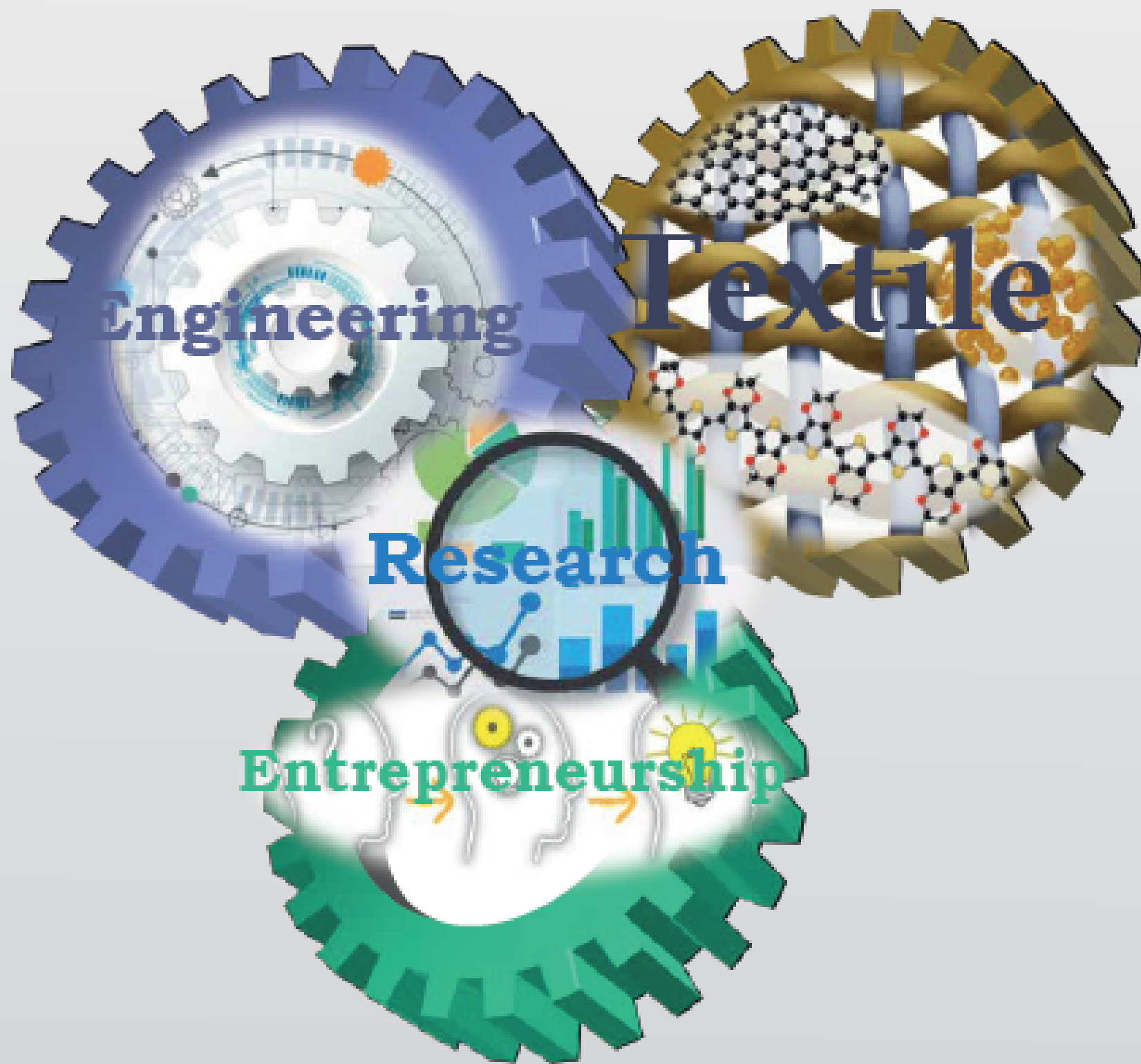


**9th INTERNATIONAL TEXTILE CONFERENCE &
3rd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE on
ENGINEERING and ENTREPRENEURSHIP 2021**

