

Consumers' preferences for smocked utility articles

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■ **ABSTRACT** : The craftsmanship of embroidery has its own excellence, attracting people from all parts of the world. In the present fashion world, embroidered pieces are preferred by everyone. The beautiful art of smocking fills delicacy and elegance to the fabric pieces and gives them a worthy place in fashion market. The present investigation was carried out in Ludhiana city. An interview schedule was prepared for the purpose of collecting the data from 90 female respondents between age group of 20-40 years selected randomly from three localities of Ludhiana city. The results of the study revealed that among the identified utility articles for smocking, cushion cover was the most preferred article (15.49) followed by handbag (14.36), bolster cover (13.21), folder (12.69), lampshade (12.46), footwear (12.33), pillow cover (11.66), jewellery box (11.61), curtain canopies (11.50) and trimming for bedsheet (9.98). Plain fabric without design was most preferred. Single coloured fabric was the most preferred followed by two coloured combination. Cotton yarn was most preferred by the respondents for smocking stitches followed by blended fabric. In case of embellishments, laces and beads were preferred the most. Pillow cover was the most preferred article on the basis of suitability of yarn and utility. Cushion cover was preferred the most on the basis of design, colour and overall impact and jewellery box was the most preferred article on the basis of embellishments used.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Smocking, Articles, Utility, Preferences

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Hand embroidery, of one kind or another, is thousands of years old. It continues as an art form today. Embroidery is so much a part of our lives that we may not even notice it. Over the years, it has made its significant place in clothing and upholstery, in Indian as well as in international market. From decorating the old torn fabric pieces to being a valuable feature of textiles, embroidery has reached far and has become an inseparable part of textile industry. Also, it has become a great source of income for the artisans all over the world. Heavy competition and ever increasing demand of variety in textile products have given way to many types of embroideries and stitches. The scope has increased with the development in technology and latest market strategies. Smocking is one of the dignified embroidery techniques and proofs of its origin have been found in England. Bailey (2005) mentioned that smocking is basically done for decorative purposes by sewing various

types of materials into a layer of cloth or fabric to create patterns and designs that are usually a reflection of the beauty of nature. It is ornamental needlework applied to all varieties of fabrics and worked with many sorts of thread—linen, cotton, wool, silk and gold. Decorative objects, such as shells, feathers, beads, and jewels, are often sewn to the embroidered piece. It is a laborious threadwork. In the past, smocking technique has been widely used for decorating and elasticizing apparel especially children's garments. The present paper focuses on consumer preferences for articles, fabrics, colours and embellishments to be used for smocked articles, preparation of articles by using smocking techniques and to study the consumers' preferences regarding prepared articles.

■ RESEARCH METHODS

The present study was conducted in three purposively

selected localities of Ludhiana city. An interview schedule was used to study the preferences of 90 female respondents selected randomly between 20-40 years of age group for utility articles to be made by using smocking technique. On the basis of preferences given by the respondents for various utility articles, two designs for each ten most preferred articles were sketched and shown to panel of judges. Out of these designs the most preferred design for each article was considered for development. Second interview schedule was employed to a sub sample of 45 respondents to study the preferences regarding the prepared articles for suitability of fabric, design, colour, embellishments used, overall impact and utility of the article. The data collected by using interview schedule were coded, tabulated and analyzed. Frequencies and simple percentages were calculated. Weighed mean scores were calculated by giving maximum marks to the first preference and minimum marks to the last preference and then multiplying the number of respondents with the marks for that particular rank.

■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the present investigation as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads :

Preferences of the respondents for various utility articles :

The data of Table 1 revealed that the cushion cover, with a weighed mean score of 15.49, was the most preferred article and hence, was given the first rank. Handbag, bolster cover, folder, lampshade, footwear, pillow cover, jewellery box, curtain canopies and trimming for bedsheet were assigned the scores of 14.36, 13.21, 12.69, 12.46, 12.33, 11.66, 11.61, 11.50 and 9.98 and were given second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth rank, respectively. It was found that cushion cover was most preferred among all the articles followed by handbag and bolster cover while carry kit, belt and utility box were least preferred by the respondents. Grewal (2002) also reported in her study that cushion cover and footwear were preferred by most of the respondents for preparation of innovative articles.

