The influence of clothing choice on trust in a business context

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ABSTRACT

Appearances play an important role in one's personal life, but also in one's professional life. They give off impressions, and people do their best to influence these in order to be positively perceived in multiple ways. People put more effort in their appearance, and try to show the best version of themselves. The research in this paper therefore tries to find out if clothing appearance has an influence on trust in a business environment, more specifically if the formality and masculinity of an outfit matter in this. Research was conducted via a survey based on the methodology of the investment game, and was spread online. The survey randomly showed the respondents one of four outfits, representing formal-masculine, formalfeminine, informal-masculine, and informal-feminine. Then a scenario question was asked, in order to indicate the level of trust ($\notin 0$ showing no trust, $\notin 25$ showing moderate trust, and \notin 50 showing full trust). The survey received 116 responses, of which most of the respondents were men, with an average age for all respondents of 39.94 years. From the results it can be seen that the respondents mainly worked in higher management functions, that they have a preference for informal wear, and that women invest more money than men do. What can be concluded from the results of this research is that formality and masculinity of the outfit of a woman in a business environment do not matter on trust. Thus, women do not have to wear a coat-suit in order to receive a higher level of trust; they can also wear a more feminine outfit, such as a dress or a skirt with a blouse. However, one should still dress appropriately for the job or task they have in order to be perceived as credible.

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Keywords

Impression management, clothing, trust, appearance, formality of clothing, masculinity of clothing, business context.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A very big aspect in life nowadays is appearance. More than ever before, there is an increased care for how we look, what type of clothing we wear, how our hair and makeup is done, and what others think of us. We try to influence this opinion of others by showing our best self, both in real life and online. Especially clothing choice has played a significant role regarding impressions over the years, with fashion changing every minute (Kiisel, 2013). This is applicable to the area of impression management, on which this paper focuses. Impression management is "the process by which people control the impressions others form of them" (Leary & Kowalski, 1990, p. 34). According to Howlett et al. (2013) "clothing can communicate an extensive and complex array of information about a person, without the observer having to meet or talk to the wearer" (p. 2). This shows that clothing appearance has a big stake in impressions, people already form an opinion only from looks. This is also becoming more and more the case in business; appearance starts to matter more and can have a big influence on deals, investments, promotions, and other possible successes (Kelan, 2013). Next to this, it is not the case anymore that men only wear formal suits to work and women a formal coat suit; there are far more work-wear options that are less formal. This can be seen since the early 1990s, where informal apparel became more accepted on the work floor, and started to take over the formal dress codes. This 'dressing down' was first seen in Silicon Valley in California, where multiple businesses have their bases (Kiddie, 2009). When specified to women, research from Eagly (2007) shows that women are becoming more educated, and with that have a higher ambition than a few years ago. This led to an increase of women in business, especially in leadership positions over the last years. Also, for businesswomen it is more complicated to establish the 'right' work outfit. This is the case, because for the biggest amount of work areas, the formal coat-suit is still the form of appearance that represents professionalism. For women, it is less clear what this entails, and the meaning of it also differs per industry, sector, function, and situation. It could be that sometimes a dress is seen as appropriate, but it could also be that a pant with a blazer is preferred. Which outfit a woman wears thus not only states their professionalism, but they furthermore have the aspect of masculinity versus femininity. This means that women still are a woman and want to dress like one, but they also want to accomplish the part of dressing like a professional, and thus have to find the balance between these two aspects (Kelan, 2013).

Thus, the way of how one dresses can influence the impression others have of them, both positively and negatively, especially for women. But does the way one dresses also have an influence on trust? And how can this clothing influence on trust be seen in business? These questions are what the research of this paper will focus on: to determine if women's clothing has an influence on trust regarding businesses. Therefor, the following research question has been established:

Does appearance in clothing choice for women matter on trust in a business context?