Proceedings of 9th ITC & 3rd ICEE 2021



18-19 November 2021, Tirana, Albania





**9th International Textile Conference & 3rd
International Conference on Engineering and
Entrepreneurship 2021**

November 18-19, 2021, Tirana, ALBANIA

BOOK OF PROCEEDINGS

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Polytechnic University of Tirana
Mechanical Engineering Faculty

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- **Energetics**
- **Constructions & Transport**
- **Materials**
- **Production and Management**
- **Textiles (clothes, footwear and leather)**

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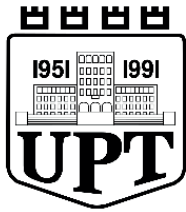
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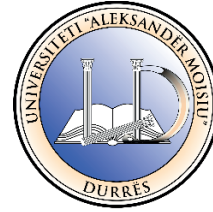
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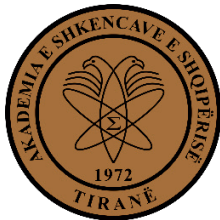
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Attitudes towards Wearing Facemasks as a Fashion Accessory

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Abstract

The global Covid 19 pandemic introduced a new item in everyday dress – the facemask. During 2020, fashion elements crept in the design of this primarily functional item. This research aims to understand the importance of fashion and aesthetical appearance in the choice of facemasks. An online questionnaire was distributed via different social media in France examining types of masks worn and the understanding of masks as a fashion accessory. The research indicates that surgical masks are worn most often, with price being the prevalent criterion for their choice. Masks are primarily seen as a personal protection equipment. However, in a small fashion-conscious subgroup of the population the appearance of face masks chosen primarily for their aesthetic appeal can be noticed. This is particularly applicable to textile masks, weather certified or homemade which are seen as part of sustainable fashion.

Keywords: COVID-19, facemasks, fashion

1. Introduction

Fashion is often oversimplified to a frivolous pastime, an attitude that ignores its role as a representative of the zeitgeist and deeper social, cultural, environmental and political fluctuations. With that in mind, the fashion aspects of facemasks worn during the early stages of COVID 19 become an interesting topic.

The creating process of functional clothing begins and ends with the user specific requirements [1]. Face masks belong to a subgroup of medical textiles termed personal protective equipment (PPE), in the form of surgical masks used for various medical procedures and filtering face-piece respirators (FFRs) recommended for use during aerosol-generating procedures on patients. From the early stages of the pandemic, the use of facemasks, primarily for medical personnel and subsequently for the general public was advocated. As reported by the WTO [2], at the beginning of the pandemic around 50% of surgical masks were produced in China, Germany and the USA, while FFRs were mainly produced by Singapore. The rapid demand for facemasks combined with a disturbance of the global supply chain caused global shortages, leading to export bans on PPE imposed by a number of countries. Consequently, prices worldwide rocketed. All these factors promoted an “all hands to the deck” attitude in the production of homemade sewn textile

masks for the general public. Textile masks were worn worldwide, even though they provide less protection [3]. In a rapidly developed science-policy interface changes in policy, including laws, regulations and government guidance were made [4]. In the era of social media, the inconsistencies in official recommendations caused a vociferous debate in the general public amongst the proponents and opponents of mask wearing through all possible outlets, yet masks became an inseparable part of the “new normal”. The general pathway included firstly mandatory use of any type of masks in closed and crowded spaces, such as supermarkets or public transport; progressing in some countries to mandatory use of any type of masks in all public spaces; and lastly since January 2021 some countries started defining the types of masks to be used in order to provide protection.

“Fashion begins where the desire for novelty relegates functional considerations to a secondary level” [5]. The novelty aspect was best witnessed in the prolific designs of textile masks, homemade or ready-to-wear, even if in some cases (e.g. facemasks to match swimming suits) personal protection was doubtful. Moreover, the addition of aesthetic and decorative elements is opposed to the definition of functional design, as presented by the Textile Terms and Definitions published by The Textile Institute. Designing surgical masks and FFRs in new colour pallets to be it plain black or pastel brings an element of fashion in the design. Fashion transcends aesthetic design by providing individuals with the opportunity to broadcast their views on society, its politics, its environmental concerns or its social issues through dress [6]. Baring seasonality, it can be argued that the facemask in the past year has acquired all additional fashion concepts.