Preferences of the respondents for the type of fabric to be used for making articles by smocking technique have been furnished in Table 2. The results elicited that cotton fabric was preferred by most of the respondents (66.67%), followed by 56.67 per cent of the respondents who preferred blended fabric and only 8.89 per cent of respondents preferred polyester fabric.

Preferences of respondents regarding yarn type to be used for smocking technique have been furnished in Fig 1. Majority of the respondents (73.33%) preferred polyester yarn for smocking technique because of its strength whereas 26.67 per cent preferred cotton yarn for smocking.

Table 1 : Preferences of the respondents for various utility articles (n=90)

Articles	Weighted mean scores	Rank
Cushion cover	15.49	I
Pillow covers	11.66	VII
Bolster cover	13.21	III
Shoulder bag	8.78	XII
Purse	8.70	XIII
Folder	12.69	IV
Handbag	14.36	II
Carry kit	4.74	XVII
Footwear	12.33	VI
Lampshade	12.46	V
Jewellery box	11.61	VIII
Curtains	6.87	XIV
Utility box	3.51	XIX
Curtain canopies	11.50	IX
Belt	4.00	XVIII
Pen stand	8.99	XI
Trimming for bedsheet	9.98	X
Trimming for table cover	6.57	XV
Hairband	5.51	XVI

WMS- Weighted mean score

Table 2 : Distribution of the respondents according to their preferences for the type of fabric to be used for making the articles (n=90)*

Type of fibre / fabric	f	%
Cotton	60	66.67
Polyester	8	8.89
Blended	51	56.67

*Multiple responses, f-frequency

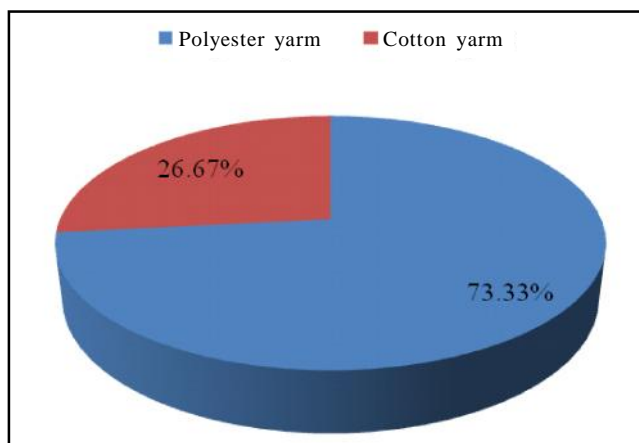


Fig. 1 : Distribution of the respondents according to their preferences for the type of yarn to be used for smocking

Data in Table 3 show the preferences of respondents regarding the colour combinations used in articles made by smocking technique. The data revealed that single coloured option was most preferred. It was opted by 61.11 per cent of respondents followed by two coloured combination which was preferred by 33.34 per cent of the respondents. Multi-coloured combination was least preferred by the respondents (2.22 %).

Table 3 : Respondents preferences for the colour combinations of fabric (n=90)

Colour combinations	f	%
Single coloured	55	61.11
Two coloured	30	33.34
Three coloured	3	3.33
Multi coloured	2	2.22

f-frequency

The preferences of respondents regarding different fabric colours have been furnished in Table 4. It was found that with an equal weighted mean score of 9.57, both blue and pink colour were ranked first. Red, yellow, purple and brown were given third, fourth, fifth and sixth ranks with weighted mean score of 7.67, 7.48, 7.41 and 7.38, respectively. White, cream, green, black and grey were least preferred by the respondents. The studies done by Grewal (2002) and Kaur (2011) also revealed that colours like blue, pink, yellow and red were largely preferred by the respondents for preparation of articles.