In order to clarify the research question, an explanation of the elements follows. 'Appearance' is in this research defined as the clothing that is being worn to stimulate trust. Then, 'clothing choice' is defined as the outfits worn by the female model on the photographs used in this research. There will be four different outfits, to represent both formal and informal types, as well as masculine and feminine aspects in these outfits. A detailed explanation of the outfits can be found in Chapter 3 on methodology. The next element is 'trust', which can be seen as 'a behavioral primitive that guides behavior in new situations'' (Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995, p. 124). This definition is coming from the investment game of Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe (1995), on which the experiment of this research is based, hence this definition of trust. Also, if trust does not exist within an environment, it is hard to develop meaningful and fruitful relationships, especially in a business context (Doney & Cannon, 1997). Then for the last element, 'business context', it is about the situation where the research is being conducted, and to which environment it is applicable. Meant by this is that one trusts the person one is working with or has a business connection with, for example a person whom one has to close a deal with, or whom one could do investments with.

The research done is this paper is academically relevant, since this specific research topic has not vet been fully researched or fully developed, and thus adds to existing work. Certainly, there has been similar research within impression management on trust linked to appearance, such as the work of Wilson and Eckel, where they assess if a face-to-face encounter is important to assess someone's trustworthiness, cooperation or true intentions (Eckel & Wilson, 2004). Another work by these two authors examines if alluring people are more trustworthy and maybe get a so-called 'beauty premium' for their appearance, and thus maybe are trusted sooner or more (Wilson & Eckel, 2006). However, this specific topic concerning formality of clothing and its influence on trust does not contain much research so far, and thus is an addition to academic literature. Next to this, it also has a practical relevance, because the findings could be very relevant for clothing brands that produce clothing for the business environment. This can be seen in the sense that they can implement the outcomes of this paper to develop clothing lines or items that can empower women's business appearances. Also, the outcomes could be relevant for the businesses themselves when it comes to closing deals. Businesses could support their employees in dressing appropriately for the job or task, in order to positively influence the impression that is formed of them, which could lead to a successful business deal and the corresponding benefits of the particular deal.

What this paper further will tackle is the theory related to this research, about impression management regarding clothing, trust in general, and the influence of age and gender on trust. After that a chapter on the methodology will follow, explaining how the research for this paper was established and carried out. Then, the results from the research will be given and analyzed. After that, the paper will conclude with a chapter containing the conclusion, a discussion, and limitations.

2. THEORY

In the following chapter several theories will be discussed, which build the theoretical framework of this paper. These theories will be used to establish several hypotheses, which are to be found at the end of this chapter. But first, impression management will be explained and a few of the main theories within this area. Then some theories regarding clothing appearance will be discussed, and the last theories mentioned are the theories that tackle the topic of trust.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Impression Management

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, impressions are becoming an increasing bigger part of everyday life. They are becoming more valuable to people, and people tend to find it important that others like them and that they are valued and seen in a positive way. They could even be tense or uneasy when it comes to being in the spotlight. Therefore, many people use products such as make-up and clothes to enhance themselves in order to be perceived as attractive, good-looking or more positive in any other way. This could lead to people thinking about how to act to develop certain impressions others have of them, because it can influence how they are being treated, seen and valued by others (Leary and Kowalski, 1990). One of the main works and a well-known theory within impression management is the one of Erving Goffman. He wrote multiple works about human behavior, how the human behavior is shaped, and by which factors it is shaped. Goffman also wrote books and papers about social aspects, such as 'social expectation' and 'social acceptance'. His interpretation of social action is that it is shaped by certain 'social scripts', that people (social actors) take part in by taking up a role build on the scripts (Hier, 2005). When we translate this to clothing appearance, one could see this as people dressing according to a certain 'social script', which would be, in their eyes, 'socially accepted', and thus give off the right impression. And that is what this paper researches, which outfit will give off the right impression regarding trust.

