



# Fashion Forecasting

## Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Explain the main areas for fashion forecasting
- ✓ Analyse the fashion forecasting process
- ✓ Explain the different phases in fashion cycle

## Fashion Forecasting

Fashion Forecasting is a global career that focuses on upcoming trends. A fashion forecaster predicts the colours, fabrics and styles that will be presented on the runway and in the stores for the upcoming seasons. Fashion forecasting is the prediction of mood, behaviour and buying habits of the consumer. It is no longer a question of identifying your customers by age, geography or income, but looking into how and why they buy, based on their mood, beliefs and the occasion.

Fashion trends are the styling ideas that major collections have in common. They indicate the direction in which the fashion is moving. Fashion forecasters look for styles they think are prophetic, ideas that capture the mood of the times and signal a new fashion trend. They base their judgment on experience, awareness to trendsetting designers, fashion cycles, and economic, social and technological influences on both the garment industry and the consumer. Fashion forecasters must do all of the following: -

- Decide which fashions are prophetic.
- Estimate which segment of the market will accept a particular fashion.
- Determine at what time these fashions will be acceptable to target customers.

### Identifying Prophetic Styles

Fashion forecasters analyse the designer collections for what they call prophetic styles, fresh ideas that capture the mood of the times. If several designers move in a similar fashion direction (that is, if they use similar fashion elements such as colour or silhouette), they do so because of common sources of inspiration based on current interest or events. That several designers simultaneously respond with similar ideas, to the same stimuli, may indicate a fashion trend.

### Adapting a Trend to a Target Market

The adaptation of a trend depends on the particular group of people who are potential consumers. Sources of influence and methods of adaptation vary with the consumers' age range, income level, lifestyle, and fashion preferences. French fashion tends to be extreme, either to express the creativity of the designers or to draw attention to the individual collections. American designers tend to soften the French silhouettes and modify other extremes, because their life-style is more casual than the European.

### How Location Affects Timing

The timing of fashion-trend adoption and adaptation depends on the geographical location of potential customers. Designer fashions from Paris and Italy are quickly accepted worldwide by those whose incomes and life-styles afford them the opportunity to wear European fashion. Otherwise, it usually takes one or two years for the ideas put forth in Europe to be accepted by Americans. New York designer fashions are accepted more readily and widely in America because they are specifically designed for the

country's needs. In either case, people having high incomes and high level jobs and living in a sophisticated urban environment will accept fashion change more quickly than others. Manufacturers and retailers naturally adjust their trend predictions accordingly. They need to determine how long it takes for their target customers to accept a new fashion. They measure the length of time between fashion origin (when a fashion was first designed) and fashion acceptance (when the particular customer bought that fashion or a modification of it). Merchandisers then know if their customer will accept current fashion immediately, six months from now, or a year from now. The fashion system has spread across all other sectors, from cosmetics to cars via politics and sports. All sectors observe fashion as an endless source of inspiration.

Forecasting the future demand for particular styles, fabrics and colours is an important aspect of the fashion industry. Textile specialists work two years ahead to determine the general guidelines for each fashion season. Fashion forecasting is an important activity to ensure that the process of observation related to short and long term planning can be based on sound and rational decision making and not hype. Forecasting can bridge the gap between ambiguous, conflicting signs and the action taken by the design team.

Long term forecasting (over 2 years ahead) is used by executives for corporate planning purposes. It is also used for marketing managers to position products in the marketplace in relationship to competition.

Short term forecasting is used by product developers, merchandisers and production managers to give style direction and shape collections. For short term forecasting most apparel companies subscribe to one or more services, whose job is to scan the market and report on the developments in colour, textiles and style directions.

Forecasters reflect the earliest views on trends some eighteen months in advance of the season. At this stage, colour is a crucial consideration of yarn mills. It is also the focus of discussion among others who are interested in very early trend decision-making. Fashion forecasters combine the views emerging about colour and fabric from the early yarn and fabric trade shows with their socio-economic and cultural analysis. Major trends in lifestyles, attitude and culture in particular music, sport, cinema and television are used to predict changing consumer demands.

Fashion forecasting involves the following activities such as studying market conditions, analysing life style of the people, researching sales statistics, evaluating popular designer collections, surveying fashion publications, observing street fashions etc.

