Shifting Fashion Paradigm: From Status Quo to Mostly Business

Usha Chowdhary
Central Michigan University
United States

Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the fashion paradigm using historical review. The concept was explored from multidimensional approach that was philosophical rather than data driven. Historical information was used to discuss evolutionary aspect. Fashion adoption is discussed to emphasize how consumer makes a decision to accept or reject an innovation. Fashion diffusion is explained to stress that it takes a team to get a new style in various consumer segment markets. The information was reviewed from anthologies, books and journal articles. The information was qualitatively organized to understand fashion from historical perspective as evolutionary transitional phase, fashion as a product and process: adoption and diffusion, and existence of fashion in the mass society. Several market segments were identified that either were well addressed or needed to be considered for future. Research could be conducted in all segments of market by using primary as well as secondary data sets. Possibilities for future extension of the work are addressed. Comparing fashion sense of immigrants versus natives will be good extension of this work.

Keywords: fashion, fashion diffusion, history of dress, market segmentation.

Historically, fashion was `property of the rich people representing royalties and the affluent groups of society who had discretionary income to spend extravagantly. Fashion originated as an art form that utilized elements of art and design to create clothes that were attractive and worth emulating. Today, fashion is a multidimensional term. Original interpretation of rendering distinctiveness has changed to conformity today by the sociologists. Fashion today is designed and merchandised as a business enterprise to make money and serve the mass society. Original concept of diffusing fashion through trickle-down process is modified to include trickle-up and trickle-across due to changed infrastructure and institutions in the market and social place.

Historical Perspective

The first current of fashion ability in the Western dress was seen among Egyptian royalties who wore cosmetics, fancifully draped apparel and symbolic headdresses to distinguish themselves from the common masses of their own nation and neighboring Mesopotamian civilization (Tortora and Eubank, 2010). Historically, it was possible to see distinct patterns of styles used in apparel even beyond the ancient civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt. Mesopotamians used tiered skirts and beards and wore clothing for modesty as opposed to Egyptians who dressed for function as well as adornment. Hourglass look with pinched waist and A-line silhouette with patterned fabric from Crete, chitons, chlamys and himations along with blonde hair and wide-brimmed hat (petaso) of the Greeks, and tebenna, stola, toga and high crown narrow brim hats of Etruscans and Romans are some such examples. The Early Middle Ages added use of silks, brocades, luxurious fabrics, and complicated woven designs with applique, embroidery and/or precious stones. The Late Middle Ages are known for fancy headdresses, parti-colored hose, houppelaunde (precursor of the graduation gown of today), and poulaines (pointed men's shoes). Italian Renaissance is distinguished by the use of camicia, brocade fur dress V-shaped waistline and use of gloves and perfumes including layered and lavish clothing. Falling bands, use of lace, ruffs, damask, and virago sleeves entered the fashion scene. Baroque period represented angularity and the Rococo period cravats and powdered wigs. Veblen identifies the eighteenth century as the time of conspicuous consumption. Men wore ditto suits with special cuff treatments that later gave birth to the French cuffs. Fancy hairstyles of women, use of panniers and silk brocades with floral patterns were the other highlights of this time period. Weber (2006) discussed Marie Antoinette's fashion sense from ostentatious to splendid to aristocratic in the 18th century. The author noted that the Austrian born Marie Antoinette was not allowed to marry the French prince until she changed her appearance.