Table 4 : Preferences of respondents for various fabric colours to be used in utility articles (n=90)

Colour	Weighted mean score	Rank
Pink	9.57	I
Red	7.67	III
Blue	9.57	I
Purple	7.41	V
Green	3.50	IX
Brown	7.38	VI
Grey	2.53	XI
Yellow	7.48	IV
White	4.14	VII
Black	2.73	X
Cream	4.02	VIII

WMS- Weighted mean score

It is evident from the data furnished in Table 5 that plain fabric without design was most preferred by 64.45 per cent of the respondents, followed by an equal percentage of respondents (12.22%) who preferred stripes and check designs, and rest 11.11 per cent of the respondents preferred plain with self-design.

Table 5 : Distribution of respondents according to their preferences for various fabric designs (n=90)

Fabric design	f	%
Plain without design	58	64.45
Plain with self-design	10	11.11
Stripes	11	12.22
Check	11	12.22

f- frequency

The data presented in Table 6 indicate that laces and beads were preferred by majority of respondents with weighted mean score of 6.44 and 5.70 and were given first and second rank, respectively. Sequins and tassels were given third and fourth rank with a weighted mean scores 4.44 and 3.37, respectively. Mirrors, shells and crystals were least preferred by the respondents. Kaur (2011) and Sunidhi (2004) reported in their studies that beads were preferred by majority of the respondents for embellishment of articles.

Table 6 : Preferences of respondents for various surface embellishments (n=90)

Surface embellishments	Weighted mean score	Ranks
Beads	5.70	II
Shells	2.80	VI
Mirrors	2.98	V
Sequins	4.44	III
Tassels	3.27	IV
Crystals	2.37	VII
Laces	6.44	I

WMS- Weighted mean score

Table 7 : Consumer preferences for prepared smocked utility articles on various parameters (n=45)

Parameters	Articles	Weighted mean score	Ranks
Suitability of fabric	Pillow cover	8.64	I
	Cushion cover	8.13	II
	Bolster cover	7.89	III
Design	Cushion cover	7.93	I
	Jewellery box	7.31	II
	Pillow cover	6.96	III
Colour	Cushion cover	7.76	I
	Jewellery box	7.44	II
	Bolster cover	6.87	III
Embellishments	Jewellery box	8.56	I
	Curtain canopy	7.51	II
	Lampshade	7.40	III
Overall impact	Cushion cover	8.60	I
	Curtain canopy	7.58	II
	Footwear	7.47	III
Utility	Pillow cover	8.29	I
	Bolster cover	7.33	II
	Cushion cover	7.18	III

Data in Table 7 show that pillow cover was the most preferred article on the basis of suitability of fabric and utility. Cushion cover was preferred the most on the basis of design, colour and overall impact and jewellery box was the most preferred article on the basis of embellishments used. It was reported by Grewal (2002) that cushion cover was preferred the most by respondents on the basis of suitability of design and colour and was ranked third on the basis of utility.



Fig. 2 : Prepared smocked articles

Majority of the respondents found the idea of making utility articles by using smocking technique as innovative and unique (Fig. 2). Similar results were also reported by Sahni and Phadke (1995), Lele (2001) and Grewal (2002).

Conclusion :

Cushion cover, handbag, bolster cover and folder were the most preferred articles while carry kit, belt and utility box were least preferred. Majority of the respondents preferred cotton fabric followed by blended fabrics. Polyester fabric was least preferred by the respondents. Polyester yarn was most preferred by the respondents for smocking stitches followed by cotton yarn. Single coloured fabric was the most preferred colour combination by the respondents. Majority of the respondents preferred blue, pink, red, yellow, purple and brown colours of the fabric while white, cream, green, black and grey were least preferred. Plain fabric without design was preferred the most by the respondents. Laces and beads were preferred by majority of the respondents for embellishment while mirrors, shells and crystals were least preferred by the respondents. Pillow cover was the most preferred article on the basis of suitability of yarn and utility. Cushion cover was preferred the most on the basis of design, colour and overall impact and jewellery box was the most preferred article on the basis of embellishments used.

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