### **The Direction of Fashion Change**

Some trend watchers visualise the dynamics of fashion as a pyramid of status level. In some theories, fashion trickles down from highly visible elite. In others, fashion trickles up from street once it is discovered by the fashion elite and introduced to mainstream audiences in an edited version. If a fashion look is promoted by the media and manufactured rapidly enough, the look can trickle across all levels of

the market simultaneously for denim, introduction of an unusual colour range, a modification in a silhouette or detail, a different way to wear an accessory or a mood expressed in a distinctive style. The pattern of acceptance (or rejection) can be mapped in time.

This collective selection forms a feedback loop between the fashion industry and the consumer, a feedback loop moderated by aesthetic trends and social-psychological processes.

## **Main Areas in Fashion Forecasting**

### **Colour Forecast**

Colour dictates the mood and attitude of the season. On-trend colour is directly linked to consumer moods and aspirations, and getting shades right can increase the sales considerably. Trend savvy clients want the products they purchase to come in the latest fashion trend shades. It is therefore important for a designer that he/she should be aware of the latest colour trends

Materials Trend Forecasts for Woven, Knits, Denim, Leather & Non-woven materials give designers the idea for the types of materials which are going to be in, in the upcoming season.

Usually the key trends for weaves, denim and woven patterns are predicted 18 months ahead of season. Visual texture and fibre analysis is presented in close-up detail, with product direction and references to relevant mills and resources.

### **Forecast for Lifestyle Materials**

The lifestyle materials forecast provides inspiration for interiors, home ware and other areas of product design.

### **Knits & Jersey**

Jersey and knit forecasts predicts new concepts and the key trend looks that are influencing knitted materials, from street style, runways, trade shows, retail and vintage. It covers areas like yarn, texture and stitch looks, as well as knit patterns and silhouette application.

### **Leather & Non-Woven**

The forecasts for skins and non-wovens aim to provide with early trends and predictions. The forecasts cover key looks and surface treatments, as well as provide knowledge on the most influential non-woven coming through for fashion and lifestyle.

### **Print & Graphics**

Graphic trend research forecasts the most up-to-date trend ideas for graphics, prints, patterns and embellishments.

## **Women's Apparel**

The ultimate women's wear product forecasts cover all the seasonal key trend looks for women's tops, shirts, skirts, dresses, denim, knitwear, pants & trousers, coats and jackets. The designers have to keep themselves updated with innovative detailing techniques, from trims and embellishments to pockets, fastenings, collars, panels and sleeves

## **Women's wear Accessories**

Trend forecast for bags, belts, and jewellery, eyewear, headwear & soft accessories provides on-trend edge required to lure today's trend savvy consumers.

**Women's Footwear:** Footwear forecasts allow designers to create trend conscious and desirable shoes, boots, sandals, heels and flats to excite today's trend savvy consumer. The forecast includes predictions about skins, leather colours, materials and texture developments, heel, toe and last shapes, concepts & novelty ideas, relevant vintage inspiration and influential street style looks.

## **Men's Fashion**

A designer must know about the latest men's fashion trends, on styles, colours, designs, and patterns for the upcoming Fall/Winter or Spring/Summer season collections.

## **Children's Fashion**

Fashion forecasting helps companies decide on the right colour, and themes for both the Boy's and Girls' markets. The colour boards, palettes, and theme descriptions along with visual clues help to capture the mood of the incoming season.

## **Fashion Forecasting Process**

### **Trend Forecasting Companies**

French companies based in Paris have traditionally dominated fashion forecasting. Although a number of larger ones are still based in Paris, a number of new niche forecasters have emerged around the world offering their own specialties of products and services.

Some better-known trend forecasters include: WGSN, Style sight and Trendstop.com.

### **Consumer Research**

Manufacturers and retailers may ask consumers directly about their buying preferences. Consumer reactions are compiled and tabulated to find preferences for certain garments or accessories, colours or sizes and so on ,or products to fit specific consumer tastes.