Weber's book (2006) shows several pictures that represent glamorous, extravagant but elegant dressing and hairstyles. The book also shows her dress as widow in jail from 1793. The nineteenth century is marked by the four time periods: Directoire or Empire, Romantic, Crinoline, and Bustle. Distinctive styles added in this period were empire waistline for women and frock coats for men. Romantic period is identified by natural waistline, S shaped curves, Leg-O Mutton sleeves and off-shoulder necklines. A-Line silhouette, bell-shaped sleeves, and blouses with camisoles mark crinoline period. The Bustle period's highlight was back fullness. Front was straight but back had a bustle. Wills and Martin (1973) describe the transient dimension of fashion by quoting Beaton who saw fashion as symbolic of subtle and hidden forces of society that go above and beyond the physical boundaries of self for the 20th century. Wills and Martin (1973) argued that the past work has focused on temporal differences and product purchase differences for fashion and avoided including socio-psychological, cultural and institutional factors. The twentieth century fashions have been influenced by wars, movie stars fashion magazines and catalogs over time. Democratization of fashion in the Post World War II played a major role in taking fashion to the masses and changing the fashion phenomenon of trickle-down to embrace trickle-up and across. The Haute couture established by Charles Worth in 1860s saw challenges of survival in the late twentieth century and several designers of haute couture entered the ready-to-wear (RTW) and perfume industry for survival.

Table 1: Wills and Midgley's Anthology (1973): Evolution in Fashion and Marketing

Author (s)	Key Statements
Bigg (1893)	fashion as non-useful
Richardson and Kroeber (1940)	fashion as cyclical
Young (1937)	silhouettes as cyclical
Carman (1966)	shortening of cycles from 30-50 years
Jack and Schiffer (1948)	fashion operates under controls
Foley (1893)	highlighted the need to understand fashion consumer
Simmel (1957)	fashion is antagonistic force.
Nystrom (1928)	dominating events, ideals and groups impact the nature and direction of fashion movements
Fallers (1954)	There is more to fashion than the trickling effect
King (1963)	refuted sole existence of the trickledown theory
Flugel (1930)	evolution of fashion
Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955)	fashion leadership
Brenninkmeyer (1963)	Fashion as a socio-psychological phenomenon with fickleness and popularity as important factors
Hayhurst (1969)	Dynamics of innovation
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Blumer(1969)	Fashion as a collective behavior
Amies (1964)	fashion as a multidimensional phenomenon
Barber and Lobel (1952)	American social system and women's fashions
Reynold (1968)	car and clothing
Laver (1937)	taste and fashion
Midgley (1973)	The seamless stocking saga
Robinson (1958)	fashion theory and product design
Wasson (1968)	predictability of fashion
Summers (1970)	fashion leadership
Danger (1968)	color trends and consumer preferences
Saddik and Wills (1973)	product and marketing strategies

Rogers and Gamans (1983) reported that fashion meets the needs of safety and security based on the Maslow's needs theory Maslow's Needs Theory. Nystrom (1928) identified "boredom, futility, self-assertion, the desire for change and dressing to please the opposite sex" (Rogers and Gamans, 1983, p. 32) as the main motivations of fashion. Adler (in Rogers and Gamans, 1983) proposed that people wear fashionable clothes to cover-up their inferiority complex. Solomon (1985) presented information in seven sections that represented fashion theory, fashion ability and advertising, merchandising issues, fashion adoption, body products and symbols, impression formation, and working women ad fashion. The collection covered a wide range of topics. Several articles focused on advertising, consumers and retailing. Frings (1999) reported that consumers wear fashionable clothes to look attractive, to conform, to impress other people, and meet one's emotional needs. Chowdhary (2006, 2011) added cultural and international dimensions along with measures that could be used to measure fashion innovativeness, fashion opinion leadership and clothing, and consumer decision-making. Chowdhary (2006) also extended Durges (1986) concept of using punch lines of advertisements that related to self-esteem, clothing and appearance.

Chowdhary (2011) also discussed the idea of mainstreaming fashion for individuals with special needs to enhance their dignity and pride.

Evolutionary Transitional Phase

Jarnow and Dickerson (1997) asserted that fashion always changes though at different speeds. Frings (1999) noted that historically royalties dictated the fashion. Today, the process of creation and progression has changed with the advanced technology and communication, invention of computers, mass customization of the process, and move of the dressmakers and haute couturiers toward expansion of their enterprise to include mainstream consumers. The industrial revolution led to mass production of apparel with need to retail it through different type of media. The author also discussed the impact of World Wars on expansion of retailing practices in the twentieth century that also influenced fashion creation and promotion for various consumer segments. Democratization of fashion is more evident in the Post World War II period. The credit goes to the US manufacturers and retailers who decided to create multiple pieces of same style in different price ranges to satisfy the diversified consumer markets.