2.1.2 Clothing Appearance

When we delve a bit deeper, we find that clothing especially plays an important role in an impression; people try to influence the impression they give off by dressing in certain ways, almost every day. One example everybody comes across in his or her life is dressing for a job interview. When one wears a wellfitting, clean outfit it gives off a better impression than when one wears a t-shirt that is too big or has a stain in it. Formal wear also is preferred when it comes to job interviews, rather than someone who is dressed informal. So, one dresses accordingly when he or she has a job interview (Gifford, Ng, & Wilkinson, 1985; Hollandsworth et al., 1979). This example shows that clothing choice matters, one creates an impression that influences the interviewer in order to be perceived in a more positive way. Another work that addresses the influence of clothing is the work of Mazali and Rodrigues-Neto (2013). These two authors researched if status goods such as clothing influence the indication one gives off of their social status. Their study showed that status goods do have value in this. Another theory, by Greenlees et al. (2005), researched if what one wears could influence the forming of an impression. They had a look at clothing within sports, and researched if wearing tennis-specific clothing had in influence on the impressions others formed of them. They found out that it was "concluded that the clothing and body language of an opponent can influence the course and outcomes of social interactions" (Greenlees et al., 2005, p. 42). Also, when it came to 'impact on judgment of opponent', the research showed that wearing tennis-specific clothing and a positive body language were seen as more favorable (Greenlees et al., 2005). Another theory about clothing appearance is the work of Howlett et al. (2013), who studied if small changes in clothing have an effect on first impressions. They say that one's appearance, stance, and attire represent multiple personal characteristics, and social roles, and thus give off impressions of one's personality. What they further state, is that when someone dressed accordingly for the job, he or she was seen as more credible and people were more likely to do business with them. A final found of this research is that a well-fitted, customized suit had more positive impressions than a regular store-bought suit. Also, a more informal outfit was seen as less favorable in a working environment (Howlett et al., 2013). A last theory about clothing appearance to be discussed here is the work of Kelan (2013). She discussed the topic of women in business, with aspects of attire, attractiveness, gender, and leadership. In her research,

she found that the formal coat-suit is still seen as the most professional business outfit, specifically a more masculine look, because when outfits ''are too feminine, they do not fulfil the role of the ideal business professional'' (Kelan, 2013, p. 48). When considered that women want to dress like a woman to show their female identity, but also have to keep the masculinity in mind in order to keep looking professional, a feminine twist on the masculine coat-suit could provide the answer (Kelan, 2013).

2.1.3 Trust

Another aspect of this research is trust, and when we take a look at theories about trust in a business context, the first research to be mentioned is the work of Sutter and Kocher (2007), who researched the degree of trust and trustworthiness of six age groups. They found out that trust in a stranger increases from the age of eight, until about the student age. From the age of the adult students until one has almost reached the retirement age, trust in a stranger stays about the same. Then, from the retirement age on, trust in a stranger decreases again. A reason they give for this is that "trust is closely related to the number of contacts with others, which typically increases from childhood to the time of entering a working career" (Sutter & Kocher, 2007, p. 368). Another work that researched trust amongst age groups is the research of Flanagan and Stout (2010). They did research on trust in three different age groups: early, middle, and late adolescents. Their results were similar to the ones of Sutter and Kocher (2007), because they found that levels of trust get lower when one reaches the late adolescents age (Flanagan & Stout, 2010). Next to age, gender can also be an aspect that is related to trust. Buchan, Croson, and Solnick (2008) did research on trust behavior in the investment game, and tried to understand the differences in behavior. One of the outcomes of their research is that "Male senders sent significantly more than female senders" (Buchan, Croson, & Solnick, 2008, p. 471), which shows that men are more trusting than women, meaning that they trust someone else more or faster. Another research on this topic is the work of Chaudhuri and Gangadharan (2003), who assessed differences in trust and reciprocity between men and women via the investment game as well. Their results showed a significant difference, stating that "Men display much greater levels of trust than women do" (Chaudhuri & Gangadharan, 2003, p. 10), because the amount men on average sent, was almost double the amount of what women on average sent. A third study that researched trust in combination with gender, is the work of Slonim and Guillen, (2010). They studied gender selection discrimination, so they examined if people preferred their own gender or the other by letting them participate in the trust game. Results showed that men send more money on average to women, and that women send more money on average to men. Also, the amount of money that men sent was higher than the amount of money women sent to others, independent of gender. This shows that men display a higher level of trust than women do (Slonim & Guillen, 2010).

2.2 Hypotheses

Howlett et al. (2013) found in their research that when people are well dressed, they are perceived as more credible, and others are more likely to do business with them. These findings are supported by Kelan (2013), who says that the formal coatsuit is still seen as more professional. A third work that tackled this topic, is the work of Hollandsworth et al. (2013). They state that formal attire has a preference over informal attire. So, one can say that a formal outfit appears as more credible, and thus that people are more likely to do business with them (Howlett et al., 2013; Kelan, 2013; Hollandsworth et al., 1979). On the basis of these findings the following hypothesis is established:

H1: Formal receives the highest level of trust.