Surveys, by telephone or mail are conducted by publication and market research companies for manufacturers and retailers. These surveys include questions about income, life-style, fashion

preference and shopping habits. Customers are usually selected by the market research firm to meet with manufacturers or retailers. In-store informal interview can help researchers obtain information by simply asking customers what they would like to buy, what styles they like that are currently available and what merchandise they want, but cannot find. Because of their close contact with their customers, owners of small stores can often do this most effectively.

Consumer research figures are important in decisions about product development, brand marketing and retailing.

### **Colour Forecasting**

Stimulating sales is the driving force behind colour forecasting. Colour grabs the customers' attention, makes an emotional connection and leads them to the product. Even when the basic product stays the same, changing the colour gives a sense of something new. Colour consultants help companies decide on the right colour story to sell the product. Some consultants specialize in advising on colour. Others develop colour forecasts as part of their overall product development function. Some large companies have departments dedicated to setting colour directions for multiple lines. Professional colour organisations bring together experts to collaborate on forecasts for industries like women's wear, men's wear, children's wear and residential and non-residential interiors.

### **Textile Development**

Frequently, the development of a completely new product is the result of a particular functional need, but often it is driven by the benefits offered by a new fabric. Specialist forecasters make the point that the technology is changing the range of product, as through the ranges of benefits that designers can build into garment product through the textiles used in construction.

Fabrics range from slick surfaces like leather and futuristic plastic to softer surfaces like cashmere, from flat weaves to heavy textures like boucle and from the solid structure of flannel to the web-like open structure of crochet. Clothing has been called "the second skin" in recognition of its intimate connection with a person's physical and psychological comfort (Horn, 1975). So it is not surprising that news about which fabrics are "in" or "out" plays such a prominent role in forecasting fashion. Newness in fabrics comes from the introduction of new fibres, the manipulation of yarn and fabric structures, variation in pattern and prints and innovative finishing processes. These innovations are introduced in trade shows and exhibitions held in the fashion capitals of the world.

## **The Range of shows**

**The fashion shows:** The word here is its widest possible interpretation to refer to the range of organised textile and fashion garment trade shows, operating over the 16 months preceding season. Trade shows, whether yarn, fabric or product have a basic function, which is to sell products.

Visitors vary according to the nature of the show. A yarn show will attract a range of people including fabric manufacturers, some retail buyers and designers. The fabric show performs a more balanced role

with great emphasis on the sales of the fabric, but with more retail designers and buyers attending, as the product on the show has a greater relevance to garment design. Garment design shows are much more diverse, ranging from the products trade shows through to the high profile **Ready -to-wear Designer shows** like London Fashion week and then the exclusive Couture shows.

Continuing this sequence, specialist product trade shows are held after the fabric shows. These shows are segmented according to broad sector like men's wear or women's wear, and by specialist product categories, like sportswear or lingerie. These shows are a good indicator of colour, fabric, styling and new products.

### **Sales Forecasting**

Forecasting is relatively easy, straightforward and accurate for products with long lifetime and steady sales. However, the fashion apparel business is one of the most volatile, because it creates products that are new, highly seasonal or have short lifetimes. In such situations forecasts become increasingly inaccurate. Errors in sales forecasting result in two kinds of losses:

Markdowns, when retailers have unwanted goods remaining at the end of a selling period, such goods then must be sold, even at a loss.

Cultural Indicators: In the apparel field, companies need an early warning system so that specific product categories can be fine-tuned to trends within a market segment. While timing is important, an agile and responsive company will be able to capitalise on trends whenever they are spotted; sometimes just as a glimmer far in the future and sometimes as a phenomenon in the building stage. Waning trends are another signal. When some avocation, interest or lifestyle loses cultural power, it is a good time to survey the information landscape for the next big thing.

### **Final Stage of Forecasting**

The 'Fashion look' for the season is therefore the result of a process of development that combines the evolved views of textiles and product trade show, forecasters, designers buyers and ready to wear shows. Like collage, the final picture emerges after various layers have come together. Even though these shows have an impact on some last minute high street fashion buys, their major impact is mainly on reflecting the final views on trends close to the season. Crucially, the media coverage of the shows is another important dimension in the trend development process, as it highlights fashion trends that fashion editors believe will be strong for the forth coming season. Such 'authoritative' coverage of the media, focusing attention on aspects of fashion, including the 'must-have' looks, colours and products influences the consumers' acceptance of hot trends for a season.

