees. The majority are married, accounting for more than half of the sample, while the others are divided between single and divorced. Only one of the thirteen women interviewed does not have children; among the twelve mothers, seven still live with their children.

Education levels are also high: most participants have completed higher education or hold a postgraduate degree, indicating a professionally qualified profile. This condition is also reflected in the income allocated to clothing purchases. Most reported spending between 10% and 20% of their monthly income on clothing, which represents a considerable portion for the B1 class and demonstrates the weight of this segment in the fashion consumer market.

In terms of lifestyle, the group is active and multifaceted. Most engage in regular physical activity and perform household tasks. Many work full-time outside the home, while others work remotely or follow flexible schedules. Two participants are both working and studying. Regarding leisure, a significant portion have free time only on weekends, while others manage to enjoy leisure time during the week thanks to flexible schedules or being entrepreneurs.

In the second part of the questionnaire, which focuses on the body, data indicate that nearly half of the participants are going through menopause, some have already experienced it, and a few have not yet begun the process. All women who are in or have gone through menopause reported symptoms, with the most frequent being mood swings, hot flashes, fatigue, and pain. Weight gain was mentioned by one participant.

Feelings about menopause and aging show a sense of ambivalence: most express concern about changes in appearance and quality of life, while at the same time acknowledging these processes as natural. Many women report significant bodily changes, such as increased measurements in areas like the abdomen, arms, thighs, and neck, which are often associated with insecurity. Abdominal flaccidity is the most cited concern, followed by flaccidity in the thighs, arms, and neck, as well as skin marks and wrinkles. Most participants reported feeling insecure about these changes.

Cosmetic procedures are common among the interviewees: only two said they had not undergone any. The most frequently mentioned procedures were botulinum toxin, breast implants, liposuction, and breast reduction. These findings suggest that, for many women in the group, the pursuit of well-being and self-esteem is also linked to aesthetic interventions, reinforcing the relationship between body, aging, and social image.

In the third part of the interview, which addressed fashion, clothing, and media, all participants agreed that clothing plays an important role in self-esteem and the sense of confidence. When asked about the features of clothing that help enhance the body, they expressed preferences for pieces with sleeves, high-waisted pants, loose and dark clothing, and small necklines. Although some participants qualify these choices based on climate, workplace, or comfort, a consistent pattern emerges in favor of discretion and comfort combined with aesthetics.

Despite a significant level of clothing consumption, just over half of the participants reported difficulty finding garments that fully meet their expectations. Some mentioned buying out of necessity, even when the product is

not ideal, while others seek specific brands or even shop internationally. The most important factors in clothing choice include finishing, fabric, design, comfort, and fit. Interestingly, these are also the features most frequently cited as lacking in the products available on the market, highlighting a mismatch between supply and demand for this demographic.

When asked about identification with phrases and consumption habits, most women emphasized their desire to stay fashionable without dressing like teenagers. Most reported becoming more selective in recent years and being willing to pay more for clothes that truly appeal to them. Some noted an increase in their shopping frequency or greater attention to fabric quality and garment structure, while others maintained frugal habits or did not consider themselves demanding.

Media, particularly Instagram, appears as the main source of fashion information. Most participants follow brands, influencers, or television presenters, although some do not see women of their age group represented in these campaigns. Cited names include Consuelo Blocker, Renata Vasconcellos, Naomi Watts, and other TV or social media personalities. Some interviewees noted that they pay more attention to how the clothes fit and how they identify with the bodies shown, regardless of the age of the media figures.

The way this information is used varies. Many women stated that they adapt trends to their personality and to what they already have in their wardrobes. Others purchase the exact items they see online, without modifications. There are also those who say they are not very influenced or who use social media more for cosmetic product information than for fashion.

When asked about the need for representation, an overwhelming majority expressed a desire for campaigns that include mature women. They want to see real bodies, different body types, more boldness, and less idealized aesthetic standards. Only two participants stated that they already feel represented, one due to recent campaigns and another because she does not consider age when choosing clothing. Still, the prevailing sentiment is a desire for more authenticity and diversity in fashion communication, reflecting the natural transformations of maturity without giving up on aesthetics or identity.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The discussion of results follows the methodology established for the research. Thus, the analysis of the interview data is integrated in an articulated and simultaneous manner with the information obtained in the literature review, which is characterized as a documentary analysis. According to Bowen (2009), this methodological triangulation reduces the impact of potential errors in the research results, which may occur when using only one method, and ensures greater credibility, scientific rigor and consolidation of findings. The survey responses are also cross-referenced with each other to improve understanding of the participants' thoughts, justifications and observations in relation to each question.