Another thing that came forward from the work of Kelan (2013) is that when a woman dresses too feminine, she is not perceived as the ideal business professional, since for this an attire which is more masculine is preferred. Adding to this is the finding that dressing appropriately is very important (Kelan, 2013). Hence, we can set up the following hypothesis:

H2: Masculine receives the highest level of trust.

When we put the above-established hypotheses together, we come to the conceptual framework that can be seen in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct this research and find out if the set hypotheses are true, an experimental research in the form of an online survey was done. This online survey was based on the investment game, which is also known as the trust game. This theory is developed by Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe (1995), and implemented by many others, e.g. Baumgartner et al. (2008). The research of Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe (1995) tries to settle disputes concerning economic behavior in the organizational context, such as 'Is trust a primitive in economic models of behavior?" (Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995, p. 123), and "What factors increase (or decrease) the likelihood of trust in economic behaviors?" (Berg, Dickhaut, & McCabe, 1995, p. 123). When taking into account the research question this research focuses on, i.e. "Does appearance in clothing choice for women matter on trust in a business context?", the second question administered in the work of Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe (1995) fits to it, because this research explored if clothing appearance matters on trust. This aspect could cause an increase or a decrease in trust, or maybe have no influence on it at all. Also the fact that the research question focuses on trust in a business context fits to the theory, since the experiment is set in an organizational environment regarding investments. Therefore, this theory was used in order to establish the research for this paper.

The theory of Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe (1995) can be explained as follows. There are two types of clients; X and Y. Clients X have to determine how much of their available money they play on to an anonymous client, Y. The X-clients were briefed that the money they sent to the Y-clients would be tripled. It is then up to the Y-clients to determine which amount of the tripled money they would return to the clients X (Berg, Dickhaut, McCabe, 1995). When a client Y decides to keep the tripled money, which leaves client X empty-handed, it can be see as 'an event that investors typically interpret as a breach or betrayal of trust' (Baumgartner et al., 2008, p. 640).

3.1 Research Design

In order to conduct research for this paper, a quantitative research will be done. This is a 2x2 experimental design with independent measures, which is also known as a betweengroups design. An experimental design is used to constitute a cause-and-effect relationship between variables. It is decided to use an experimental design because, due to the limited information available on the topic, it is the most convenient way to measure the effect of clothing appearance on trust. Due to the fact that an experimental research design is more controlling considering the variables, it is a very applicable way for coming to conclusions to establish if a change in variables leads to a change in the outcome. This could lead to better results (Grand Canyon University, n.d.). For a clear, graphic overview of the research design, see Table 1. Between-groups means that different respondents work with a different case of the independent variable. So, each one of the four outfits is experienced by a different respondent, and no respondent will experience more than one outfit. To make sure of this, randomization is applied, which accounts for equal chances of getting assigned to a certain case. An advantage of this is that it prevents certain order effects from occurring, for example when respondents are assigned to multiple varieties of a case they can get known to the effect of the experiment, which could influence results. However, there is a chance of participant differences interfering with the experiment, since personal characteristics are differing and these could influence the answer someone gives (McLeod, 2017).

Table 1. Graphic overview of research design.

	Formal	Informal
Masculine	Formal- Masculine (FM)	Informal- Masculine (IM)
Feminine	Formal- Feminine (FF)	Informal- Feminine (IF)

3.2 Outfits

In this section, the outfits will be explained. As mentioned before, the outfits will be differing on formal versus informal, and masculine versus feminine. This means that there are four outfits to consider, namely formal-masculine (FM), formalfeminine (FF), informal-masculine (IM), and informal-feminine (IF). To establish the outfits and make them representative, a small online search was done on what is being considered formal or informal, and what is considered masculine or feminine. Then multiple outfits were thought of, and in the end the following outfits were used. The formal-masculine outfit consisted for the upper wear out of a black blazer. A white blouse was worn underneath this, with a loose black pants, and flat black shoes. Next is the formal-feminine outfit, which contained a simple black dress with a small knot in the front, and was worn with flat black shoes. The informal-masculine outfit consisted out of a loose black jumpsuit, with the trouser on calf-length. The jumpsuit was also paired with flat, black shoes. Last is the informal-feminine outfit, which contained a short, black skirt with a sleeveless, black top with shimmers. As well as the other outfits, this one was paired with black, flat shoes. For the photos of all four outfits, see the Appendix.

