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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FASHION AND CONSUMER DEMAND

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1- INTRODUCTION :

Fashion , is the visual representation of a given historical period . Ancient civilization identified the exercise of power , political , religious , or military , with visual elements related to the grab worn by kings , priests , or warriors . this practice continues at present in those countries where old traditions have been preserved , and in authoritarian societies . It later times fashion in its more primitive sense became generalized to larger groups of people as society became organized in classes , each having different role in economic , social , and intellectual development . In modern times , as the class system became less rigid , fashion became even more generalized , indicating the economic level of the people as well as the surroundings in which they lived .

The twentieth century has witnessed a completely new situation , clothes , traditionally individually made are now mass-produced . fabrics are more available and less expensive , and the garment industry has grown by leaps and bounds , becoming an extremely important economic factor worldwide .

Fashion reflects the way the consumer thinks and lives, it is influenced by the same social , economic, technological, and other environmental forces that influence all other aspects of people's lives. Executives on all levels of the fashsion inddustry must be aware of these environmental conditions if they are to make informed decision about styling and merchandising .

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This paper examines the predominant influences on the consumer and in turn on fashion . Because fashion reflects life, people are obviously important in determining what fashion will be and that the fashion industry will produce. Today fashion begins and ends with the consumer. Consumers are people who buy and use merchandise. Customers, a more specific term, are people who buy and use merchandise from a particular producer or retailer . As marketing strategies have become more sophisticated, manufacturers and retailers have had to consider consumers wants and needs. The ability understand consumer preferences is a valuable asset at any level of the fashion industry .

2 - ANALYSIS OF FASHION :

In general, analysts have drawn a fundamental distinction between applications of the term fashion .

The term may be applied to a consumer product , but it can also be used in describing a pattern of consumer response towards new forms of consumer products .

What is the Fashion ?

It is a fundamental importance to appreciate the relationship between the terms : Fashion, Design, and Style. Spoles had suggested that , in the context of clothing, a design is a unique combination of characteristics that , within a given class of products, distinguishes one item from another, shirts, dresses, trousers, and hats may each be seen as an individual class of product with an almost infinite number of design possibilities within each class. Differences can exist within classes in terms of a number of variables, and construction, as well as fabric colour, structure, surface pattern, and texture. It is a unique combination of such variables that constitutes a design .

Thus many designs with common features may be classified as being of the same style . Items of clothing with the same basic outline and constructions, for example, may constitute a single style .

Nystrom defined fashion as : nothing more or less than the prevailing style at any given time. He continued by nothing that a style is a characteristic or distinctive made or method of expression, presentation or conception . Jarnow, Judelle, and Guerreiro emphasized that a style does not become a fashion until it achieves some degree of popularity . Furthermore, it remains a fashion only as long as it maintains that popularity . Spoles suggested that fashion products exhibit a number of unique characteristics. Thus fashions have a limited lifespan and are continuously subject to obsolescence. Indeed, it is evident that consumer adoption of many clothing products is based on such factors as novelty content rather than on superiority in terms of technical performance .

Spoles defined the fashion process as : a dynamic mechanism of change through which a potential fashion object is transmitted from its point of creation to public introduction , discernible public acceptance, and eventual obsolescence .

Benthall and Polhemus, for example, suggested that changes in fashion reflect social change .

Simmel considered the adoption of fashion products as a form of imitation that may give rise to a process of social equalization . Robinson, for example , referred to fashion

as a subtle and volatile form of luxury and stressed that utility or functional qualifications play the subordinate role .

Similarly , Young considered fashion to be a process of continuous social change that was not in any way handicapped by a compulsion to provide progress . She commented that : fashion is evolution without destination .

Gregory observed that a distinctive fashion has the same economic effect as a brand or trade mark : it distinguishes a particular product in the minds of buyers and creates loyalty to a particular producer or seller, it lifts the product out of the market for more standardized goods and creates a speciality which is relatively free from comparative judgement of price, quality , or durability. In this sense, fashion is a purely monopolistic element .