### **The Future of Forecasting**

For apparel executives, hitting the target requires a balancing act between anticipation of future developments and improvisation in the face of change.

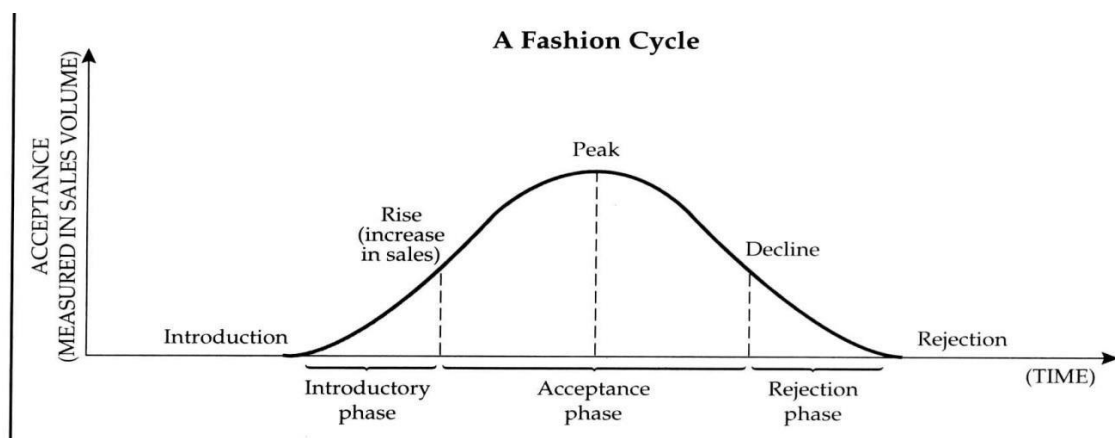
In the marketplace, those shifts may correlate with:

- Changes in taste or lifestyles.
- Immigration.
- Technological developments.
- Shifts in the prices of raw materials.

Thus fashion forecasting is used within the fashion/textile industry as a means of directing companies into new ideas of colour/fabric/theme/mood and yarn developments for different product types and levels. Knowledge of trends and future market requirements is increasingly important to the industry. While there is no definitive fashion story, accessing the right colour palette, researching fabric and styling trends to suit a particular niche and customer profile is essential. The degree and quality of information available to designers and its interpretation, given an effective marketing strategy, effectively dictates their success.

## 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 fashion cycle. It is difficult to categorise or theorise about fashion without oversimplifying. Even so, the fashion cycle is usually depicted as a bell shaped 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 such as the shirtwaist dress or the miniskirt.



## **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. Designers, whose clothes are works of art, do not expect to sell in quantity. Production in small quantities gives a designer more freedom, flexibility, and room for creativity.

## **Increases 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 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."

## **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.

## **Declines 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 still wear garments in the style, but they are no longer willing to buy them at regular prices. Retail stores put such declining styles on sale racks, hoping to make room for new merchandise.

## **Rejection of a Style, or Obsolescence**

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

## Length of Cycles

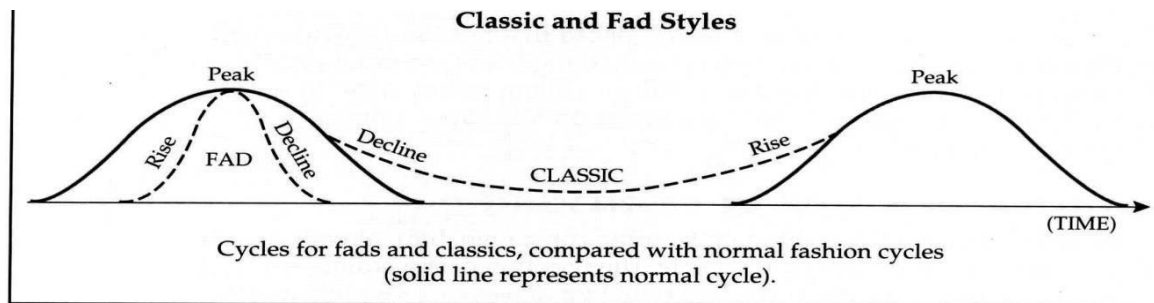
Although all fashions follow the same cyclical pattern, there is no measurable timetable for a fashion cycle. Some fashions take a short time to peak in popularity, others take longer; some decline slowly, others swiftly. Some last a single selling season, others last several seasons. Some fade quickly, others never completely disappear