3.3 Survey

3.3.1 Survey Outline

The survey was set up with the tool Qualtrics. It consisted out of three parts: an introduction and two questions blocks. In the introduction the reason for the survey was given. In the first question block, there were four questions asked about the independent variables age, gender, preferred type of wear (formal or informal), and which job or function the respondent has. Then a randomized question block appeared, which gave equal chances to be assigned to one of the four outfits, which was done to have more reliable results. This randomized block had four different types representing the four different outfits, but with the same question asked. In all four the same scenario of the respondent receiving €50 to invest was sketched. This scenario was based on the method known as the investment game by Berg, Dickhaut, and McCabe (1995), in order to be able to measure trust, since it is a very difficult term to grasp and measure. The scenario contained the following text: "The scenario you are in is as follows. You get €50 to invest, and the person portrayed below will make this investment for you, and will give you an amount in return. Because of making the right decisions, she was able to triple your money and she also did so. However, there is the risk that she will not fully return the amount to you. Do you trust her with the full amount of €50 to invest for you, returning you a possible amount of €150, do you trust her with less money and give her €25 to invest, equalling a possible return of €75, or do you not trust her at all and decide to not invest your money?" Then the photograph was shown and the question "With which amount do you trust this woman?" was asked. There were three answer options given, namely €0, €25, and €50. These three amounts resemble the level of trust a respondent has in the person wearing a certain outfit. The amount of €0 can be seen as a low level of trust, €25 can be seen as a moderate level of trust, and €50 can be seen as a high level of trust. Since the variables are recoded, 1 is a high level of trust, 2 is a moderate level of trust, and 3 is a low level of trust. After this, the respondent was done with the survey and was thanked for their participation.

3.3.2 Photos in the Survey

The four photos used in the survey were made to represent the four outfits: formal-masculine, formal-feminine, informalmasculine, and informal-feminine, as described above. They were all self-made, with the outfits selected and worn by the author of this paper. Multiple options for the outfits were researched and photographed, then a selection of the best four outfits was made and these were put in the survey. Characteristics such as facial structure and hair color, and accessories like glasses were not part of the research, since only the effect of clothing choice is being researched. Next to this, according to Howlett et al. (2013), "facial information is known to heavily influence judgements" (p. 5), meaning that the facial features portrayed in the pictures could influence the respondents. Therefor, to make sure that this was not the case, the photos shown to the respondents were excluding the face of the model.

3.4 Data Collection

The data was collected via an online survey, and with the tool Qualtrics such a survey was set up. The survey was spread on the social media platform for business, LinkedIn. Since the platform is meant for business purposes and business connections, the respondents are more likely to be active in the field of business and thus will be a representative example of the population to which this research is applicable. In order to reach a broader public, the survey was made in English and not in Dutch, since that also decreases the amount of possible respondents. The age reach was set between 18 and 70 years, because this gives a good reflection of the population, since in a business context a lot of different ages are present. Also, the survey was pilot-tested amongst two fellow students before it was spread, to increase the quality of the survey and to have a different view on it. This was not done to gain results, but to reveal possible misunderstandings or confusion that the survey could carry, and by pilot testing this can be removed (De Veaux, Velleman, & Bock, 2006).

4. RESULTS

The results brought by the online survey were analyzed in SPSS Statistics, version 25, to see if the before mentioned hypotheses are true, and to gather an overview of the collected data.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The survey gathered 148 responses, of which 32 responses were unusable due to the fact that some were recorded in the previewing phase, and some respondents left answer fields empty. Thus, 116 responses remained usable (N=116). The first four questions of the survey, about the age, gender, preference in wear, and job/function of the respondents, got the following results. Out of the 116 respondents, 74 were male and 42 were female, which stands for 63.8% and 36.2% respectively. The ages of the respondents lie between 18 years old and 79 years old (mean=39.94, SD=18.007). For men this was an average age of 44.23 years old, and for women an average age of 32.38 years old. For preference in wear, 51 respondents said to prefer formal wear, with 44.0%, whereas 65 respondents said to prefer informal wear, which accounts for 56.0%. The job/function variable is very widespread, with a lot of different jobs and functions. That is why it was decided to group the respondents into categories, such as 'Student', which was an answer given by 21 respondents, 9 respondents said to be retired, and further many jobs/functions can be seen as 'higher management'. Next to this, 2 respondents said to be jobless, and 4 respondents said to be interns.