The analysis of the interviewees' profiles is supported by Kotler and Armstrong (2007), who highlight that factors such as marital status, the presence of children and stage of family development directly influence the lifestyle and consumption patterns of mature women. Therefore, the data showing that 61.5 percent of respondents are married, and 92.3 percent are mothers, with 53.8 percent still living with their children, demonstrate the relevance of the family context in their purchasing decisions and consumption priorities. In addition, Morace's (2018, p. 130) description of "singular women" as mature women who balance multiple tasks in different areas of life is reflected in the interviewed group, as the practice of physical activities (92.3 percent), work, mostly full-time and outside the home (61.5 percent), and domestic activities (performed by ten out of thirteen participants) coexist in their routines, reinforcing an active and multifaceted lifestyle. Leisure is also present among the activities, whether through flexible schedules (six out of thirteen), free time during the week (four out of thirteen), or only on weekends (seven out of thirteen). It is worth mentioning the discussion by Prodanov and Reinke (2016) about how many women's fashion brands still view the social interactions of mature women as limited to family and work, a perception that appears inconsistent with the routines described by the interviewees.

The educational level of the sample, with 38.5 percent holding a university degree and another 38.5 percent holding a postgraduate specialization, suggests high professional qualifications and financial stability (Das Neves & Paschoarelli, 2016; Borges et al., 2020), aligning with the result that eight out of thirteen women (61.5

percent) stated they allocate between 10 and 20 percent of their monthly income to clothing. These expenditures represent a significant share of the average income of Brazil's B1 social class (ABEP, 2022), indicating a relevant consumer profile for the fashion market.

Based on the questions related to body perceptions, direct connections can be identified between the interviews and concepts discussed in the literature. According to the Brazilian Ministry of Health, climacteric and menopause typically occur between the ages of 40 and 65 and provoke significant physiological changes. This biological process is evident in the interviews, with 46.2 percent of participants currently going through menopause, 38.5 percent having already gone through it, and only 15.4 percent not yet started. The symptoms described such as mood swings (81.8 percent), hot flashes (63.6 percent), fatigue (54.5 percent), pain (54.5 percent), and weight gain (9.1 percent) corroborate the findings of Fittipaldi, Marques and Silva (2021) and Das Neves and Paschoarelli (2016). The bodily changes resulting from loss of muscle mass, increased fat, and reduced collagen (Das Neves & Paschoarelli, 2016) are highly relevant for participants, with increased measurements in the arms and abdomen reported by ten out of thirteen, and abdominal flaccidity (84.6 percent), as well as sagging in the thighs, neck and arms (69.2 percent each), identified as causes of insecurity in 76.9 percent of the sample.

The participants' perceptions of menopause and aging reflect a mix of feelings, with 76.9 percent expressing concern about changes in appearance and quality of life, aligning with Borges et al. (2020), who identify the process as a psychological challenge intensified by social standards that valorize youth. Likewise, the pursuit of aesthetic procedures mentioned by 81.8 percent of respondents - including botulinum toxin, silicone implants and liposuction - reinforces the pressure associated with confronting age and gender bias, as described by Guimarães (2020). However, the interviews also reveal that 53.8 percent of participants see menopause and aging as natural processes, which partly reflects the gradual overcoming of the "rigid and stagnant idea of old age" mentioned by Das Neves and Paschoarelli (2016, p. 196). This phenomenon aligns with the notion of "beautiful aging" discussed by Prodanov and Reinke (2016, p. 134), which interprets aging as a phase of liberation and authenticity.

Clothing emerges as an essential element in constructing the identity and self-confidence of the women interviewed, especially when coping with bodily transformations associated with aging and menopause. In line with the findings of Das Neves and Paschoarelli (2016), the preference for clothing that conceals specific body parts, particularly those perceived as weak points, is confirmed by the participants' choices, which favor garments with sleeves (61.6 percent), high-waisted pants (92.3 percent), and small necklines (53.8 percent). Crossreferencing this data with body-related responses suggests that women who prefer larger necklines, or are indifferent to them, may not perceive that area as a source of insecurity due to undergoing procedures like breast augmentation or reduction surgery, which together account for 45.5 percent of the responses.

The significance of fashion for this group is also reflected in their reported consumption volume and frequency, which in many cases has increased in recent years, as well as the income portion allocated to clothing. In contrast, the literature highlights the difficulty mature women face in finding brands or collections that meet their needs and desires. This perception is confirmed in the interviews, with 53.8 percent divided between "I can't find exactly what I want, but I buy anyway" (23.1 percent) and "I have difficulty, but I still manage to find it" (15.4 percent). One significant comment came from a participant who reported buying clothes abroad, where she finds more options, which reveals how this niche remains undervalued by national and regional brands.