Distinctive and luxurious high value appeal of fashion has become story of the past. Today's casual lifestyle and relaxed outlook have changed the fabric of fashion. Mass production, mass distribution; mass consumption and mass communication have shrunken the globe to narrow down the cultural differences. Fashion is used as a collective behavior more so than the status quo. Outsourcing of the manufacturing has resulted in global diffusion of certain styles. McDowell (1985, p. 10) went ahead to state, "Clothes were a tool of oppression, a weapon wielded against the poor. They were used to drive home the lesson that the grand were not simply different, they were better, because they were rich." McDowell (1985) also asserted that even though Paris was known as the capital of fashion, the famous designers including Charles Worth were not French."Charles Worth and Molyneuxwere British; Mainbocher was American; Schiaparelli was Italian; and Belanciaga was Spanish." He further noted that reason for leaving their home countries was the availability of skilled workforce of French that did not exist in their country of birth.

With the demise of couture work, development of several other fashion centers in United Kingdom, United States, Japan and Italy made the fashion to reach another dimension. Fashion was no longer the property of the court to show political dominance. However, pop music started inspiring fashion designers and "anti-fashion" was seen on the streets of London. Italian fashions started from Florence in 1950s and moved to Rome in 1960s and finally to Milan in 1970s. United States is accredited with the relaxed casual looks. Denim jeans and t-shirts have become a universal outfit that is accepted all over the world. Simple and sophisticated casual wear of 1940s moved toward jeans and t-shirts of 1970s, to reflect the melting pot existence of the United States in the new millennium. Japan entered the fashion scene with its simple and flowing designs that reflected very pleasing and flowing aesthetic effects. Democratization of fashion is evident all over the world. High fashion can be made accessible to consumers through knock-offs in department and discount stores. Consumer gives distinctive touch through scarves, pins, mixing and matching and other such subtle practices rather than dramatic styles seen in historical fashions. There is more kinetic movement in today's styles and silhouettes than ever before. Textile is used smartly to add function, comfort and style in fashion. Traditional rigidity of lines, forms, shapes, and color is softened. Sumptuary laws do not dictate fashion. Rather laws are created to protect the consumers and workplace.

Influence of Art on Fashion

Arts and dress designing have gone hand in hand. For example, a Russian ballet group brought exotic and colorful effects in early 1900s. Several designers have contributed to fashions through their distinctive color and form choices. However, Bakst is accredited to impact color and fabric choices, (McDowell, 1985). Yves St. Laurent (1983) created "Picasso" inspired black satin dress with sequins in his Fall/Winter 1979-80n collection. Same collection also had several styles that were inspired by pop art. Based on Mondrian's paintings, YSL created dresses with simple lines and basic primary colors (McDowell, 1985). Every designer uses elements of art and principles of design to create aesthetically pleasing apparel whether influenced by an artist or not.

Fashion Adoption and Diffusion

Fashion adoption refers to the acceptance of an innovation by the consumer. Various scholars (Rogers, 1962; Robertson, 1971; Frings, 1999) have discussed adoption process. However, they differ on the number of steps used by them to make the final decision.

Solomon (1985, pp. vii-x) published a seven-part book that had articles on "body products and symbols", "fashion ability and advertising", "fashion adoption", "fashion theory", "impression formation", "merchandising issues", and working women and fashion. Selected themes from his table of content are provided in Table 2 based on alphabetical order rather than original seven sections. The intent is to reflect the multidimensional nature of fashion that is no longer dictated by laws. Rather laws are created to protect the consumers and represent fashion from social and psychological approach with a touch of business and marketing and consumer behavior.