Then for the scenario question ('With which amount do you trust this woman?'), asked for each of the four outfits, the following data was found. The formal-feminine (FF) outfit got 28 responses, with for the level of trust a mean of 1.54 (SD=0.693); the formal-masculine (FM) outfit got 28 responses with a mean of 1.82 for the level of trust (SD=0.819). For the informal outfits, the informal-feminine (IF) outfit received 30 responses (mean=1.93, SD=0.785); and the fourth outfit, informal-masculine (IM), got 30 responses (mean=1.83, SD=0.834). From this, it can be seen that the formal-feminine outfit scored the highest on trust, since the mean response of 1.54 is the closest to 1, stating a moderate to high level of trust.

4.2 Hypotheses Analysis

In order to test if the hypotheses are true, multiple Independent Sample T-tests were conducted. This test was chosen to give an overview of the means and significance levels. First, the four varieties of the main question needed to be grouped together in order to get means and significance levels for Formal, Informal, Masculine, and Feminine. Thus, FF and FM were grouped to get Formal, IF and IM were grouped to get Informal, FM and IM were grouped to get Masculine, and FF and IF were grouped to get Feminine.

For the first hypothesis (Formal receives the highest level of trust) Formal and Informal are needed, and the corresponding means can be found in Table 2 below (1=Formal, 2=Informal). It can be seen that Formal does receive a higher level of trust since the mean is closer to 1 than the mean of Informal. However, the sig. score is 0.164 and with an alpha of 0.05, it

means that we fail to reject H1, and thus there is no statistically significant difference regarding formality of clothing in trust.

Table 2. Overview Means Formal and Informal
Group Statistics

	GroupingFormality	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
FormalANDInformal	1,00	56	1,6786	,76532	,10227
	2,00	60	1,8833	,80447	,10386

For the second hypothesis (Masculine receives the highest level of trust) Masculine and Feminine are needed, and the corresponding means can be found in Table 3 below (1=Masculine, 2=Feminine). It can be seen that Masculine does not receive a higher level of trust since the mean of Feminine is closer to 1 than the mean of Masculine. When we look at the sig. score of 0.559, we see that it is higher than the alpha of 0.05 meaning that we fail to reject the hypothesis, and thus there is no statistically significant difference regarding masculinity of clothing in trust.

Table 3. Overview Means Masculine and Feminine Group Statistics

	GroupingMasculinity	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
MasculineANDFeminine	1,00	58	1,8276	,81945	,10760
	2,00	58	1,7414	,76228	,10009

4.3 Pattern Analysis

Possible patterns in the data were also analyzed, by using the crosstabs function in SPSS Statistics. The variables 'gender' and 'preference in wear' were set out against each other, to see if there are patterns concerning gender preferences in the formality of wear. The outcome is that the male respondents prefer informal wear to formal wear, 59.9% and 40.5% respectively. The women in this research do not have a preference, since both formal and informal got 21 counts and thus 50% (See Table 4).

Table 4. Gender Preferences in Formality of Wear Do you prefer formal or informal wear in a business context? * What is your gender? Crosstabulation

			What is your gender?			
			Male	Female	Total	
Do you prefer formal or informal wear in a business context?	l prefer formal wear	Count	30	21	51	
		% within Do you prefer formal or informal wear in a business context?	58,8%	41,2%	100,0%	
		% within What is your gender?	40,5%	50,0%	44,0%	
		% of Total	25,9%	18,1%	44,0%	
	l prefer informal wear	Count	44	21	65	
		% within Do you prefer formal or informal wear in a business context?	67,7%	32,3%	100,0%	
		% within What is your gender?	59,5%	50,0%	56,0%	
		% of Total	37,9%	18,1%	56,0%	
Total		Count	74	42	116	
		% within Do you prefer formal or informal wear in a business context?	63,8%	36,2%	100,0%	
		% within What is your gender?	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	
		% of Total	63,8%	36,2%	100,0%	

Another thing that stood out were the preferences in formality per age. Two groups were established, with one group consisting out of respondents with an age of 50 or higher (group 1), and one group with an age below 50 (group 2). Out of the 116 respondents 40 were 50 years of age or older, so 34.5%, and 76 were younger, which thus accounts for 65.5% of the respondents. For the older age group, there was a preference for informal wear, 60% of them said to prefer informal wear over formal wear. For the younger respondents there was also a preference for informal wear, but interestingly this percentage was only 53.9%. Even though this was smaller than for the older respondents, it remains a majority (See Table 5).

