

Mutation of Trend Forecasting From Art to Science

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Abstract: This study has been undertaken to investigate the factors responsible for change in the approach towards fashion forecasting. Art is all about mode of expression and Science caters to logics and valid reasoning. Fashion Industry is a million dollar industry where Fashion forecasting plays a major role in shaping the future of the fashion market. It is not based on the whims of a bunch designer or bigger brands expressing their vision and ideas. In modern era it is all about calculations of every small detail, experimentation, giving trial runs, coding and decoding of multiple aspects and then coming up with a concrete data analysis of the all the different aspects .

Key words–Fashion, Trend forecasting, Fashion Industry, Consumer

1. INTRODUCTION

For years, fashion industry has had previous data and intuition at its disposal to predict customer demands which is now becoming quite irrelevant considering the fast-changing fashion trends and the tough competition in the market. More so, with more and more people getting brand conscious, it is becoming tougher for aspiring fashion designers to make a place on the mannequins.

Fashion trend forecasting is a complex and diverse field. It concerns the behavior and wishes of society, the changes within society and the reason why this behavior, these wishes and changes come about. Over the course of several decades, intuition has been key in the field of fashion trend forecasting. However, during the past couple of years big data have gained territory in the forecasting industry. The dynamics that come into play when a fashion forecaster – either a data analyst or an intuitive trend forecaster – advocates a fashion trend that is picked up by a fashion company cause a loss of creativity in the fashion industry. While Elizabeth Wilson in her book *Adorned in Dreams* writes that ‘fashion is one among many forms of aesthetic creativity which make possible the exploration of alternatives’, the current fashion industry is facing standardization. If fashion is about change, expressing individuality, creativity and exploring alternatives, why is it that the majority of us are wearing clothes that are very similar? The uniformity of trends and the unvaried way we dress as a result is problematic if we want to use fashion as a way to express ourselves as individuals and it is problematic for the fashion industry as a whole if we want it to be a truly creative industry.

Consumers, fashion trend forecasting agencies and fashion companies influence each other when a trend is being established. Hence, this interplay of influences is what is named the ‘dynamics of fashion trend forecasting’. High fashion designers and consumers that produce (social) media content are followed by other consumers, fashion companies and forecasting agencies who want to stay up to date about the latest developments in fashion. Fashion companies, in general, subsequently influence consumers by using branding and marketing strategies in order to seduce the consumer into buying their products. With regard to forecasting agencies, a distinction is made between fashion analytics agencies and traditional trend forecasting agencies. Fashion analytics thrives on data whereas traditional trend forecasting is fueled by intuition. These forecasting agencies are the main influencers of mass market fashion companies, as brands continue to rely heavily on agencies’ predictions. Mass market brands’ free creativity is therefore diminished.

2.1 Megatrends mapping at fashion capitals

Fashion capitals are known for unique and strong identities. There are four major fashion capitals: London, Milan, Paris and New York. Various major activities like fashion weeks and fashion trade fairs make these cities a concentrated core hub of fashion. They are looked upon for stylistic inspirations. The collections are showcased at different times in these cities and guide colour palettes, silhouettes and textures of upcoming trends to be launched in stores for the masses as well as the niche markets in different fashion seasons.

2.2 Comparative study of current and previous trends

A comparative report of collections and product range of each designer/design house for the current year and previous year is generated by the forecasting team. This is done to figure out the similarities and differences. It also works as a guide for emerging trends in silhouettes, fabrics, colors, embroideries, textures, prints, surface manipulations and embellishments. Forecasters can thus analyze and predict innovative and unique trends that may prove to be high in demand in the coming season.

2.3 Identifying a niche market/client/group

One has to identify the target client for whom forecasting is required. The final product must satisfy the preference for a particular color, texture etc. of the targeted market.

Analyzing the demographic and psychographic structuring of the market

The client/group shall be chosen carefully and must relate well to the prospect designs yet to be developed.

Client profiles on the basis of demographics and psychographics must be analyzed meticulously for an effective choice.

A few examples are:

A client profile shall have a description about a chosen/given client with reference to demographic and psychographic study of the same. Demographics can be quantified and will include various statistical data of the client like name, age, gender, complexion, body type, height, budget/disposable income, socio-economic status, occasion for which the product or garment is required or suggested.

Psychographics are not measurable. They are quality-based and vary as per the taste of the individual or group and preference of the client like color choice. Other criteria include length of garment, size and prototype of desired product, trimmings preferred types of prints and embroideries. These may be different from the one in trend. Psychographics are related to the quality aspect of the final product desired as per the chosen given client/group.

2.4 Generating a style and trend report for the season

The report, based on rigorous market and trend analysis, shall be generated with the following predictions:

- A) Expected silhouette stories
- b) Expected fitting styles like pegged or flared, looser tunics or body snugging, straight fit or narrow fit
- c) Preferred themes for the coming season that shall regulate different elements and concepts to be focused by the design houses
- d) Colors in trend, with a brief of their categories like whether pastels will be preferred over bright hues; multicolored or monochromes; solid colors or blended palette; high intensity saturated chrome or toned colors
- e) Kind of prints that shall prove to be more popular like small or large, floral or geometric, linear or checkered, peppy or classic.

