

FASHION ADOPTION THEORIES



Trickle
up

- Innovation initiated from the street
- Since she is a struggling city girl, her wardrobe consists of many low end items of clothing, but she makes them work by experimenting with accessories



Trickle
down

- A style offered by top strata, accepted by lower strata
- As soon as Holly's wardrobe items hit the market, people from everywhere flocked to the stores to own a piece "just like Audrey did"...



Trickle
across

- Fashion moves horizontally between groups on similar social levels
- The popularity of the movie has been believed to have introduced the Little Black dresses in countries such as India.

Theories of Fashion Adoption

Theories of fashion adoption or distribution are concerned with how fashion moves through the various socioeconomic levels of society. There are three primary theories of fashion adoption: trickle-down, trickle-across and trickle-up. However, no one theory is adequate to discuss fashion theory or explain how fashion moves through society. In addition to these theories, there is an alternate populist model of fashion adoption, which applies to some situations that identify fashion distribution as moving through social groups rather than socioeconomic classes.

Trickle-Down Theory

Coined by economist Thorstein Veblen in 1889, the trickle-down theory of fashion adoption assumes that fashion begins in the upper echelon of society. Styles worn by the wealthy change, and those changes are gradually adopted by the middle and lower classes. When those styles have been assimilated by the lower classes, the wealthy, in turn, change their style and attire. This theory assumes that the lower classes want to emulate the upper classes and is the oldest theory of fashion adoption. It is applicable historically, particularly prior to World War II. Styles from the white blouses of the Gibson Girl era to the shorter hemlines of the 1920's began in the upper classes.

Trickle-Across Theory

First developed in the late 1950's, the trickle-across theory assumes that fashion moves across socioeconomic levels relatively rapidly. Clothing styles do not trickle down but appear at all price points at approximately the same time. Mass communications and popular media support the existence of this theory, providing pictures and details about new styles, as does the modern retail world. Many designers show similar styles in a variety of lines, ranging from high-end designer clothing to lower-end affordable pieces. Once a design appears on the runway, a variety of companies produce similar garments, allowing widespread access to fashion. From the 1960's shift dress to the shoulder pads of the 1980's, these garments were available in discount, department and designer stores at approximately the same time.

Trickle-Up Theory

The trickle-up theory of fashion adoption reflects changing styles and practices in fashion. According to the theory, styles may begin with youth or street fashion and move progressively up the fashion ladder until they are favoured and worn by older and wealthier consumers. Coco Chanel was the first to adopt this theory when she integrated military fabrics and attire into fashion following World War II. The classic T-shirt began as an undergarment in the working classes and is now a fundamental piece of the everyday wardrobe. Once the styles have been adopted by more traditional consumers, the street or youth culture may adopt a new style.

Historical evidence

Fashion involves change, novelty, and the context of time, place, and wearer. Blumer (1969) describes fashion influence as a process of “collective selection” whereby the formation of taste derives from a group of people responding collectively to the zeitgeist or “spirit of the times.” The simultaneous introduction and display of many new styles, the selections made by the innovative consumer, and the notion of the expression of the spirit of the times provide impetus for fashion. Central to any definition of fashion is the relationship between the designed product and how it is distributed and consumed.

The Populist Model

While the three primary theories of fashion adoption largely apply to socioeconomic levels, the populist model, conceived by anthropologist Ted Polhemus in his 1994 book “Streetstyle,” identifies social groups, rather than classes, as a source for fashion inspiration. A social group, such as punks in 1970’s London, for instance, may adopt a distinctive style and appearance shared throughout the group. The style serves to unify the group and identify individuals within the group but is often unrelated to trends outside of the group. Individuals adopt the style to become and remain an identifiable member of that particular social group.