

## **Imitative Behavior of Women in the Selection of Clothing**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Imitating the deeds of others is part of human nature. Fashion imitation and its consequences are recently been focused by the researchers. In this study, qualitative approach is been adopted to find the reasons of copying or imitating the clothing of others from the same society. For this, interviews were conducted for the purpose of data collection from 14 respondents (n=14) who belonged to three cities (Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Multan) of Pakistan. For the analysis of data, NVivo was used and queries such as word search, tag cloud, model by nodes, and word frequency were applied to data. The results of the study show that imitating the dresses of others lead to excessive spending and disturb the household spending pattern.

**KEYWORDS:** Imitative behavior, copy, new dresses, affordability, socialization, interviews.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Imitation of behaviors can be observed very commonly in our daily lives. For example, if a particular model of car is nominated as the “Model of the year”, then the sales of that model rises instantly. Same happens when some book comes in the “Best-Seller list” then the other people also buy the same because the consumers and reviewers want to learn from the actions of previous buyers and it also creates the element of curiosity in them. In case of fashion, people buy the dresses of the designer who is nominated as the “designer of the year”. There are so many other examples which show that people like to copy or imitate the decisions and behavior of others from the same society while making different choices.

The literature for imitation can be found extensively from the area of social psychology. Presently, the concept has given its name to all schools of psychological and philosophical speculation. The concept of imitation is also evident from the era of Plato and he was well against the use of imitation [1]. Imitation is said to be the similarity in behaviors to some stimulus or to copy something. To imitate is to behave like someone else but it is also true that all of such likeliness doesn't come under the category of imitation. There could be many sorts of imitation: there could be the imitation of movements of someone. The imitation can also be of thoughts, emotions and feelings [2]. Imitative behavior can be found in many species and there are many studies [3, 4] which proved the fact that imitative behavior is found in both animals and human beings. There could be many forms of imitation such as when person affects or guides in the development of other person's behavior then this is called the copy behavior [5]. The present research focuses on imitating behavior of people with respect to clothing; the way people like the style, design, print or fabric of someone's dress and try to imitate it.

The objective of this study is to find the reasons and consequences of the imitative behavior of women specifically for not just for the same of imitation as the followers of fashion trends. The study also analyzed the process of the selection of dresses and new styles or fashion in clothing. Pappas [6] stated that people want to be alike with one another if they belong to the same society or culture. In the literature of consumer behavior this is also said as Bandwagon effect in which people buy certain things, adopt particular fashion, vote certain people just because other members of the society do the same [7]. More importantly, fashion is in fact the reflection of a person's social nature. It is part of the human nature that he/she compares his/her behavior or actions to that of a more important person. Now the question arises that what is basically meant by fashion. The answer is simple as Pappas [6] suggested that fashion is basically a group agreement as to what the new ideal should be. Anything which is called fashionable is what people wear and why people do this is just because other people wear the same. If people are trying to following something, that makes a thing fashionable. So, it means that a mass imitation for a particular dress or style eventually becomes the fashion. In other words, fashion is derived from mutual imitation. For example, if some celebrity in some fashion show or magazine appeared as wearing nose ring then women of the that region start wearing that kind of ring with no reason other than the fact that other members of the society are wearing that too. It is kind of “Bandwagon Effect” where people keeping on doing something done by others around them. It also exhibits that people act same in the same direction as the others do. Same phenomenon is attached to

the apparels of women. While being dressed up, they get the inspiration from the styles adopted by colleagues, friends, magazines, celebrities and media.

Now the problem is that while living in the society, people are tend to be attracted by the norms or trends prevailing in the society. In the social circle of a girl, if all others are wearing costly dresses and designers' clothing then it also exerts her to wear a costly dress in the social gathering. This can cause the social imbalance for those who can't afford it and consequently may disturb the household budget. If some person doesn't adopt the same fashion which is in practice by other members of the society then he/she is called backward, having no sense of fashion. So to match the trends prevailing in the society, everyone tries to be alike others, it is just like when in Rome do like Romans do. Rigorous research [8] has proved the fact that women are more prone to social trends as in contrast to men. The element of being social tempts a woman more to buy new dresses to wear on social gatherings or parties as compared to men. The excessive spending on buying dresses can disturb the household expenditures. The study also addresses the kind of problems faced by women by being the chaser of fashion and imitators of others all the time. In addition, it is also analyzed that what kind of affordability issues women usually face when buying new dresses just for the sake of staying in line.