3 - FASHION CYCLES :

Consumers are exposed each season to a multitude of new styles created by designers . Some are rejected immediately often by the buyer on the retail level . But others are accepted for a time, as demonstrated by consumers purchasing and wearing them . The way in which fashion changes is usually described as a fashion cycle Fig. (1) , It is difficult to categorize or theorize about fashion without oversimplifying . Even so , the fashion cycle is usually depicted as a bellshaped curve encompassing five stages introduction, rise in popularity, peak of popularity, decline in popularity , and rejection . The cycle can reflect the acceptance of a single style from one designer, or of a general style .

3.1. INTRODUCTION :

A designer interprets the times in a creative form , and then a manufacturer offers the new styles to the public. When we speak of the latest fashions from Paris, they may not yet be accepted by anyone. Therefore, at this first stage of the cycle, fashion implies only style and newness .

Most new styles are introduced at a high price level . Designers whose names are respected for both their creativity and their sense of timing , are often given financial backing and allowed to design with very few limitations on creativity, quality of raw materials , or amount of fine workmanship .

Naturally, production costs are high and only a few people can afford the resulting clothes .

3. 2. INCREASE IN POPULARITY :

As the new fashion is purchased , worn, and seen by more people it may begin to rise in popularity . In the case of an expensive item , sales will never be high , but the item may be the most popular in a designer's collection or even the most popular of all high priced new fashions.

The popularity of the style may further increase through copying and adaptation. Some manufacturers may buy the right to produce line-for-line copies exact duplicates of the original style. Which they then sell at somewhat reduced prices. Other manufacturers may try to copy it with cheaper fabric and less detail, and sell at still lower prices . Other designers or stylists may modify the original to