Wearing facemasks in public places is a prevalent practice in many East Asian countries, either as a common courtesy when an individual has a cold or as prevention against air pollution [7]. In the west, prior to the Covid pandemic, it was rarely witnessed. Leone [8] has explored the meaning of a surgical mask to the western mind. He argues that masks are not just associated with the idea of medical treatment, but rather with that of traumatic medicalization, a situation indicative of risk and danger for the wearer. Further psychological evidence presented by Howard [9] identified undesirable appearance as a key psychological impact of facemasks. These arguments can be seen as a contributing factor to the desire to personalize the facemask, even at the price of reducing its functionality.

Sustainability was the key issue in the fashion industry of 2019, as such reflected in the perceptions of facemasks. Interesting examples of recycling textiles into FFRs can be seen in the works of Zhijun Wang, who since 2013 in cooperation with various brands reconstructs footwear into FFRs for smog protection [10].

This research aims to understand the importance of fashion and aesthetical appearance in the choice of facemasks.

2. Research methodology

To define the attitudes towards wearing masks an online questionnaire was distributed in May 2021 via different social media in France. Non-probability snowball sampling technique was used to construct the sample, where questionnaires were redistributed by an initial group of respondents to include more participants. In this way 134 fully completed questionnaires were obtained.

The questionnaire included demographic parameters, as well as questions related to the wearing of facemasks. Questions relating to face mask included: type of masks worn (surgical, FFP2,

certified textile masks, homemade, textile masks); criteria for mask selection (sustainability, protection, looks, comfort, legislation, price); retail outlet where the masks were bought (pharmacies, local business, supermarkets, homemade, online, other). To see the importance of the aesthetic appearance of masks questions regarding the importance of masks to personal style, frequency of coordinating facemasks to clothing, preferred facemask color, willingness to pay more for aesthetically pleasing facemasks, in addition to the general importance of fashion to the responded were included in the questionnaire. Finally, two open-ended questions regarding the opinion whether face masks can be a fashion statement and description of their favorite mask.

3. Results and discussion

Due to the non-probability sampling of the questionnaire the distribution of demographic parameters was skewed towards female participants (75,5%) and younger individuals (71,6% aged 18-30 years, 14,2% aged 30-40 years, 14,2% over 40 years. Demographics were not related to any of the examined parameters for mask wearing.

As can be seen on figure 1, the majority of respondents wore surgical masks (67.2%), followed by certified textile masks (23.9%), while homemade textile masks (5,2%) and FFP2 masks (3.7 %) were less worn. Masks were usually purchased at supermarkets (33.7%) and pharmacies (27,0 %), or supplied by employers (11.2%), bought online (9.6%), in local businesses (9.0%) or homemade (9.6%). Respondents were asked to select one or more criteria for selecting masks. As seen on figure 2 purchasing masks was most influenced by price (50.0%) and comfort (43.3%). Other criteria when choosing masks were protection (28.4%), legislation (28.4%), sustainability (27.6%) and appearance (24.5%).

