
Factors Affecting Fashion Change

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A number of issues which have proved to be influential in the production and consumption of fashion products are identified. The importance of such factors as female emancipation, the increased influence of the youth market, changing social attitudes, and the increased applicability of mass communication and mass manufacturing is recognised. A small number of issues relating to international trade in textiles and clothing are also outlined.

1. INTRODUCTION

During the course of the twentieth century a number of important events and factors have revolutionised production, influenced design and stimulated trade in textiles and clothing at both national and international levels. The impetus for change seems to have been initiated at the time of the Industrial Revolution which witnessed the mechanisation of spinning and weaving, the increased capital intensity of production, dramatic increase in output/machine, the introduction of the factory system and a wide range of accompanying economic and social changes. The objective of this paper is to identify the more important economic, social and technological issues which have been the determining factors in the production and consumption of fashion products during the twentieth century.

2. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FACTORS INFLUENCING FASHION CHANGE

Fashion change has been considered as a reflection of the prevailing social and economic climate. Bailey [1988], for example, proposed that fashion in clothing and in many other commodities, ".....reflects economic growth and social progress" [Bailey 1988].

It is evident from much of the literature that many observers hold a similar opinion, expressing support for the notion that fashion change is affected by a nation's economic performance [Flugel, 1966; Greenwood and Murphy, 1978; Sproles, 1979]. For example, economic growth and increasing wealth have been considered to accelerate the pace of fashion change, whereas high levels of unemployment and inflation have been regarded as inhibiting factors in the process of fashion change.

It has been proposed that many past social and cultural changes have been reflected in the popular garment styles of the respective periods. Polhemus and Proctor [1978] and Flugel [1966] proposed that fashion change is symbolic of changes in our wider social environment. Blumer [1969], for example considered that fashions are chosen from a number of possible alternative styles, and that those styles which most appropriately reflect the prevailing or incipient tastes and attitudes of a population will be fashionable [Blumer, 1969]. Female emancipation, youth, changes in social attitudes, mass communication and social mobility are among the most common factors which have been proposed to have had a notable effect on the stylistic nature of clothing fashions in recent times.

Over the past few decades, Afis-Nomen have become increasingly integrated into many social spheres which have traditionally been dominated by men. Legislative changes in many countries have made many social spheres such as education, employment, and even politics more accessible to women. The woman's movement, manifested in the principles of sexual equality and economic independence, has been viewed as influencing a shift to more functional forms of dress for women [Horn and Gurel, 1981]. Modern convenience equipment, which allows a certain amount of freedom from domestic duties, and the social acceptance of the working mother have undoubtedly enhanced the feeling of female emancipation. These factors, together with the increased interest in leisure activities [Rouse, 1989] and the improved accessibility to speedier forms of travel, have contributed to a shift towards more casual and practical clothing styles.

Demographic change has been credited with shifting the emphasis of fashion in many countries. For example, during the nineteen fifties, in much of Western Europe, when teenagers emerged for the first time as an important social force, their influence was felt in many fields. Aided by full employment, and free from the financial responsibilities which constrained their parents' expenditure, the teenage income was absorbed in a market saturated with consumer goods. [Davis, 1990] noted that the post-war teenager (in the UK) had, ".....for the first time, a substantial amount of money to spend on 'luxuries', and could dominate the market in many sectors of the burgeoning leisure industry" [Davis 1990]. Studies conducted on teenage spending reported that large proportions of their income were spent on clothing and footwear, pop records and in cinemas and dancehalls [Davis, 1990]. One field in particular where the extent of teenage influence was clearly manifested was the fashion industry. Brenninkmeyer [1969] commented that: "Since the Second World War, fashion has become exceedingly young" [Bren-