Fashion diffusion refers to the spread of the style across the society. It can happen through trickle-down, trickle-across or trickle-up processes (Fallers, 1954; King, 1963; Field, 1970). Spatial diffusion theory also has a merit if one wants to understand spread of style from peripheral parts of the country to the interiors. Several interfaces such as electronic media, digital media, print-media, as well as interpersonal communication [lay a pivotal role in becoming aware of new styles as well as diffusing them in society over time. Some happens through visual displays and other through word of mouth. Chowdhary (2011) proposed that fashion adoption and fashion diffusion are interfaced by fashion communication in today's society for complete operation. Fashion adoption includes perception, comprehension, trial adoption/rejection, and recycle/denial stages at the individual level. However, fashion diffusion can represent trickling down, across, and up. Fashion communication embraces fashion leaders, trade and consumer publications and reference groups. With increased use of Internet buying by the young consumer, it should also become part of fashion communication. Some of the previous research provides evidence that justifies the effectiveness of information sources by leaders and followers to promote and diffuse new fashions in society (Polegato and Wall, 1980; Chowdhary and Dickey, 1988).The information in this paper emphasizes a philosophical perspective on changing fashions based on the historical roots. For example some of the diffusion practices are far more technology based than ever before. Internet did not exist until 2002 and telemarketing was not very popular until the new millennium. The consumer still believed in touchy feely nature of merchandise that drove willingness to purchase or not to buy the garment. However, the trends have changed today.

Table 2: Content from Solomon's (1985) Collection in The Psychology of Fashion

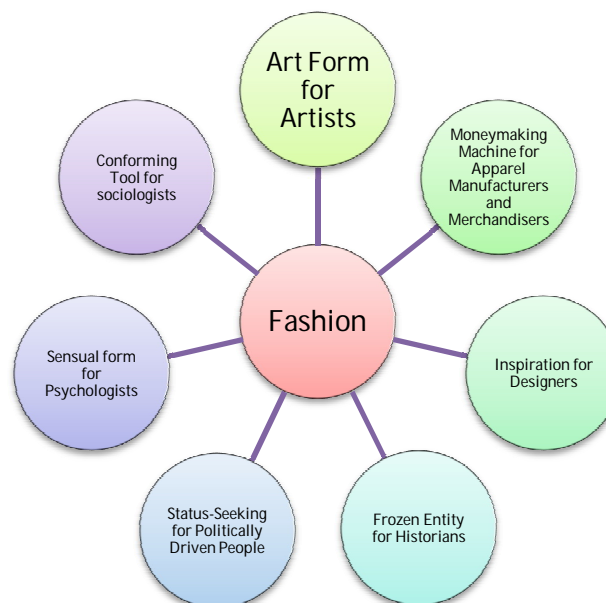| Author (s)	Topic
Abramov	Color Analysis
Beck	Fashion and modernism
Davis	Fashion as communicator
Davis and Lennon	Attitude Toward Clothing, Self-Monitoring and Fashion Opinion Leadership
Dichter	Why of clothes
Gadel	Style oriented apparel consumer
Giddon	Ethical Consideration
Gorden, Infante & Braun	"Communication Style and Fashion Innovativeness" (p. viii)
Holman	Advertising Research
Holman & Wiener	Life cycle value perspective
Holbrook and Dixon	Fashion Market Mapping and Consumer Preferences
Kaiser, Schutz, Chandler, & Lieder	Shoes as sociocultural symbols
Lind and Roach-Higgins	Collective Adoption and Socio-Political Symbolism in Dress as Related to Fashion
Mayer and Belk (p. ix)	"Fashion and Impression Formation among Children"
McCracken	Rehabilitation of trickle down theory
Millenson	Psychological strategies for advertising in Fashion
Mulready and Lamb ((p. ix)	"Cosmetic Therapy for Chemotherapy Patients"
Rook	"Body Cathexis Market Segmentation" (p. ix)
Rubenstein	""Color, Circumcision, Tattoos, and Scars" (p. ix)
Simon-Miller	Signs and fashion cycles
Sproles	Fashion theories
Taylor	Short-circuit profit making