Table 5. Age Preferences in Formality of Wear
Do you prefer formal or informal wear in a business context? * AgeGroups
Crosstabulation

			AgeGi		
			1,00	2,00	Total
Do you prefer formal or informal wear in a business context?	l prefer formal wear	Count	16	35	51
		% within Do you prefer formal or informal wear in a business context?	31,4%	68,6%	100,0%
		% within AgeGroups	40,0%	46,1%	44,0%
		% of Total	13,8%	30,2%	44,0%
	l prefer informal wear	Count	24	41	65
		% within Do you prefer formal or informal wear in a business context?	36,9%	63,1%	100,0%
		% within AgeGroups	60,0%	53,9%	56,0%
		% of Total	20,7%	35,3%	56,0%
Total		Count	40	76	116
		% within Do you prefer formal or informal wear in a business context?	34,5%	65,5%	100,0%
		% within AgeGroups	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	34,5%	65,5%	100,0%

A last thing that showed up during the analysis of the results was that both male and female respondents most of the time invested \notin 50, 40.5% and 50.0% respectively. Further 35.1% of the men invested \notin 25, and 24.3% of them invested \notin 0. For women the numbers are similar, with 31.0% investing \notin 25 and 19% investing \notin 0 (See Table 6).

Table 6. Overview of Investments per Gender
FormalANDInformal * What is your gender? Crosstabulation

			What is you		
			Male	Female	Total
FormalANDInformal	1,00	Count	30	21	51
		% within FormalANDInformal	58,8%	41,2%	100,0%
		% within What is your gender?	40,5%	50,0%	44,0%
		% of Total	25,9%	18,1%	44,0%
	2,00	Count	26	13	39
		% within FormalANDInformal	66,7%	33,3%	100,0%
		% within What is your gender?	35,1%	31,0%	33,6%
		% of Total	22,4%	11,2%	33,6%
	3,00	Count	18	8	26
		% within FormalANDInformal	69,2%	30,8%	100,0%
		% within What is your gender?	24,3%	19,0%	22,4%
		% of Total	15,5%	6,9%	22,4%
Total		Count	74	42	116
		% within FormalANDInformal	63,8%	36,2%	100,0%
		% within What is your gender?	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
		% of Total	63.8%	36.2%	100.0%

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

The research done in this paper gives an overview of formality and masculinity of clothing appearance, and what the effect is on trust. What can be seen from the results in the previous chapter is that the formal outfits did receive a higher level on trust. However, this was not significant and thus not in line with the literature. From this it can be seen that women do not have to dress formal in order to receive more trust for what they do, and that a more informal outfit is accepted as well.

For the second hypothesis it was assumed that a more masculine outfit would receive a higher level of trust than a feminine outfit. However, the results showed that the respondents actually had a higher level of trust in the feminine outfits than in the masculine outfits. From this it can be concluded that, statistically seen, there is no significant difference regarding masculinity of clothing on trust. This means that women do not have to stick to the masculine coatsuit, but that an appropriate and more feminine dress receives a fair amount of trust as well.

What can also be seen from the results is that the formalfeminine outfit received the highest level of trust, and that the informal-feminine outfit received the lowest level of trust. From this we can say that in order to receive trust, women should dress accordingly for the job or task, but that they do not have to stick to a masculine coat-suit. They could for example wear a more feminine dress, as long as it stays appropriate. From this it could be said that the question if formality and masculinity do not matter on trust, but that another factor influences this, which for example could be the fit or quality of an outfit, the posture of a person or maybe even the color of the clothing.

