Research Paper   **Fine Arts**

The Fashion Cycle and Theories of Fashion

* Sana Mahmoud Abbasi

* Director of the Fashion Design Program, College of Fine Arts & Design, American University in the Emirates, Dubai

ABSTRACT

As a fact in the world of fashion, trends are manifested nearly two years before they actually reach the global markets. It all starts with fashion forecasting agencies, with their intensive analysis of everything starting from political events, musical hits, economic changes and even technological breakthroughs; they can predict the trends that will later on be walking down the catwalk. They identify what color palettes, fabrics and silhouettes that will be utilized for the next season. This gives a collection's direction for private label designers and commercial companies alongside with some private research to maintain their originality. However, the changes every season follow the direction of the fashion cycle. As the new styles are introduced to the public they go through different phases that will be discussed. Furthermore, demographics play an important role in setting the trends. This study will explain the Fashion cycle and its stages, the role of demographics in setting certain trends and where the classic and fad fit into the Fashion cycle in this competitive industry

Keywords : Introduction Stage, Peak of Fashion, Fad, Classic, Trickle-up theory, Trickle-down theory, demographics

Introduction:

Fashion often reflects the society. Important personalities in history have also had an impact on fashion, but no matter how competitive and innovative the Fashion industry is, it actually has to follow what is called the "Fashion Cycle", which has no specific measurable time period. Some styles sustain for longer period of time. Some die out soon, and some styles come back years after they were declined. So we can say that fashion changes with time and has always been evolving to fit the taste, lifestyle and demands of society. It is only natural that the new trends are introduced to the public gradually. The introduction stage is the beginning of an exciting roller coaster ride that the Fashion trends go through every season. There is no doubt that every individual has a unique taste, but it seems that when the style is worn by so many people around us, it is only natural that you will find yourself following the trends and want to try it on as well. However, there are certain rules when it comes to classic. Classic styles are stable and they stay the same throughout the year. While Fad, is the fashion that comes in quickly and is accepted by the mass very rapidly, but sweeps away and become less desirable in a short time. It is short lived, while the classic styles are long lasting. However, demographic studies determine the distribution of the merchandise according to the studied criteria.

The Fashion Cycle:

The ways fashion changes are described as the "Fashion Cycle". A cycle: Is the period of time or life span during which fashion exists. Style: is a particular look, shape or type of apparel. The fashion cycle is usually depicted as a bell-shaped curve encompassing five stages: **Introduction, Rise in popularity, Peak, Decline in popularity, and Rejection.** Consumers are exposed every season to a multitudes of new styles created by designers and are launched by big clothing companies. Some styles are rejected immediately by the buyers on the retail level, while some styles are accepted for a short time. That is demonstrated by the consumers purchasing and accepting to wear these new styles.

A Standard Fashion Cycle
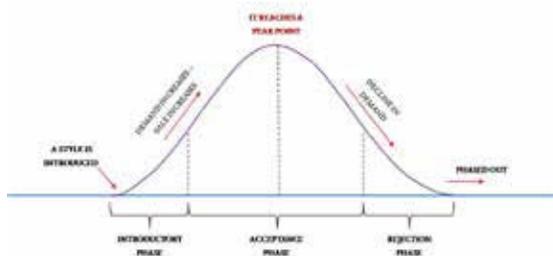
Stages of the Fashion Cycle:

Introduction of a style: Fashion leaders introduce new collections every season for the sake of being innovative and creative. During the introductory phase, the new style is introduced to the public. This new style may or may not appeal to the mass, and therefore be accepted by the consumers. New styles are usually introduced in high price with minimum quantities, to test the market. Usually a new style is worn by the Fashion leaders, athletes, or movie stars, and selected people who can afford it, and mostly celebrities and rich people who love to experiment and try out new styles to grab the attention of the media, and to stand out among the rest. **2. (Rise) Increase in popularity:** A new style worn by a celebrity or famous personality, seen by many people and it may draw attention of buyers, the press, and the public. Most designers also have prêt line that sells at comparatively low prices and can sell their designs in quantities. Manufacturers adopt design and styles to produce with less expensive fabric or less details. The adaptations are made for mass production. **3. Peak in popularity:** Styles at this stage is most popular. When production of any style is in volume, it requires mass acceptance. The manufacturers carefully study trends because the consumer will always prefer clothes that are in the main stream of fashion. When a fashion is at height of its

popularity, it may be in such demand that many manufacturers copy it or produce adaptations of it at many price levels. Length at this stage determines if the fashion becomes classic or Fad **4**. **Decline in popularity**: A time comes after the mass production of a few styles people get tired and began looking for new styles. They still wear the particular style but are not willing to buy them at the same price. With the launch of new collection every season the popularity of the style of the previous seasons declines. Fashion is over saturated or flooded the market. Retail stores put such decline styles on sale rake as off season sale or clearing sale. **5. Dejection period:** It is the last phase of the cycle. Some consumers have already turned to new looks, thus beginning a new cycle. The rejection or discarding of a style just because it is out of fashion is called consumer obsolescence. Since consumers are no more interested in buying, manufactures stop producing and the retailers will not restock the same styles. Now it's time for a new cycle to begin.

