

Cotton is first choice for shoppers

New research by Cotton Council International reveals budget-conscious consumers are prepared to pay more for quality and style in natural fibres

The current troubled economic climate may have caused UK shoppers to cut their budgets and hit the high street less often, but more than a quarter of consumers still love shopping for clothes, according to the latest consumer lifestyle research from Cotton Council International (CCI). And when they do, nearly two-thirds of these dedicated shopaholics say that, in spite of the economic situation, they are prepared to pay more for better quality. Their preference is for natural fibres, and cotton in particular, which they equate with quality products.

CCI's biennial research, The Global Lifestyle Monitor Survey (GLM), which looked at a range of lifestyle issues related to clothing, shopping and textiles, was conducted in March among UK residents in the 15 to 54 age group. The findings, which were launched at the GLM Drapers Webinar on 19 May, offer buyers and retailers useful insights into consumer attitudes and behaviour.

Quality matters

The survey shows that although the state of the economy has led to a reduction in spending on clothes, UK consumers will buy if fabric, style and quality are right. The average amount spent per person on clothing in the three months prior to the survey was £141.90, compared to £220.40 two years ago. The percentage shopping for clothes for themselves every month has also declined, from 64% in 2008 to just under 49% this year.

However, consumers' desire for natural fibres is growing, with almost four in 10 believing better quality clothes are made from 100% natural fibres, with cotton a clear winner. It is the fabric of choice for British shoppers, with almost half choosing cotton garments as the ones they wear the most. Cotton is considered to be the most in vogue fabric, with 36% believing it is best suited to the latest fashion styles.



Investment buys: shoppers are willing to pay for quality garments

As Steph Thiers-Ratcliffe, International Marketing Manager, Cotton Council International, points out: "The economic climate may have reduced the frequency of shopping and the amount spent, but not at the expense of quality. Shoppers have been seeking out better prices, but have remained committed to buying premium garments made from natural fibres."

When it comes to purchasing decisions, the research disclosed, perhaps surprisingly, that consumers are influenced more by store displays than celebrities. More than half (54%) cite store displays as their inspiration, with

“
UK shoppers look for quality from their shopping

**Steph Thiers-Ratcliffe,
International Marketing
Manager, Cotton Council
International**



only 16% choosing celebrities. Friends, family, colleagues, people on the street, magazines and the internet are other sources of clothing ideas. More than 50% of shoppers confess to buying clothes on impulse, which suggests there are great opportunities for retailers to attract them with eye-catching displays.

Brand identity is also a key factor. More than 40% now decide which brand they want to buy before they spend their hard-earned cash, in contrast to 2008 when this was of concern to only 33% of British consumers.

High street multiples are the favourite shopping destinations for 63%, but traditional department stores remain popular at 49%, which is down 10% from 2008. Merchandise selection and variety come out top for 39% of consumers, but the importance of value for money (37%) and the right styles and designs (34%) have increased significantly.

Thiers-Ratcliffe adds: "The research suggests that UK shoppers look for quality from their shopping – with natural fibres being the most desirable clothing ingredient. Our COTTON USA 'Naturally' Mark is a symbol of purity, strength, comfort and quality, and helps shoppers to identify premium cotton items that are made to last." ●

For more information about COTTON USA email sthiers@cotton.org or visit www.cottonusa.co.uk