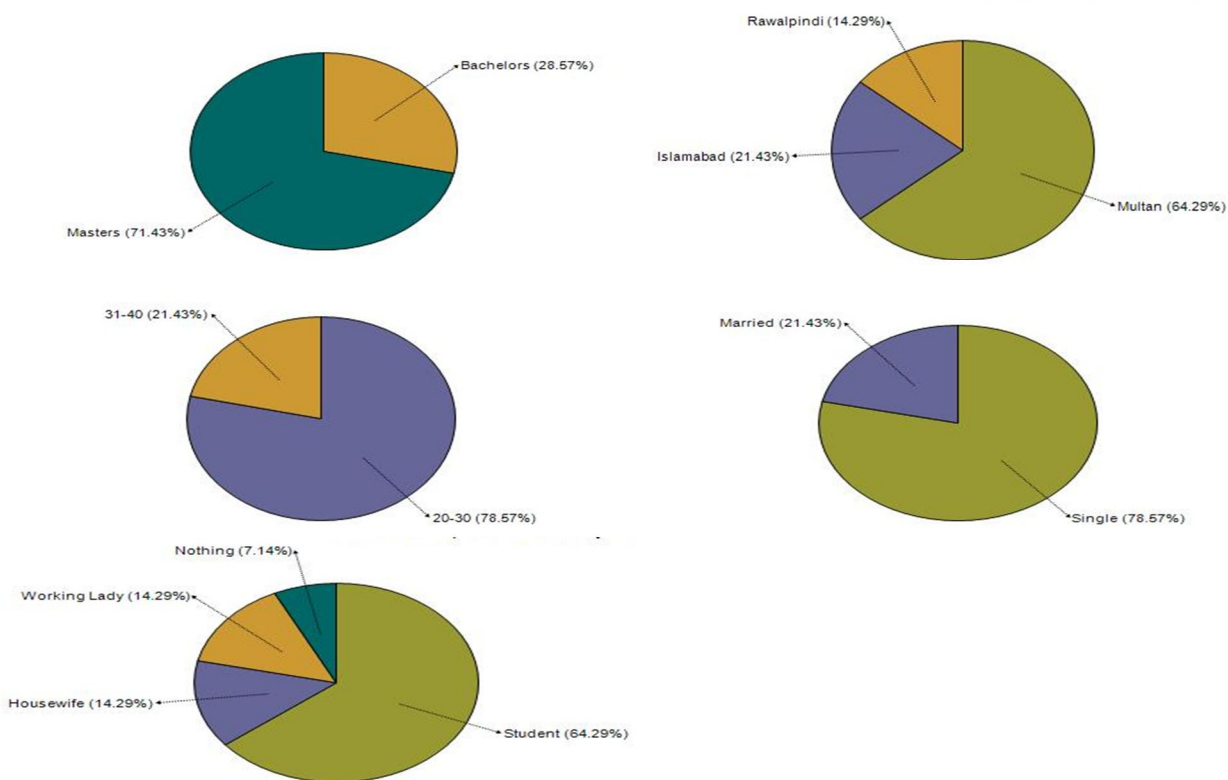
The monthly spending upon buying new dresses is then linked with the imitative behavior of women when they get inspired by someone's dress and wanted to buy it. According to the previous literature in this area, three main reasons were identified for excessive spending upon dresses which were the level of sociability, imitativeness and affordability [9]. It is very hard to find any research except [6, 9] for finding the problems associated to the imitative behavior of women in clothing. The study highlighted the social consequences caused by this phenomenon. The approach of this study is qualitative in its nature whereas it is difficult to find any previous study with the same approach upon this issue. Khabiri et al. [15] conducted a study with the focus upon influential factors in luxury apparel purchases but this was quantitative study in its methodology.

## METHODOLOGY

The nature of the issue, called for an empirical work was, hence an exploratory study is designed on the basis of the phenomenology. The reason for going towards this lies in the beauty of this approach illuminates the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation the interactions between people and also provides the way to understand these interactions. This approach is concerned with the study of experiences from the perspective of different individuals [10]. All of these points made me to choose this approach in my research.

The study is based upon the interviews involving the respondents aged between 18-50 years. This is gender based study so all of the respondents were females. The number of respondents for this study were fifteen (n=15) in total and this decision was made by keeping in view the criteria of Denzin and Lincoln [11], who suggested that 10 respondents are necessary to create sound theoretical base. The respondents include students, housewives, unmarried women doing nothing and working ladies. Some of the respondents were selected from the universities by giving them the presentation about the study and they voluntarily offered themselves to be part of this study by sharing their views. These respondents also arranged meetings with their relatives (other respondents). Some of the organizations are also visited to get the views of working women. The respondents were from three different geographical locations in Pakistan i.e. Islamabad, Rawalpindi and Multan. This helped in creating diversity in the study. Before actually conducting the interviews, a brief guideline was taken by one of the expert in the qualitative research to understand the ways to communicate with females and the opinion is also gained to win the trust of the respondents.

**Figure 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**



## INTERVIEWS

The questions asked during the interviews were semi-structured and open ended. I as a researcher had my objectives in my mind but at the same time I gave full authority to the respondents to share their views. The questions were to analyze the social life of respondents, their spending pattern and their problem in making purchases for new dresses. As it is common in qualitative research, I developed new probes on the basis of findings in initial interviews. This also helped in getting diverse information. All of the interviews were recorded by using a tape-recorder. Due to the social and religious bindings video-recording was not possible for interviewing female respondents. During the presentation, when the prospective respondents were told that their voice will be recorded they were quite hesitant in doing so. But when the ethical statement of the study was described in a way that their name and their responses will not be disclosed to anyone else then they allowed recording of their responses.