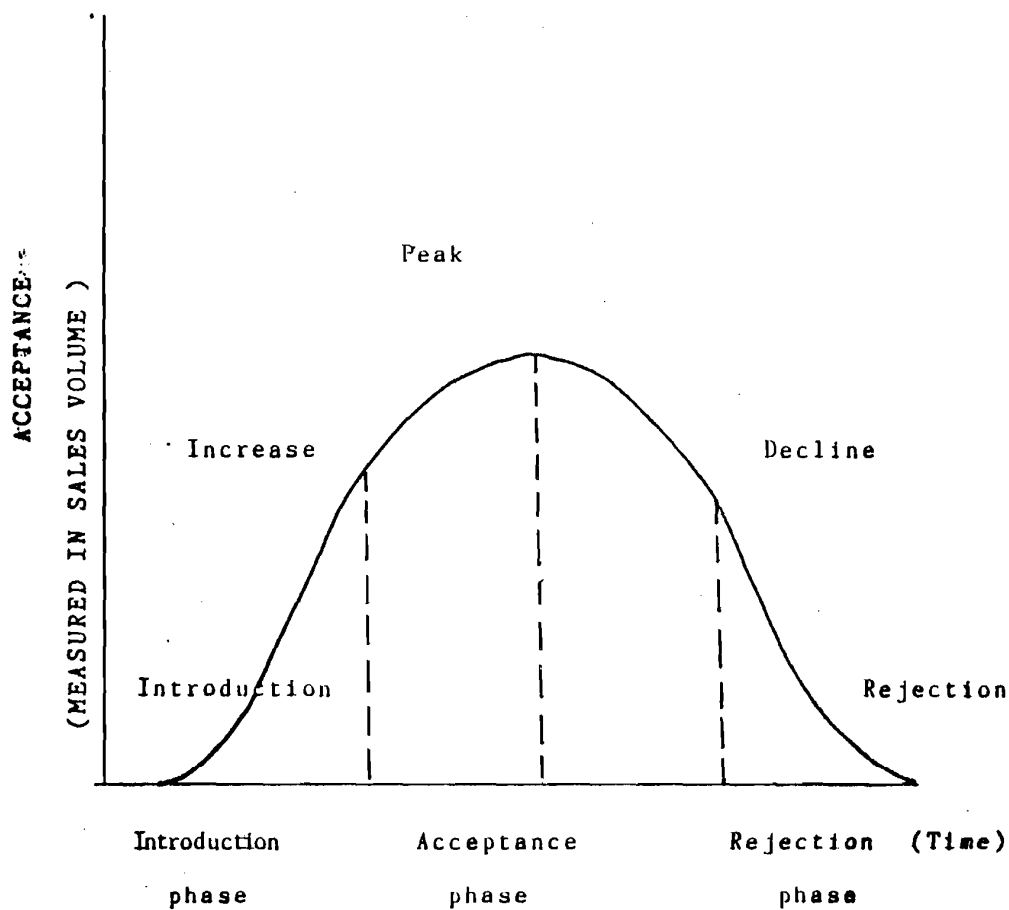


Figure (1) Fashion Cycle .

suit the needs of their customers . Volume production requires a likelihood of mass acceptance . Large manufacturing firms cannot allow the creative freedom that high fashion demands because of manufacturing and marketing restrictions . The larger firms must follow pre-established trends rather than create new ones .

3. 3. PEAK OF POPULARITY :

When a fashion is at the height of its popularity , it may be in such demand that many manufacturers copy it or produce adaptations of it at many price levels . Styles with great appeal are produced in many variations .

3. 4. DECLINE IN POPULARITY :

Eventually , so many copies are mass-produced that fashion conscious people tire of the style and begin to look for something new . Consumers till wear

garments in the style, but they are no longer willing to buy them at regular prices .

3. 5. REJECTION OF A STYLE OR OBSOLESCENCE :

In the last phase of the fashion cycle, consumers have already turned to new look , Thus beginning a new cycle for another style .

4. ECONOMIC INFLUENCED ON CONSUMER DEMAND :

When the economic situation is unstable, the fashion picture is also unstable. Not only is money in short supply , but people seem to be confused about what they really want . For example , in an economic upswing colors are basically cheerful and happy , but they have a grayed palette when the economy is in trouble . In a recession , people are likely to buy conservatively or at least buy fashions they believe to be of lasting value .

4. 1. CONSUMER SPENDING :

The amount of maney consumers spend on fashion and other goods depends on their income . Income as it affects spending is measured in three ways : Personal income , disposable income , and discretionary income . Personal income is the gross amount of income from all sources, such as wages, salaries, interest, and dividends .

Disposable income is personal income minus taxes . This amount determines a person's purchasing power .

Discretionary income is the income left after food, lodging, and other necessities have been paid for . This is the money available to be spent or saved at will . If the total personal income , desposable income , or discretionary income for an entire country is divided by its total population the result is the average per capita income in each category . Income , however, is relative to the economic situation. Thus, income is meaningful only in relation to the amount of goods and services it can buy-its purchasing power. Inflation, recession, the international value of currency, and productivity affect purchasing , power .

4-2- LABOR COSTS :

As people receive higher salaries and live better , the cost of making garments increases . Rising labor costs have practicckally forced the couture out of business . As a result custom designers have started ready-to-wear lines to serve the general public . Now there is little style difference between the clothes of the wealthy and those of the average person, a democratization of fashion is closer to reality. Expensive clothes are made from richer fabrics and have finer detailing, but the difference is not as obvious as it was .

5. SOCIAL INFLUENCES ON CONSUMER DEMAND :

Changes in people's attitudes and life styles change their fashion and buying habits, people want fashions appropriate to their interests and activities . Only in this century have women been allowed to vote, to own property, and to pursue careers-and only after a long struggle . Women's new status and life-styles in turn have changed the way they

dress. Better educated and exposed to new ideas , women want a wider fashion choice . Women need more active clothing . For jobs they need practical and business like clothes.

Men's roles too have changed, affecting their style of dress. The shortening work week and a more casual life style have increased men's participation in home life and leisure activities .

