



# Attitudes Towards Wearing Masks Among Young Adults

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## Introduction and Literature Review

- On April 1, 2020, CDC declared wearing a mask was an important safety precaution to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus (Ryan, 2020). Subsequent research supported the importance of wearing masks, analyzed policy, and identified groups that wore masks.
- Chernozhukov et. al. (2020) investigated the influence of various U.S. policies that were implemented which slowed the rate of infection. Mask policies were found to be a more effective when compared to business closures and stay-at-home orders.
- Li et. al. (2020) found culture influenced mask wearing more than government mandates. Eastern regions, where mask wearing is common, showed slowed spread of the virus when compared to western parts of the world.
- Mask wearing and varying age groups have been examined, because COVID-19 has been found to cause noticeable illness in older adults. Results from several studies suggest that young adults do not consistently follow safety measures.
- One survey discovered young adults, particularly those residing in rural locations, were not wearing masks as often as older adults (Haischer et al., 2020). A report published by the CDC found that populations ages 18 to 29 were least likely to wear masks (Hutchins et al., 2020). Limited studies have examined how attitudes among young adults about masks impact mask wearing.

## Method/Exploration Techniques

### Procedure:

- First, the study was reviewed and approved as exempt by the university's Institutional Review Board (#1666205-1).
- In December 2020, the survey was distributed online to fashion classes in the Midwest and Northeast. These locations were diverse in population size. Students completed the survey as part of the course. Each student was assigned a code to maintain anonymity. A mixed methods approach was used. The questionnaire contained four sections.
  - 1) A demographics section
  - 2) Open-ended questions about participants' attitudes about masks
  - 3) Questions on mask wearing behavior (e.g., frequency and type of mask)
  - 4) A list of garment characteristics >> These characteristics were identified by Beaudoin, Moore, and Goldsmith (1998) with a question prompting the participant to rate on a 5-point Likert scale the importance of the feature in purchasing the product.
- The open-ended questions were analyzed using line-by-line coding as detailed by van Manen (1997) where responses were analyzed for themes. The authors made connections in the responses between attitudes about garment features and mask wearing.
- The Likert Scale questions were analyzed using a Factor Analysis which resulted in two characteristics, style characteristics (Color, Attractiveness, Fashionableness, Brand, and Style, Cronbach  $\alpha$  = .897), and practical characteristics (Fit, Durability, Ease of Care, Good Price, and Comfort, Cronbach  $\alpha$  = .932).
- The style and practical characteristics were then compared using an Analysis of Variance to frequency of mask wearing.

## Discussion, Conclusions, Recommendations

- Addressing the first research question, participants regarded practical characteristics of masks over style. This finding was particularly true among the group living in the crowded, urban area.
- Style considerations were considered, particularly the color. Brand was not considered important. Theoretically, the results contradict Fishbein theory in that individuals expressed a negative attitude towards masks.
- However, safety was most important. This research has implications in designing masks, highlighting problems with masks currently available.
- Designers could work to find solutions (e.g., masks that attach to clothing for convenience). In addition, selling masks can be enhanced given these findings. E.g., safety and function could be emphasized in advertisements, particularly for urban populations.
- These messages can also be used in campaigns to prompt young populations to wear the mask.
- This research was limited to a convenience sample of college students. Further research could be completed on a broader sample.
- In addition, clothing that is not necessarily perceived positively could be examined to assess at what levels of dislike and what other motivations will consumers tolerate and wear a garment despite having a negative attitude about it.

## Results

### Participants

- Total of 63 participants: including 39 in the urban Northeast and 24 in the rural Midwestern region. The majority were 22 (34.0%) Caucasian, 12 Black (19.0%), or Hispanic (19%); studying fashion merchandising (n= 37; 58.7%) and senior standing (n=34; 53.9%); and 18-29 years (92.1%).

### Results

#### Quantitative Data

- Mask wearing frequency ranged from always (n=25; 39.7%), often (n=22; n=58.0; 34.9%), occasionally (n=6; 9.5%), to rarely or never (n=10; 15.9%).
- The highest mean scores were intrinsic practical considerations, including Comfort (m = 4.52), fit (m = 4.41) and Durability (m =4.37). The lowest scores were related to extrinsic style characteristic, Brand (2.27).
- Style characteristics were lower than practical ones: Color (m-3.16), Fashionableness (m =3.17), Style (m -3.24) and Attractiveness (m = 3.25).
- In statistical relationships between wearing masks and garment features, only fashion considerations were statistically significant to mask-wearing. Those that wore masks more often considered fashion style (color, attractiveness, fashionableness, brand, style) more important than function.

#### Qualitative Data

- Both practical and style considerations were discussed. When asked why they wore a mask, participants noted practical considerations. A participant described the practical safety features of a mask: "For my protection and safety of our families."
- When asked how they felt wearing a mask, 28 (44.4%) participants were positive about wearing a mask because it provided a feeling of safety. Eighteen (28.6%) did not mind wearing the mask and fifteen (23.8%) did mind wearing the mask. Several were uncomfortable wearing the mask, but thought it provided safety.
- Common problems with the mask mentioned were hearing others in the mask, pulling on the ears, fogged glasses, breathing problems, and inconvenient to wear (e.g., forget to wear it).

#### Patterns

- Patterns were found in the type of mask participants worn by region. The sample in the rural area tended to wear fabric masks (n=22; 92.3%) noting decoration or style characteristics. The participants in the urban region wore the disposable surgical mask (n=24; 61.5%) describing filters, n-95, and additional functional features of their masks. Eighteen (28.6%) of the urban participants and only four (16.6%) of rural participants did not consider their wardrobe when selecting a mask. Color of the mask and their outfit was discussed frequently among those who considered their outfit when selecting a mask. With regard to fashionable masks, the majority of the sample in both groups were positive about these masks (n=48; 76.2%), because they were "fun", "cute," and they provided some relief from the seriousness of the pandemic. A few participants (n=6; 9.5%) in both groups said they did not wear fashionable masks mainly because they thought these masks did not protect well.

## References

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## Purpose and Research Questions

Identifying positive or negative associations to masks can be helpful in redesigning the mask and in campaigns that encourage young adults to wear masks.

**Relevant Theory:** Related theory encompasses the notion that intrinsic (physical) and extrinsic (external) features of apparel influence its perceived quality (Brown & Rice, 2000). Another theory that guided this research was Fishbein's (1975) theory of reasoned behavior, that asserts the attitude towards a product leads to the behavior (wearing or purchasing).

**Research purpose.** The objective was to investigate attitudes about mask characteristics that motivate young adults to wear masks

**Research Questions: How do attitudes about -**

- 1) Practical characteristics of masks influence mask wearing?
- 2) Mask style and extrinsic characteristics influence mask wearing?