It was a bit difficult to conduct first interview from students of university. The girls were hesitating because of difference in gender of interviewer and interviewee. But when the first girl gave the interview and shared her views then the remaining respondents gained the confidence and communicated without any resilience. The initial respondents of the study also persuaded other girls to be part of the study and that helped a lot during the whole process of interviewing.

Generally, the girls were not directly admitting that they copy someone's style or dressing. Every respondent was hesitating to unfold the fact that it is part of human nature to copy or imitate other members of the same society. During the initial interviews, the respondents when asked about the imitation in dressing in a bit direct way then all of the respondents replied in negating that they never do so. The approach for asking this question then changed in the further interviews and asked indirectly and by doing so they admitted that they copy the dresses of their colleagues and friends.

The interviews conducted from working ladies were difficult to handle because the meeting was fixed at their workplace and there was a bit interruption during the process of the interview. They have to answer the questions and meanwhile they have to handle the unexpected office work. As their views were being recorded on the tape-recorder so the interruptions were also recorded and became a bit difficult to transcribe those interviews.

**Data Analysis:**

Data analysis stage is one of the crucial stages of the qualitative research. For this study of analyzing the imitative behavior, Phenomenology approach principles provided the guidelines for analysis. By taking help from this theory, initial themes and categories found in the initial interviews and then based on the findings of those, further path was set accordingly. The findings of the study and the themes generated by results were then compared to the available literature on this topic.

During the analysis stage, two qualitative softwares were used. The first one was Dragon NaturallySpeaking version 11, which helped in transcribing the tape-recorded interviews. With the help of this software the audio files were changed into MS-Word file without wasting the time on personally writing all of the interviews by hand. This software enabled me to just speak the interviews in front of computer and the software wrote all of the information in Word-document.

Secondly, the other qualitative software was NVivo version 10. This software helped in doing the analysis of the data gathered by interviews. Now a day, NVivo is proved to be information management tool for the qualitative research. The document shaped interviews prepared by Dragon NaturallySpeaking were then imported to NVivo and various analysis techniques or queries such as Word tree, Text searching, Word frequency and cloud tags were then applied to data.

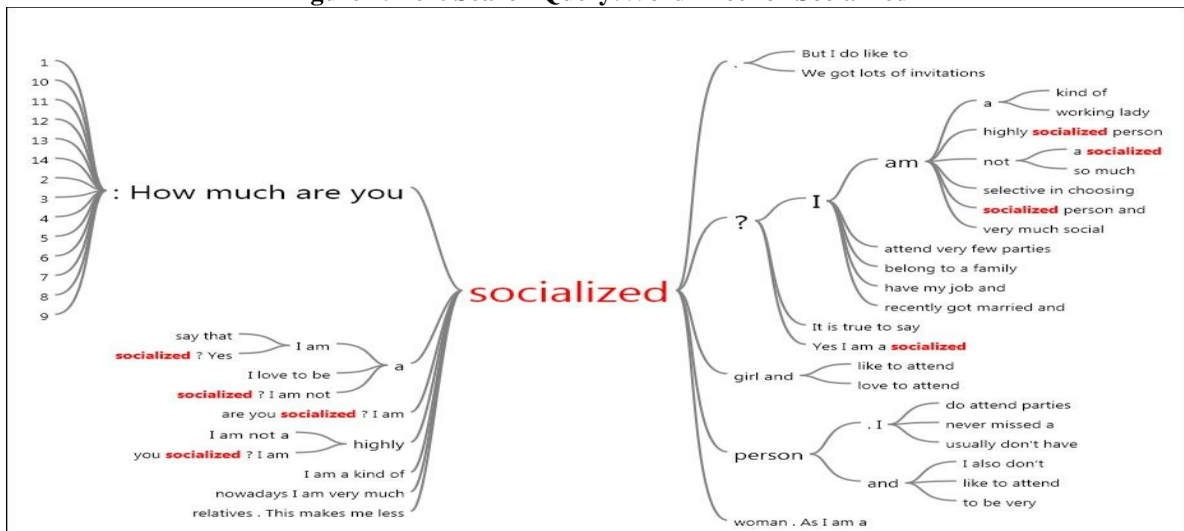
**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Rigorous help was taken from NVivo for finding the results of the study. The queries like Word tree, text searching, word frequency, cloud tags and nodes modeling were applied to the data for the purpose of analysis. For analyzing the socialization of the respondents, the text searching query was applied and that unfold many aspects related to the socialization.