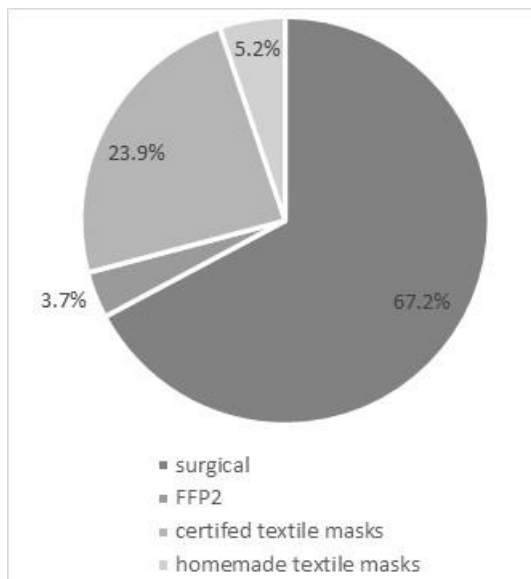


Figure 1. Types of masks worn

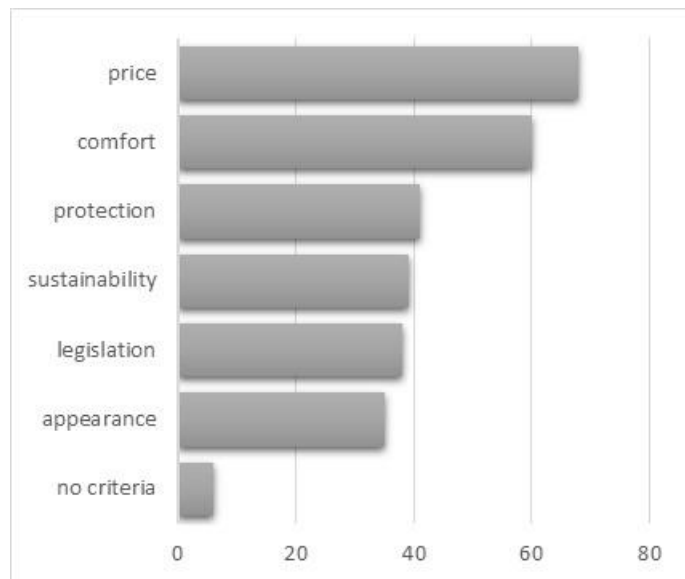


Figure 2. Criteria for selecting masks

The criteria for selecting masks influenced the type of mask worn. A chi-square test was conducted to see the differences between groups who selected masks according to a certain criterion, the summary significance coefficients presented in table 1. In comparison to the general population where certified textile masks were worn by only 23.9%, they were worn by 42.4% of respondents who selected masks by appearance, 45.5% of respondents lead by

sustainability in their selection and 34.4% of those whose primary criterion was comfort. In addition, homemade textile masks were also more popular with groups who select masks by appearance (12.1%) and sustainability (13.5%). In contrast, medical masks were preferred by 77.6% of respondents whose selection criteria was price.

Table 1. Chi-square coefficient for cross tabulation of criteria for mask selection and most often worn masks

	Criteria for mask selection					
	appearance	comfort	sustainability	legislation	price	protection
χ^2	14.339	8.795	25.336	6.038	8.674	2.014
df	3	3	3	3	3	3
p	.002*	.032*	.000*	.110	.034*	.570

To further examine how facemasks were worn by respondents who selected masks by appearance a chi-square test was conducted. Significant differences were found regarding the general significance of fashion for the respondent, coordinating face masks with outfit, using colored or designed masks, readiness to pay more for aesthetically pleasing face masks and masks as an indicator of personal style. The parameter was also connected with shopping in local businesses and perceived comfort. Table 2 gives the summary significance coefficients of this test.

If face masks are understood as a fashion accessory their appearance is related to the general fashion attitudes of the individual. General fashion attitudes were measured on a scale from 1- "fashion is very unimportant to me" to 5- "fashion is very important to me". Whereas in the examined population fashion was very important to 17.2% of respondents and important to 40.3% of respondents, it gains importance among those who select masks according to looks (30.3% very important, 48.5% important, 15.2% neutral, 6.1% unimportant, 0% very unimportant). It is therefore indicated that a subgroup of fashionistas is elevating the mask from a merely practical item to a fashion accessory.

When it comes to paying attention to coordinating face mask with the outfit in the general population 32.2% of respondents never paid attention, 38.0% sometimes, 14.0% often, 11.6% always and 4.1% did not answer. Both groups who selected masks according to appearance and those who think that fashion is important are twice more likely to coordinate the facemasks with their clothing.

These respondents were also more willing to pay a higher price for facemasks with a pleasing appearance. Whereas in the general population only 31.3% would pay more for aesthetically pleasing masks 52.2% of those who find fashion important and 57.6% of those who select masks due to appearance would.

Considering the masks design, facemasks worn by the respondents were generally white/blue (38.1%), black (37.3%), with a motif (13.4%) or in a solid colour (11.2%). When appearance is the key criterion for mask selection the most often worn facemasks are black (57.6%), with a motif (21.2%) or in a solid colour (15.2%). It can therefore be concluded that this group prefers masks with colour as an aesthetical design element.