Thus, it can be answered that the results found in this research are contradicting with the hypotheses established for this research, and that, to conclude, the formality and the masculinity of the outfit of a woman in a business context do not matter on trust. Even though small differences were found, they were statistically non-significant and thus we cannot say that appearance in clothing choice for women matters on trust in a business context.

5.2 Discussion

What can be seen from the results is that most of the respondents were male, and that the average age was 39.94 years. The preference for type of wear for the respondents was informal, one of the things that according to the literature was expected to be the other way around, since Howlett et al. (2013) found in their research that formal wear is preferred over informal wear in a working environment. Next to this, the first hypothesis was not true either. A reason for these differences in outcomes could be the limited amount of data that has been gathered, since the sample was a lot smaller than the population and thus could be less representative. When more respondents are collected and thus more data, the results become more representative and more reliable, and then could be more in line with the existing literature (McLeod, 2013). Another reason for this difference could be that the research done until now and which is used as literature for this research is outdated. According to Herman and Gioia (2001) a shift in formality of dress has occurred, and informal dress is increasing. So, a shift in formality of dress could be the reason.

For the second hypothesis, results showed that the masculine outfits did not score higher levels of trust than the feminine outfits, which was contradicting with the hypothesis. A reason for this difference is in regards to societal changes, because dressing more feminine has become more socially accepted. Women already want to show their female identity more nowadays than before, and they do so by dressing more feminine business look, but due to emancipation of women it could be that men nowadays also accept or even prefer a more feminine outfit (Schippers, 2007). This shows that brands that produce business outfits, and not stick to the masculine type of business outfits.

Something else that proved interesting was that men and women seemed to have the same spending pattern. The percentages of what both men and women sent out to invest were similar, and thus were not in line with the literature. This namely stated that men send significantly more money than women do, showing that they are more trusting than women (Buchan, Croson, & Solnick, 2008).

Another focus point from the analysis was that the older respondents, so ages 50 and above, said to prefer informal over formal wear, with a rather large majority. Next to this, the younger respondents (ages below 50) also said to prefer informal wear, but this was a much smaller amount. An explanation for this can be the zeitgeist, in which a shift from formal to informal has taken place and wherein what is perceived as formal and informal has changed too (Sebastian & Bristow, 2008).

5.3 Limitations

Although this research was thoroughly planned and conducted, several limitations occurred. One of these is that the pictures shown to the respondents were excluding the face of the model. This was done in order to exclude facial features that could influence the respondents in their answering, and to make sure that the respondents judged the clothing only so that just the effect of the outfits would be measured. However, a downside of this choice is that it is not in line with ecological validity. Ecological validity ''refers to the relation between real-world phenomena and the investigation of these phenomena in experimental contexts" (Schmuckler, 2001, p. 420). In other words, if the setting of the experiment is representative for how this would occur in real life. One could say that this research is not representing the real life situation, but in order to have more valid outcomes for this research the facial characteristics were excluded, so that the chance of alternative causes cannot explain the results from this research and that they can only come from the outfits presented.

Further, the outfits of the research were shown via one photograph only. If the respondents maybe would have seen more photos or maybe saw the outfit in real life it would have changed their choices. The latter was not an option for this research, since the choice was made to exclude other aspects, e.g. facial characteristics, hairstyle, and physical characteristics, in order to focus on the effect of the clothing only.

Also, personal characteristics of the respondents influence the choices they make in a survey. If one by nature prefers formal wear in a business environment, then it could be that he or she might be more likely to trust a formal dressed person more and thus invests more. Next to this, real money was not involved in the survey, which could also influence the answers of the respondents since they did not have anything to loose. If it would have been played with a real investment amount, respondents might have thought their choices more through and maybe they would have made a different choice.

A last limitation to this research is the collected data. The survey was initially only spread via LinkedIn, which gathered a small amount of respondents. Spreading via such an online platform makes for the researcher not being able to have an influence on the amount collected, since there is no obligation for someone to fill out the survey. The initial amount of responses was not representative enough of the population, and thus other ways of spreading were looked into and used. However, the fact of no obligation to fill out the survey remains and this is something that further research should keep in mind.

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7. APPENDIX



Figure 2. Photo Formal-Masculine Outfit



Figure 3. Photo Formal-Feminine Outfit



Figure 4. Photo Informal-Masculine Outfit



Figure 5. Photo Informal-Feminine Outfit