6. TECHNOLOGICAL INFLUENCES ON CONSUMER DEMAND :

Obviously , mass production would be impossible without technological inventions such as the sewing machine . The development of modern production machinery, such as power sewing machines and cutting tools , had naturally speeded up the process of fashion manufacturing . Today's power machines can run faster than a car engine, sewing over 5000 stitches per minute . Modern cutting techniques include water jets and laser beams . Mass production makes more goods at different price levels available to more people in a shorter time . Technological inventions in the textile industry actually triggered the Industrial Revolution , since, then, advances in spinning weaving , and knitting processes have fostered the growth of our giant textile industry . Modern agricultural developments have improved the quantity and quality of natural fibers . Technological research has made synthetic fibers possible , as well as finishes that change fabric characteristics .

6. 1. TRANSPORTATION :

Modern transportation has also made the logistics of the fashion business more manageable . Improved trucking, railroad , and air freight services quickly bring the newest fashion to the retail store and the consumer . Availability often increases demand .

6. 2. COMMUNICATION :

Modern communication media bring different cultures into contact , making people more aware of other life styles and modes of dress. Now television and daily newspapers bring fashion from around the world into our homes almost instantly . As a result, the public is made aware of the existence of new styles. If the image presented is pleasing, people want the same or similar styles themselves. Thus , one of the greatest impacts of modern communication of fashion is to accelerate change . Communication also speeds up the process of copying . So that merchandise produced throughout the world tends to look similar . The sooner a fashion saturates society , the sooner people tire of it and want change .

6. 3. COMPUTERS :

In textile production computers run many machines, in garment manufacturing they make, grade , and lay out patterns in maker from . At all levels of the industry , computers control inventory and distribution , making it easier and faster to fill orders or replenish stock . Ideally , the computer saves time on paperwork and leaves designers, merchandisers, sales reps, and buyers free for creative thought . On the other hand , many people have let the sales figures maintained by computers

dominate the intuitive judgment they must use in order to anticipate new trends .

7. CRITERIA CONSUMERS USE IN FASHION SELECTION :

To determine the acceptability of fashion , both manufacturers and consumers should consider the criteria used for its selection .

Elements of fashion appeal draw the consumer's attention to a fashion . There are also practical considerations, including quality and price, that the consumer usually evaluates before making a purchase .

7. 1. ELEMENTS OF FASHION APPEAL :

The elements of fashion appeal are basically the same as the elements of design , but here they are viewed by the purchaser rather than the creator .

- * Color usually the first aspect of a garment or accessory to which , consumers respond is color . People relate very personally to color , usually selecting or rejecting a fashion because the color does or does not appeal to them or flatter their own coloring .
- * Texture the surface interest in the fabric of a garment or accessory is called texture . Consumers relate to texture because of its sensuous appeal .
- * Style the elements that define a style include line, silhouette, and details. A garment's appearance is also affected by hanger appeal . Depending on the consumers level of fashion consciousness their judgment will be conditioned by their opinion of what is currently fashionable .

7. 2. PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS :

- * Price is probably the most important practical consideration for the average consumer . The consumer evaluates for the total worth of all the fashion appeal aspects of the total worth of the garment or accessory and their relationship to its retail price .
- * Fit, the try on is a crucial step in the consumer's selection of a garment because sizing is not a guarantee of fit . The department of commerce has tried to set sizing standards .
- * Fabric performance and care . The durability of a garment or accessory and the ease or difficulty of caring for it are often factors in selection. Most consumers prefer easy-care, wash and wear fabrics , although designer and contemporary customers may not mind paying for dry . Cleaning the more delicate fabrics they prefer Easy care and durability are of special concern in children's wear and work clothes .
- * Appropriateness . It is important that a fashion item be suitable or acceptable for a specific occasion or for the needs of the consumer's life style .
- * Brand . Brands are a manufacturer's means of product identification . Some consumers buy on the basis of a particular brand's reputation, often as a result of heavy advertising .

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