## Classics

Some styles never become completely obsolete, but instead remain more or less accepted for an extended period. A classic is characterised by simplicity of design, which keeps it from being easily dated. An example is the Chanel suit, which peaked in fashion in the late 1950s and enjoyed moderate popularity again in the late 1970s. In the interim, the house of Chanel in Paris, as well as other manufacturers, produced the suits for a small, dedicated clientele.

## Fads

Short-lived fashions, or fads, can come and go in a single season. They lack the design strength (character) to hold consumer attention for very long. Fads usually affect only a narrow consumer group, begin in lower price ranges, are relatively simple and inexpensive to copy, and therefore flood the market in a very short time. Because of the market saturation, the public tires of them quickly and they die out. The fad of the early 1980s was the punk look from England, which heavily influenced the international junior market.



## Cycles within Cycles

Design elements (such as colour, texture, silhouette, or detail) may change even though the style itself remains popular. Jeans became a fashion item in the late 1960s and remained so throughout the 1970s. Therefore, their fashion cycle was very long. However, various jean silhouettes- including bell, cigarette, and baggy legs-came and went during that time.

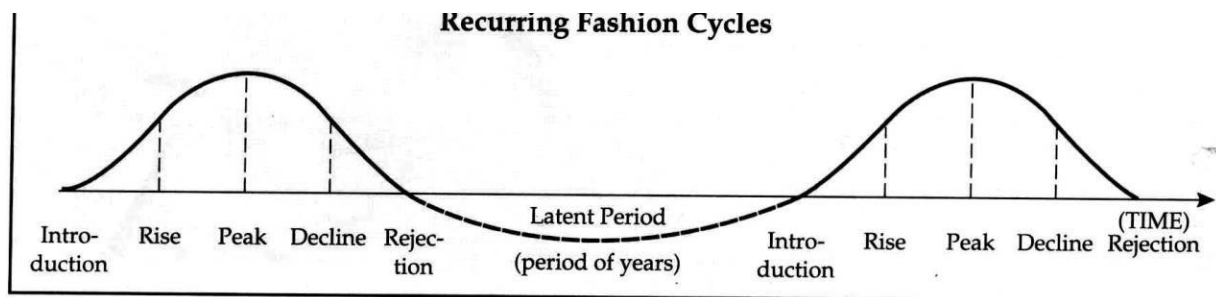
## Interrupted Cycles

Consumer buying is often halted prematurely because manufacturers and retailers no longer wish to risk producing or stocking merchandise that will soon decline in popularity. This is obvious to consumers who try to buy summer clothes in August.

Sometimes the normal progress of a fashion cycle is interrupted or prolonged by social upheaval, economic depression, or war. Consider the large shouldered, wedge shaped silhouette in women's fashion which began in the 1930s. Because people were concerned with things more important than fashion during World War II, the same silhouette continued, without the normally expected decline, for the duration of the war. The new look of 1947 with its sloping shoulders tiny waists and longer skirts was a radical change because the old cycle had been unnaturally prolonged.

## Recurring Cycles

After a fashion dies, it may resurface. Designers often borrow ideas from the past. When a style reappears years later, it is reinterpreted for a new time, a silhouette or proportion may recur, but it is interpreted with a change in fabric and detail. Nothing is ever exactly the same – yet nothing is totally new. As the century and millennium draw to a close, designers are showing many nostalgic looks of the 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and even the 1980s. However, the use of different fabrics, colours, and details make the looks unique to the turn of the century.



## Consumer Identification with Fashion Cycles

### Taste

An individual's preference of one style to another is referred to as taste. Good taste in fashion implies sensitivity to what is beautiful and appropriate. Acceptance by the public does not prove that a design is necessarily beautiful, only that its timing is right. Really beautiful design is often not accepted by the general public at all, either because it is too extreme or because it is too expensive. Watered-down copies, on the other hand, often lose their original beauty.