When it comes to masks as an expression of personal style 41.6% of respondents believed that facemasks can express an individual's style, whereas 58.2% did not. However, within those respondents who select masks by appearance the number of affirmative answers rises to 60.6%. This makes it clear that in certain cases facemasks can gain the status of a fashion accessory. To

further explain these attitudes an open-ended question “Are facemasks an affirmation of individual style?” was asked. The answers could generally be grouped in three categories.

Table 2. Chi-square coefficient for cross tabulation of appearance as criterion and other variables

	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8
V1	$\chi^2=10,868$ df=4 p=0,028*	$\chi^2=25,173$ df=4 p=0,000*	$\chi^2=19,181$ df=3 p=0,000*	$\chi^2=14,001$ df=1 p=0,000*	$\chi^2=9,789$ df=1 p=0,002*	$\chi^2=7,388$ df=1 p=0,007*	$\chi^2=6,371$ df=1 p=0,012*
V2	X	$\chi^2=35,832$, df=16, p=0,003*	$\chi^2=17,454$ df=12 p=0,133	$\chi^2=11,288$ df=4 p=0,024*	$\chi^2=4,708$ df=4 p=0,319	$\chi^2=2,640$ df=4 p=0,620	$\chi^2=3,336$ df=4 p=0,503
V3	X	X	$\chi^2=23,244$ df=12 p=0,026*	$\chi^2=11,203$ df=4 p=0,024*	$\chi^2=10,202$ df=4 p=0,037*	$\chi^2=10,028$ df=4 p=0,040*	$\chi^2=4,989$ df=4 p=0,288
V4	X	X	X	$\chi^2=18,182$ df=3 p=0,000*	$\chi^2=11,637$ df=3 p=0,009*	$\chi^2=6,045$ df=3 p=0,109	$\chi^2=0,949$ df=3 p=0,814
V5	X	X	X	X	$\chi^2=1,300$ df=1 p=0,254	$\chi^2=6,572$ df=1 p=0,010*	$\chi^2=10,174$ df=1 p=0,001*
V6	X	X	X	X	X	$\chi^2=2,733$ df=1 p=0,098	$\chi^2=3,203$ df=1 p=0,703
V7	X	X	X	X	X	X	$\chi^2=2,833$ df=1 p=0,092

Variables:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Criterion appearance | 5. Readiness to pay higher price |
| 2. General significance of clothing | 6. Buying in local business |
| 3. Coordinating mask with outfit | 7. Criterion comfort |
| 4. Colour/design preference | 8. Masks are expression of personal style |

The first group consisted of individuals who believe that masks as an item in everyday use can contribute towards individual style, and also make the individual feel better about themselves. These attitudes can be seen in the statements:

“Masks have become a fashion accessory, same as bags. We can coordinate them with clothes to feel better.”

“Yes, (as fashion) they are foremost a reflection of the time we live in.”

A second group can see changes in the perception of facemasks but personally refuses to accept them as an accessory:

“As far as I am concerned no, on the other hand some people coordinate facemasks with outfits to express their individuality, the need to be different and of course to refuse to accept facemasks solely for sanitary reasons.”

Finally, there were respondents firmly opposed to the wearing of masks for aesthetical or social reasons:

“Masks spoil the look more than they contribute to it.”

“Hiding smiles does not make us look better.”

“As necessary as they are in the current context, they should never be an object of fashion or style, they are neither a toy nor an element of beauty.”

In addition, respondents who selected masks according to the criterion of appearance were more likely to buy them in local business, which implies increased ecological and social awareness. It was interesting to note that the criteria of choosing masks for their comfort and appearance were linked. In a time when mask wearing sometimes is often debated and controversial issue, it might be socially more acceptable to explain mask selection by practical criteria such as comfort, rather than frivolous aesthetical demands.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this research was understand the importance of fashion and aesthetical appearance in the choice of facemasks. The research indicates that surgical masks are worn most often, with price being the prevalent criterion for their choice. Masks are primarily seen as a personal protection equipment. However, in a small fashion-conscious subgroup of the population the appearance of face masks chosen primarily for their aesthetic appeal can be noticed. This is particularly applicable to textile masks, weather certified or homemade which are seen as part of sustainable fashion.

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