**Socialization:**

Figure 2 shows the word tree which was generated by word search query for the word “Socialized”. When the respondents were asked that how much they are socialized then in the reply to this question they replied with various comments by this they can be categorized in three different types of personality traits. Some were highly socialized and it is judged by the comments like 1) I love to be socialized, 2) to be social is part of my nature and so on. Some of the respondents were less socialized and remaining doesn’t want to be socialized. Some of the respondents quoted that they don’t have time to be socialized as they have commitments related to their jobs and consequently they categorized themselves as less socialized. Some respondents revealed that they are selective in choosing the parties to attend. To be highly socialized or less directly affects their expenses on buying new dresses because if a person is not socialized then the need for buying new dresses is minimized automatically. Some respondents shared that their family structure and religious bindings don’t allow them to be social and to attend every function from their social circle.

**Figure 2. Text Search Query:Word Tree for Socialized**

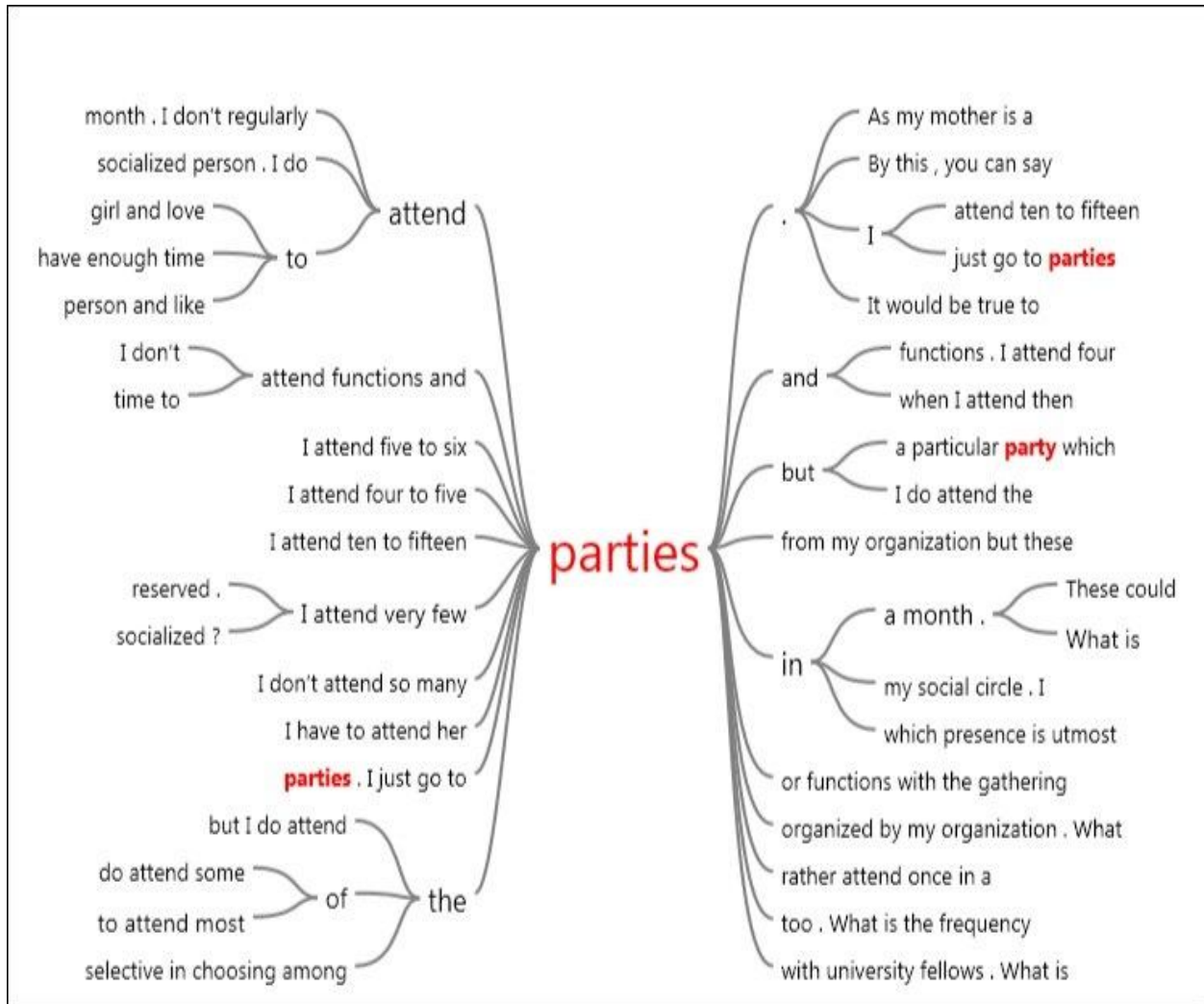


It is also evident from previous research [12] that highly socialized person spends more on purchasing new dresses.

In the same concern another query was run to check the number and nature of parties attended by the respondents. Figure 3 serves to elaborate these two concerns quite effectively. Figure 3 highlighted the number and nature of parties attended by different respondents. This number is ranged four to fifteen per month. Meanwhile, it can also be observed that some respondents only attend the parties organized by their organization whereas some attend every single party in their social circle. Some of the respondents also quoted that they don't like to attend parties. It all depends upon the nature of the respondent in defining the frequency of attending parties or functions. Most of the respondents explained themselves very selective in choosing among the parties. They only like to attend the parties which suit their personality and social circle. Some other research studies [15, 16] also support that personality of individuals and their social circles have strong impact upon their buying behavior.