Demographics:
Demographics are the quantifiable statistics of a given population. Demographics are also used to identify the study of quantifiable subsets within a given population which characterize that population at a specific point in time. These types of data are used widely in public opinion polling and marketing. Commonly examined demographics include: Gender, age, and ethnicity. Knowledge of languages and disabilities, mobility, home ownership, employment status, and even location are also included in the Demographic study. Demographic studies results determine the type of merchandise that will be in the stores, and help guide the buyers to choose what is appropriate to buy for the people in each geographic location. Even online shopping is based on Demographic studies results. For example in the study conducted by Dina Burkolter & Annette Kluge in 2012, it was found that in regards to *Gender*: Men were seen as early adopters of online shopping. However, with online shopping becoming more common, the number of women shopping online increased (Kim & Kim, 2002). In Germany for instance, in 2009 for the first time, a majority of the women asked about their postal and online shopping behavior, indicated to buy online instead of via mail (bvh, 2010). Gender differences in online shopping were also found regarding product types. For instance, women were more likely than men to shop home furnishings, apparel, and jewelry online (Chiger, 2001; Norum, 2008; Seock & Bailey, 2008) while men were more likely to shop entertainment, videos/DVDs, computers, and electronics online (Norum, 2008). Therefore, we can assume that there are gender differences in respect to online shopping behavior and product types with women buying furniture and apparel online and men technical appliances.

Theories of Fashion:
To understand how new fashion ideas are spread and how they are adapted to the taste, life-style and budgets of various costumers, we need to understand the three variations of the fashion adaptation process:
Traditional adaptation
Reverse adaptation
Mass dissemination.

Trickle-down theory (Traditional Adaptation)
It is based on the traditional process of copying and adapting trendsetting fashion from, Paris, London, Milan, and New York fashion leaders.

Couture designer fashion is expensive and it is affordable by only a few people.

Those designs are copied again and again at lower prices until they have been seen often by the conservative buyers.

It starts from to high fashion to the common people.

Trickle-up theory (Reverse Adaptation)
It starts from street fashion to high fashion.

Since 1960s designers and manufactures pay more attention to the customers innovations as they watch people on street to find ideas.

The "gypsy" look is a good example of a street look which reached the runway.

Trickle-across theory (Mass Dissemination)
Modern communications bring fashion from around the world into our homes instantly.

Many separate markets have developed to various age ranges, life style, tastes.

Various designer and manufacturer labels appeal to various market segments at different price points.

Mass production means that many different styles can be accepted at a same time.

Classic
Some styles never become complete obsolete, but interest remains more or less accepted for an extended period. These are called the classic styles that they are a must to have in the closet. For example: A pair of jeans, a black jacket, a classic blazer, or a polo shirt

Fads
A short lived fashion is called fad. Fads either lack the design strength to hold consumers attention for a long time, or they are just crazy styles that they may be worn for fun, but their popularity is short lived. For example: bold patterns, or floral designs, spikes, or neon colors

Cycles within cycles
Design elements such as color, texture, and silhouette may change even though the style itself remains popular. A good example is Jeans. It stays the same with variations like boot cut, skin fit, low waist, high waist, different washes, torn jeans, many more

Conclusion:
Fashion always follows the same cyclic pattern. However, there is no measurable time table for any fashion cycle, as some take short time to peak in popularity and some take longer period of time. Some decline slowly and some very fast. Some styles will sell in a single season, and take some several seasons to clear the shelves. Some fashion fades quickly others never disappear. When the styles are introduced in the stores, most new styles are introduced in the high level. They are usually high fashion created by well known designers, and are made of high quality material. As the styles increase in popularity during the rise stage, they will be seen worn by celebrities on TV or magazines they attract the attention of the general public. People start to buy these new styles, and manufacturers start to copy these styles in an affordable price. A great example is the company ZARA, which creates the latest trendy runway, looks in affordable prices. When the style reaches the peak, that means that fashion is at the height of popularity and it may be in such demand that more manufactures copy it or produce adaptations of it at many price levels, but also it means that the fashion leaders, and people who seek unique looks are tired of it by now. After so many designs copies are mass produced, people get tired of that style and begin to look for something new. Reduction will start and the decline stage will witness many customers still buying the garments but with the discounted price. Retail stores start putting the declining styles on the sale rack. During the obsolete stage, the style is completely rejected, and the merchandise is sent to the discount stores and outlet Malls. During each fashion cycle there are items that are always there, and they are called the classic, as they are a must to have in the closet, like a black blazer, or a good polo shirt, while Fads are short lived fashion styles that are introduced during the fashion cycle to create a fun look but a short lived one. As designers look for innovative ideas to cre-

ate new looks every season, they look in the streets and study how people create their own individual looks and that inspire them to create high fashion looks, and it is also true that when fashion leaders are wearing a new styles, all the mass will copy them and follow their footsteps. In all these cases demographics remains a very important element that determines what type of fashion is supposed to be in the stores, according to age, gender, ethnicity, and income level of the people living in the geographic area. As recent studies indicated that gender plays an important role, and women seem to shop more online for household items and accessories, while men shop more for electronics.

REFERENCES

http://www.fashiondesignscope.com/?p=117 | 2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics | 3. http://journal-bmp.de/2011/12/das-verhalten-von-online-konsu-menten-und-dessen-beziehung-zu-soziodemographischen-und-den-faktoren-%E2%80%9Ashopping-orientation%E2%80%98-%E2%80%98need-for-emo-tion%E2%80%99-und-%E2%80%9Afashion-leade/?lang=en | 4. http://monicaniftian.blogspot.ae/2011/01/fashion-cycle-and-fashion-theories.html | 5. Journal of Business and Media Psychology (2011) 2, Issue 2, 20-28 available: www.journal-bmp.de |