Preferences center on garments that combine comfort, finish, fit, aesthetics and cut, along with a perceived lack of these factors in the current market, especially proper finish and fair pricing. Meanwhile, the participants demonstrate increasing demands for product quality, prioritizing fabric, modeling and fit (46.2 percent), which, according to Das Neves and Paschoarelli (2016), indicates a more conscious and selective consumer profile, willing to pay more for garments that meet their expectations (69.2 percent).

Regarding media use, Instagram stands out as the main platform for fashion information among participants (53.8 percent), followed by websites and television. This preference resonates with the analyses of Silva and Façanha Neto (2023), who explore the role of social media in democratizing and segmenting fashion content. When asked about the media's influence on their consumption habits and choices, 76.9 percent responded affirmatively, with many saying they adapt inspirations to their personal style and body, while others reported purchasing items directly from media content.

Despite this, as Prodanov and Reinke (2016) point out, mature women continue to be offered more classic and conservative products and less trend-related content compared to younger audiences. Although 84.6 percent of participants do not wish to dress like teenagers, they express a desire for modern clothing that incorporates trends and aesthetic innovation.

Among the media channels followed, 53.8 percent follow brands, 30.8 percent follow digital influencers, and 7.7 percent follow presenters or actresses. However, 76.9 percent report not feeling represented in media and express a desire for greater body and age diversity, aligned with real aging. One participant highlighted that better representation would help her visualize the product on a body like her own, which does not currently happen. These findings reinforce the critique by Bueno and Souza (2024) regarding the underrepresentation of mature women in fashion communication.

The identification with public figures observed in the survey confirms the importance of positive media role models. According to Guimarães (2020), mature influencers and media personalities play a relevant role in challenging stereotypes and fostering a more inclusive dialogue on aging, a desire that also emerges among the interviewees, who call for more boldness and authenticity in fashion proposals aimed at mature women.

CONCLUSION

The objectives proposed for this study were fully achieved, as demonstrated by the data analysis and the theoretical framework employed throughout the research. The general objective, which was to analyze the factors influencing clothing consumption among women in the aging process, aged between 40 and 60, was accomplished through a comprehensive investigation that considered physical, psychological, and media-related aspects of this consumer profile.

The specific objectives were also met. The first, to understand the profile of B1-class women in the city of Blumenau, revealed an active, multifaceted, and financially stable group, whose routine combines work, physical activity, and family responsibilities. This profile supports the perspectives of Kotler and Armstrong (2007) and Morace (2018) on how social roles and lifestyle influence consumption priorities. In addition, the significant portion of the monthly budget allocated to clothing underscores the economic relevance of this demographic for the fashion market, as also highlighted by Das Neves and Paschoarelli (2016).

The second objective, to relate the aging process to the elements that affect clothing preferences and needs, was supported by the interview data. Bodily changes resulting from menopause and climacteric, such as increased measurements and skin sagging, are reflected in the respondents' choices, which favor comfortable garments with suitable cuts that conceal areas of insecurity. This finding is consistent with the studies of Das Neves and Paschoarelli (2016) and Araújo and Barbosa (2016), who emphasize the importance of clothing adapted to the physiological and psychological changes of middle age.

The third objective, to assess the role of media in shaping and influencing clothing choices, was also achieved. Instagram emerged as the main channel for fashion information and inspiration among respondents. However, the research revealed a significant gap in media representation, with 76.9% of participants reporting not feeling represented in fashion content. This supports the critique of Bueno and Souza (2024) regarding the underrepresentation of mature women in fashion communication.

Despite the results obtained, one challenge encountered was the limited availability of recent academic literature on the topic. Although mature women represent a demographically and economically significant group, they remain underrepresented in academic studies across different fields of knowledge. This highlights a lack of theoretical references for supporting research in this area (Araújo and Barbosa, 2016).

This study contributes to reinforcing the importance of understanding the needs and expectations of mature women in the fashion market. It also underscores the urgency of developing inclusive strategies that integrate fashion, media, and representation. There is a clear need to deepen knowledge about this demographic, which constitutes a substantial demand in the fashion sector, especially due to its greater willingness to invest in products that are appropriate and aligned with their needs and aspirations (Das Neves and Paschoarelli, 2016). Such efforts are fundamental to fostering a more authentic and respectful dialogue about aging, enabling these women to continue using fashion to reaffirm their identity and self-confidence.

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