For better clarification of buying behavior another text search query was run with the word "Buying". Figure 5 shows the results of this query. This describes various aspects of buying behavior. In this word tree, respondents explained that they purchase dresses to improve their personality and make good impression on other people in their social circle. They also described their frequency of purchases which is around three to seven dresses a month. Some of the respondents shared that they visit only predefined shops as they don't want to take risk for the quality of stuff. An important thing is highlighted by this tree that respondents also make unplanned purchases without having any need for that purchase. The respondents explained that during their visit to the market if they like the style of a particular dress, they immediately purchase that dress without thinking and without any need. They accepted the facts that by doing this their expenses rise and sometimes their month spending pattern is disturbed.

Figure 3. Text Search Query: Word tree for Parties



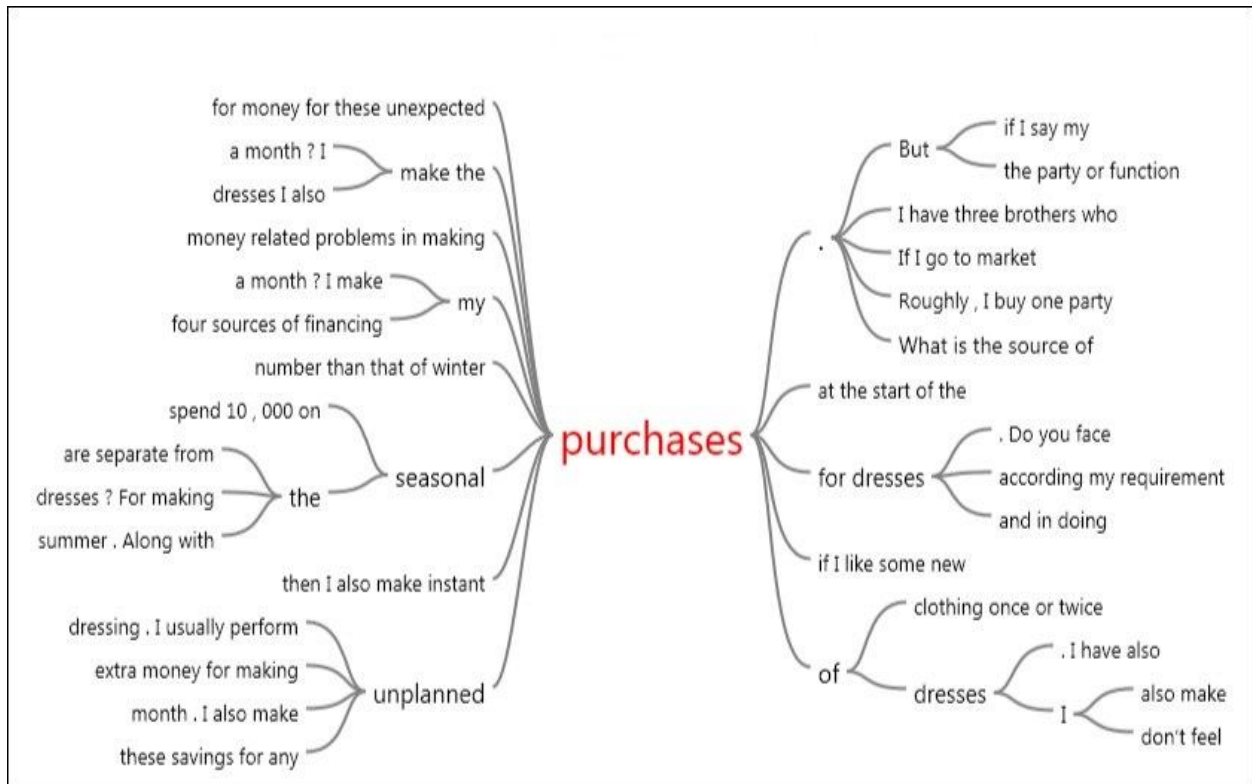


**Frequency of Buying Dresses:**

The frequency of buying dresses is analyzing in the context of purchases during the time span of one month. This is analyzed to know the number and nature of purchases during a month. Figure 4 elaborates the buying behavior of respondents for clothing which describes the reasons behind making purchases of dresses.

This describes that there could be two types of purchases which are planned and unplanned purchases. The planned purchases are those for which the respondents are already prepared and set the budgets and the other is unplanned purchases for which the respondents are not mentally prepared. The respondents explained that the unplanned purchases happen because of any unexpected function. They also explained that the frequency of buying new dresses depends upon two conditions. One is related to the need of purchases and other is the number of purchases they have done in the same month. If they have bought enough dresses in the same month then it is possible that they might select among those dresses to wear on parties and don't go for buying new dresses. For categorizing the need of purchases, the respondents explained that they usually buy dresses in two conditions. One is for purchasing dresses at the start of any season such as winter purchases or summer purchases. The other is for parties and functions. They explained that the party dresses are usually more costly than seasonal dresses.