## **Consumer Groups**

Consumers can be identified with various stages of the fashion cycle. Fashion leaders buy and wear new styles at the beginning of their cycles; others tend to imitate. Because of differences in taste, what is fashionable for one group is not for another group: what is in fashion for fashion leaders is too extreme for followers and what is finally accepted by followers is already out of fashion for leaders. Manufacturers and retailers may also be identified as fashion leaders or followers, depending on which consumer groups they target.

## **Fashion Leaders**

Although fashion leaders are not usually the creators, they may give impetus to a fashion by discovering and wearing a certain style. Fashion leaders are a very small percentage of the public. Most fashion leaders are members of higher income groups, because quality high fashion is expensive.

Fashion leaders constantly look for interesting New Styles, colours, fabrics, and ways to accessorise their clothes. They go to great lengths to find unique fashion-to and out-of-the-way boutique, or even to another country. They often become aware of various modes of dress while travelling. They are discerning shoppers who would rather have a few beautiful things than many mediocre things. Many fashion leaders occupy prominent positions that give them exposure, notice, and influence over the way others dress. The press reports details of what they wear, and they are seen at public events, in films, or on television

Most fashion leaders are confident of their own taste and do not need others' approval. Individualists, they do not need the security of standardization. They dare to be different, and their acceptance of a designer's clothes makes the clothes fashionable.

## **Fashion Followers**

Most men and women however, seek acceptance through conformity and follow world, national, or community fashion leaders in order to feel confident in wearing a new look. Fashion followers emulate others only after they are sure of fashion trends. Consumers become fashion followers for several reasons: They lack the time, the money, and the interest to devote to fashion leadership. They need a period of exposure to new styles before accepting them. They are insecure about their tastes and therefore turn to what others have already approved as acceptable and appropriate. They want to keep up with their neighbours or peers group or want to be accepted by them. They tend to imitate people they admire. Because of fashion followers, most members of the fashion industry are copyists or adapters. From a marketing point of view, fashion followers make mass production successful, because volume mass production of fashion can be profitable only when the same merchandise is sold to many consumers.

## **Adoption of Fashion**

Basically, there are three variations of the fashion- adoption process: traditional adoption, reverse adoption, and mass dissemination. It is important to understand how new fashion ideas are disseminated, or spread, and how they are adapted to the tastes, life-styles, and budgets of various consumers.

### **Traditional Fashion Adoption**

Innovative designers have the courage and confidence to try new looks. At first the looks seem outrageous to many people, until it is seen how they can be adapted by the customers. Not every extreme design is accepted by the general public. That a top designer shows harem pants does not mean that everyone will wear them, but it does indicate a possible trend toward ankle interest. To cause attention and change direction even moderately, high fashion often seeks to be extreme.

The traditional adoption theory is based on the fact that most high fashion is expensive, and therefore affordable to only a few people. As the new fashions are worn by publicised fashion leaders or shown in fashion publications, more consumers are exposed to the new look and some will desire to have it for themselves. To appeal to this broader group of consumers, manufacturers produce less expensive versions or adaptations of high fashion. These are copied again and again at lower prices, until they have been seen often enough to become acceptable to the most conservative buyer. The cheapest versions are seen at discount houses soon after. Consumers then tire of the look and its popularity fades.

Fashion implies newness and freshness. Yet as a fashion is copied, modified, and sold at lower and lower prices, it loses its newness, quality, and other essential design elements. Therefore, one disadvantage of traditional adoption is that the original is often modified so much that it is no longer attractive or even recognizable.

### **Reverse Adoption**

Although most fashion filters down from high-priced designer clothes, fashion occasionally begins with the consumer. For example, in the 1960s and early 1970s young people in London and San Francisco influenced the whole fashion industry by creating unique combinations of old, new, and handcrafted clothes.

### **Mass Dissemination**

Missy market styling is generally adapted from designer fashion through the traditional process. Styling ideas for active sportswear and denim wear are usually inspired by the consumer, through the reverse process. Junior fashions might be mass-disseminated, since the original ideas are often produced precisely for this youthful market.

## Further Reading:

- ✓ *Fashion Forecasting (By Kathryn McKelvey, Janine Munslow)*
- ✓ *Introduction to Fashion Design (By Patrick John)*