Fashion Today

Consumer market segmentation is based on body type, garment type, body size for the mainstream, as well as occasion. Separate entities exist for under-fashions and outer fashions, casual and formal wear, big, tall and plus sizes along with ready-to-wear enterprise. Different classifications are used for those with special needs. Mainstreaming of special needs is also visible in ready-to-wear that was not the norm until the 1970s. Fashion can reach consumer through telemarketing, electronic marketing, dressmakers, ready-to-wear, imports, catalogs, and individual sewing. The apparel market shows fusion of fads, fashions and classic.

Those living in mass societies seek distinctiveness through unique additions and those from culturally inspired economies seek to follow mass society dress codes. The concept of universal fashions is prevailing in true sense with advent of new technologies of production and communication. Anything and everything goes in the world of fashion. The lines to distinguish between geographic boundaries are diffusing in everyday lives but prevailing stronger for rituals. Styling details in terms of silhouettes and lengths and widths do not move through centennial cycles as suggested by Young (1937) and Richardson and Kroeber (1940). Carman (1966) asserted that diversification of styles and changing patterns of adoption and diffusion have refuted the previous theories. The cycles can have sub-cycle of 30-50 years. Today's fast-pace society and advancement of education and technology have further cut the length of these cycles. A click of button is sometimes needed to send a style from part of the world to another.

Existence of Fashion in the Mass Society

Fashion is still considered to be a prevailing style at a given time that is not short lived and timeless. Additionally, it continues to offer the sense of self-enhancement by either making people look more beautiful, distinctive, or similar to others than possible otherwise. However, traditional concept of conspicuous consumption no longer dominates it. In the mass society, individuals desire to feel distinctive through distinctive choices of textures, styles, color combinations, brands and accessories. Easy accessibility through advanced technology and retailing, everything and anything goes because fashion travels instantaneously. All theories prevail simultaneously. The historical reflections of riches, elegance, extravagance and conspicuous consumption in fashion have become limited to theater and Hollywood. Even though haute couture exists, designers have to be part of the ready-to-wear for mere survival. A consumer seeks functionality over style. Of course, exceptions do exist. Most fashionable clothing is seen at social events. Otherwise, casual style is ubiquitous in everyday wear. Theoretically, trickle-down, trickle-across and trickle-up theories co-exist. Fashion continues to diffuse into society through word of mouth, fashion magazines, internet, movies, television and telemarketing. Length of time identified in the past through cyclical and pendulum theories has decreased. There is need to re-look at the fashion product as well as process in today's context. Its definition is based on the perspective people take. Apparel manufacturers and merchandisers see it as moneymaking machine. Artists see fashion as an art form. Economists perceive it as wasteful practice. Fashion designers use it as an inspiration for updating the existing art forms. Historians see these as frozen entities to signify time in which they existed to represent spirit(s) of the time. Political individuals see it as a status-seeking tool. Psychologist sees it as sensual project. Sociologists envisage fashion as a conforming tool. Fashion can be used and understood in any of the above-mentioned context even today (figure 1). Needless to say, it is an all-pervasive phenomenon that represents an ongoing change signifying modernity. It serves as an interface between yester and future times.

Figure 1: Fashion as a concept for people from different context

To conclude fashion is a change meter that reminds people that there is nothing absolutely new under the sun. Art forms reappear in a modified form to represent new context, new resources and new times. The innovative transformation represents freshness of thoughts, continuity through integration of old and new, and/or departure from old to create new entities. Apparel is the interface between an individual and his/her environment. Therefore, fashion innovations in apparel reflect individual's mindset. In mass and technologically advanced societies of today, fashion serves as a unifying force that casually brings the common masses together and distinctively satisfies the ego of elite and fashion forward by offering them innovative apparel that can be extravagant and elegant to serve very small percentages of the society. Fashion is no longer used as a weapon by the royalties and elite because royalties are minorities and fashion is both democratized and mainstreamed.

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