**Figure 4. Text Search Query: Word tree for Purchases**



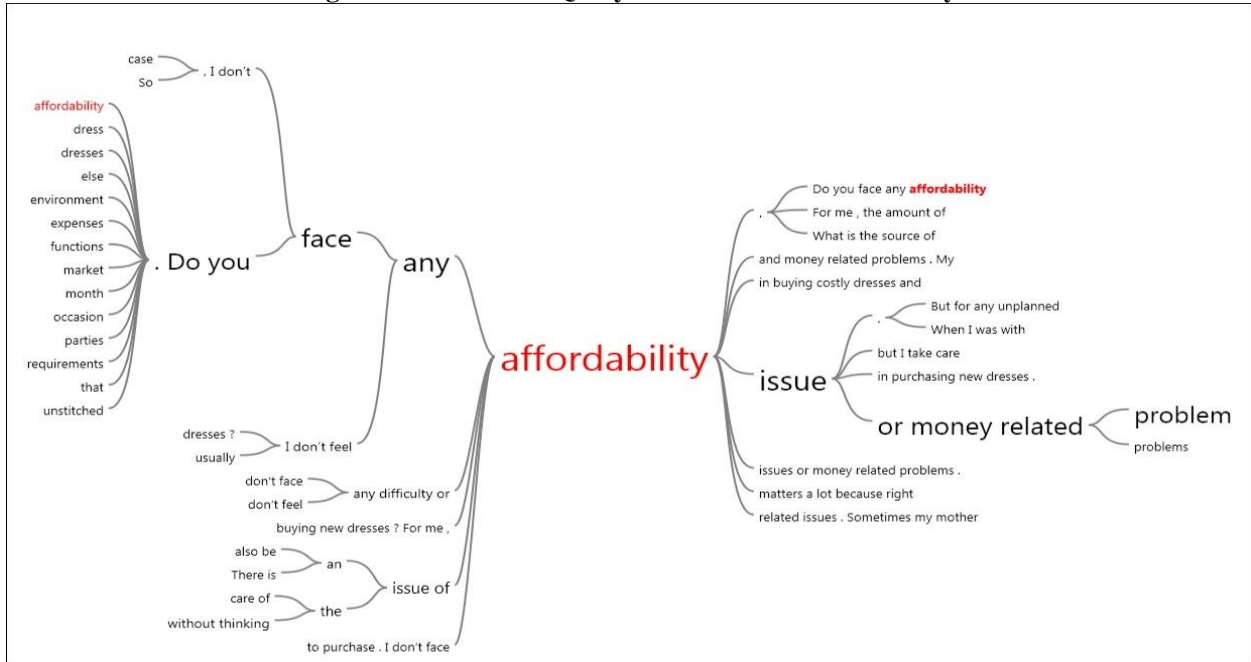
**Affordability:**

In making the purchases of new dresses, the issue of affordability is very crucial. For this, another word search query is run with the word of "Affordability". Figure 6 shows the word tree for this query. The respondents were asked to share any affordability or money related problems in making purchases for new dresses. The results can be observed from figure 6. For most of the respondents, the issue of affordability is very important. They explained that they take care of affordability of their parents for buying new dresses. Meanwhile, they also shared that they don't feel any difficulty whenever they want to buy new dress. They somehow manage the funding for their purchases. It is evident from their views that they used to put pressure on their parents to buy new dresses for them. As in figure 5, some of the respondents quoted that sometimes their mothers forbid them to buy excessive new dresses but they somehow manage money to fulfill their desires by persuading their fathers, brothers or any other earning member in family. This shows that buying new dresses affect their household spending pattern.

Figure 5. Text Search Query: Word tree for Buy



Figure 6. Text Search Query: Word tree for Affordability

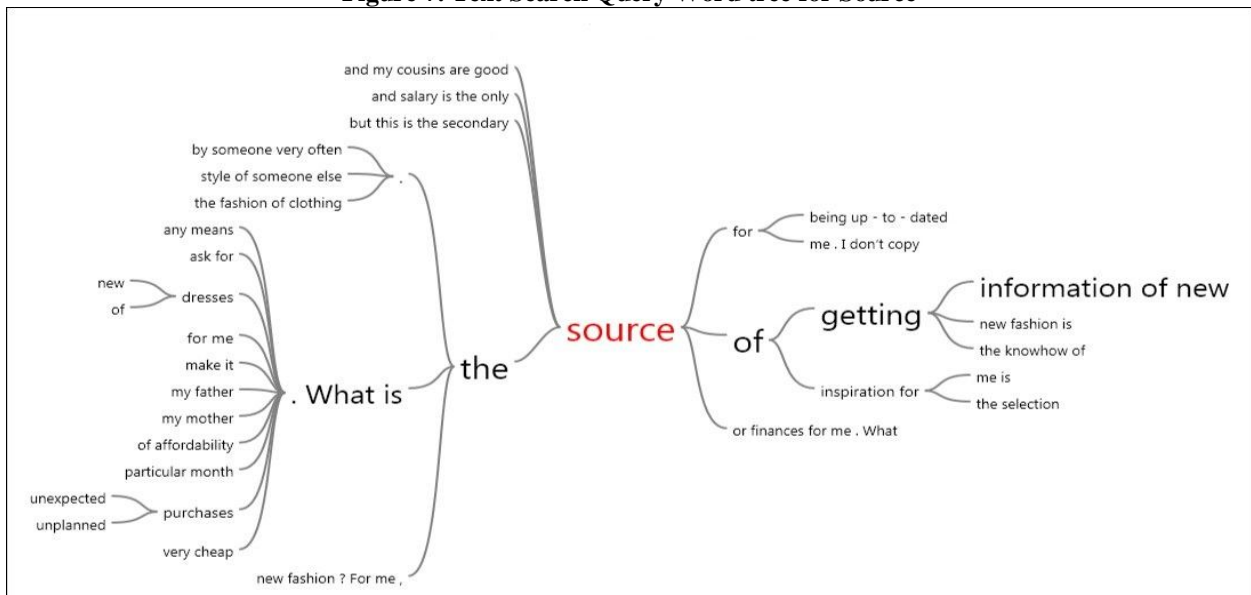


**Source of Information:**

The respondents were also questioned to know about their source of getting information in the context of new fashion. Their views were analyzed by running two word search queries with the words of “source” and “copy” which are shown in figure 7 and 8.

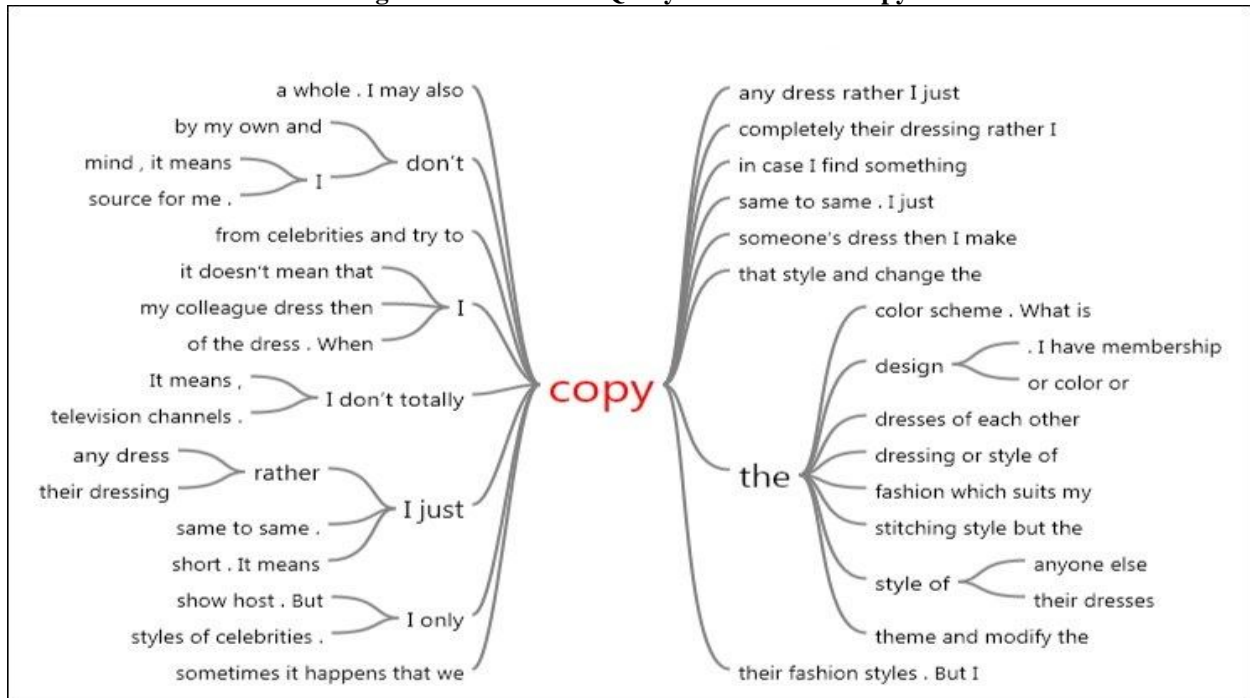
Figure 7 describes the views of respondents about their source of inspiration for selecting their dresses. They explained that there could be many sources such as friends, colleagues, celebrities, magazines, and TV shows or dramas. This is also evident from the research done by Mete [13]. None of the respondents was ready to accept that they copy or imitate the style of other people. But they do it unknowingly and that is also evident from their responses. They imitate the dressing of celebrities and their friends but meanwhile they try to make that particular dress a bit unique by making minor changes in stitching. It is also evident from figure 5 that they make immediate purchases if they like some new fashion in dressing wore by someone else.

Figure 7. Text Search Query Word tree for Source





**Figure 8. Text Search Query Word tree for Copy**



It can also be seen in figure 8 that respondents copy the dressing style of others and make minor changes according to their taste and personality. People make minor changes to their dressing according to their taste, personality and mood [14]. Copying the styles of others leads them to spend more on their dressing which is also evident from figure 4.

**Word Frequency in Responses:**

For the purpose of making the results more understandable, another query was run in NVivo i.e. word frequency query. By this, the words which are commonly used by the respondents during interviews are shown in tag clouds.

**Figure 9. Word Frequency Query: Tag cloud for Word frequency**

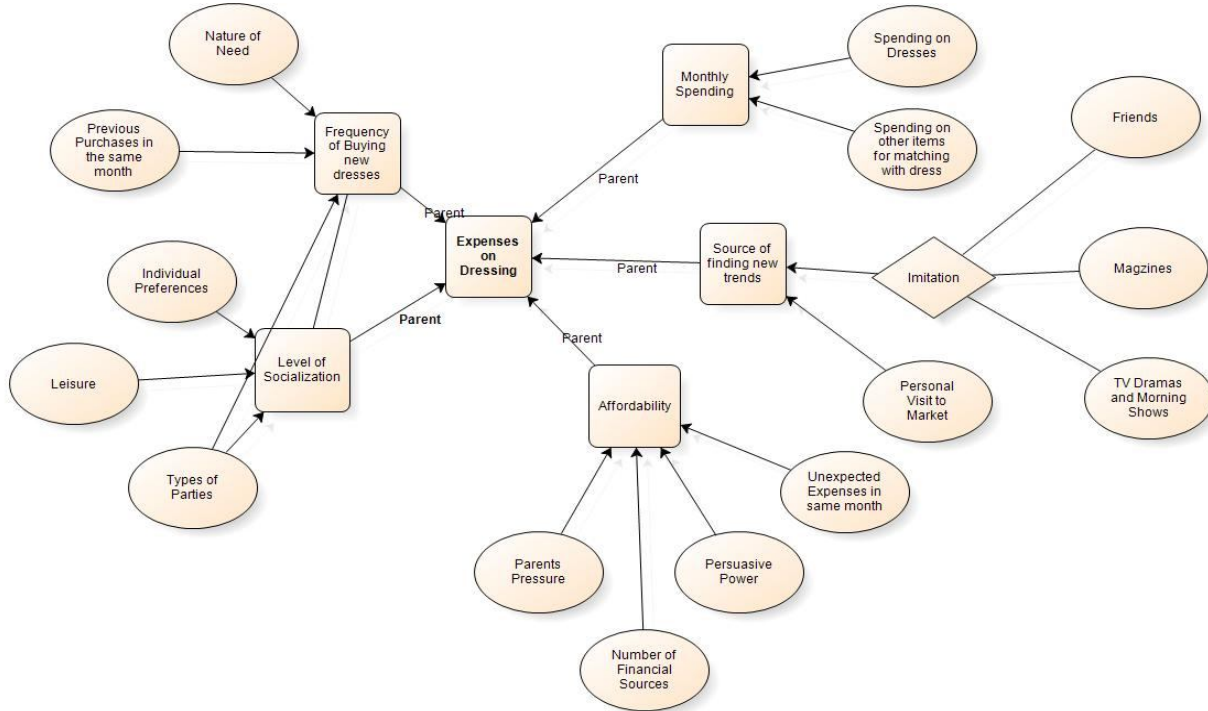


This helps in capturing the whole view of responses in a single sight. Figure 9 shows the most common words uttered by respondents during interviews. New dresses, parties, function, socialization, problem in purchasing are most common words. This shows that most of the respondents faced the money related problems in buying new dresses. This also explained that buying new dresses is very important for respondents.

**Model by Nodes:**

'visit to markets and imitation of trends from friends, fashion magazines and television dramas or morning shows. If the imitation will become common in respondents then this can raise their expenses. Nvivo generated this model automatically by identifying various nodes in responses.

**Figure 10. Relationship among Nodes Model by Nodes**



**CONCLUSION**

People try to copy the styles of others and in doing so they disturb the household spending pattern in particular and economy in general. The study showed that sometimes women spend more on clothing just to maintain their status in the society and to be praised in the family or social gatherings. In the countries like Pakistan, males either in shape of brothers, fathers or husband are tend to be the sole earning members of many household and most of times they are suffered by the expected and unplanned purchases by the women in the family. This study defined the reasons of uneven expenses on dressing by women and they rarely face any difficulty in managing the financing for their needs and they do so by putting pressure on the earning members of household. This research is only limited to find the reasons for excessive spending on dresses. The further research is needed to explore these reasons in particular so that the remedies could be found to reduce these excessive spending on dresses.

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