2.5 Data analytics in fashion trend forecasting

Data analytics in fashion trend forecasting, just like intuition, faces both negative and positive reactions. Since the fashion industry is conservative in its nature and has until recently relied exclusively on intuitive forecasting processes, it only slowly adopts data analytics as a new forecasting tool (Kumar, 2013). Data analysts argue that big data can help to more accurately predict fashion trends (Swayne, 2014; Bodeswa, 2015). According to data analyst Francesca Muston of trend forecasting agency WGSN, data can never substitute traditional trend forecasting since trends have a subjective nature, yet it can be used to 'enrich' the forecasts they make (Glassman, 2014). Even though most data professionals still see the value of intuition, as has been mentioned before, there are also those completely against the traditional approach to trend forecasting since gathering data and building models would be the only way to correctly predict trends without intuitive interference (Horx.com, n.d.). It is evident that the use of big data in fashion trend forecasting will rise in the coming years – be it at the cost of intuition or hand-in-hand with intuition – since the tremendous amount of information available enables data analysts to model trends and patterns based on sophisticated algorithms (The Business of Fashion, 2013).

3.1 THE DIRECTION OF FASHION CHANGE

Observation is not enough. If the trend watcher is to take advantage, he needs a framework for explaining how the trend began and its likely path within a social system. The directional theories of fashion change trickle down, trickle up and trickle across to make prediction easier by pointing to the likely starting points for a fashion trend, the expected direction that trend will take and how long the trend will last.

Some trend watchers visualize the dynamics of fashion as a pyramid of status level. In some theories, fashion trickles down from a 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 color 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.

The Look; Design Concept As fashion insiders and forecasters have a mental map of the marketplace, the locations where innovations are likely to be glimpsed early, the supply chain of the textile/apparel industry and the retail conduct to consumers. Fashion insiders also have another mental map - the map of seasons and shows. When consumers shop for winter coats or summer swimsuits, fashion insiders are seasons ahead in their thinking.

Forecasters use these mental maps to organize their observations of directional information. Since innovations rarely apply to the entire marketplace, information must be tagged for the appropriate price point, category and classification. In this way, forecasters turn random bits of data into useful information for decision support, points and style directions.

3.2 The drivers of fashion change

3.2.1 Social and cultural changes are major determinants of emerging fashions. However, they are themselves affected by the other drivers of change that include globalization of world markets and accessibility of more sophisticated communications technologies. The latter has provided people with faster and wider access to more ideas and influences from other cultures and societies, driving demand for wider choice in fashion products.

3.2.2 Trend forecasting businesses

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

3.2.3 Some better-known trend forecasters include:

- SachaPacha
- Peclers Trend Union
- Line Creative Partners
- Au Studio Promostyl
- Promostyl

Forecasting is more than just attending runway shows and picking out potential trends that can be knocked off at lower prices (although that is part of it). It is a process that spans shifts in color and styles, changes in lifestyles and buying patterns and different ways of doing business. What appears to be near random activity is in fact a process of negotiation between the fashion industry and the consumer, and between the various segments in the supply side chain.

4.1 Consumer research

4.1.1 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, colors or sizes and so on, or products to fit specific consumer tastes.

4.1.2 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.

4.1.3 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.

4.1.4 The apparel supply chain has one purpose, i.e. to provide an appealing and desirable product to satisfy customer needs, wants or aspirations. When successful, the connection results in a sale, because this connection is the purpose of the process. Every forecast begins with the customer, by observing the customer's adjustments to the marketplace and in the unexpected ways the customer adjusts the marketplace to his lifestyle and preferences.

4.2 Color Forecasting

Stimulating sales is the driving force behind color forecasting. Color grabs the customers' attention, makes an emotional connection and leads them to the product. Even when the basic product stays the same, changing the color gives a sense of something new. Color consultants help companies decide on the right color story to sell the product. Some consultants specialize in advising on color. Others develop color forecasts as part of their overall product development function. Some

large companies have departments dedicated to setting color directions for multiple lines. Professional color organizations 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.

4.3 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.

4.5 Introducing Innovation

While attention is showered on the most exciting and extreme runway fashions, the mechanisms of fashion change work in the background to create patterns familiar to the most experienced fashion watchers. When an innovation arrives on the scene, individuals consider it for adoption. The cumulative effect of those decisions can be tracked in sales and visually on the street. In fashion terms, the innovation may be the invention of a new fiber or a new finish.

CONCLUSION

Fashion involvement is an influential driver of consumer's fashion adoption process. How much a consumer will be involved in the fashion that much will be his/her intention to buy that fashion. Fashion involvement is related to the personal characteristics of the consumer that reflects about his/her subjective knowledge of fashion, which in result helps in to develop their intentions to adopt new fashion. Involvement has the strongest influence on the consumer's buying behavior, which means that if consumers involve in fashion, for example selecting and evaluating the new fashion according to their choice and interest, then they will hold more positive intention to buy that particular product.

Social values positively influence the consumer decision making process to adopt any fashion. Social values are the strongest forces that impact the consumer's purchase intention. The social values have the impact on the consumer product adoption behavior. Consumers have some internal motives which they connect with the desired world values through the use of symbolic and sensory values that develop their intention to adopt such things that can fulfill their expectations. Social values are considered as the tools to link individuals with the outer world or with the specific society in which they live. Social values have the positive influence on the purchase intention. It has two determinants i.e. opinion leadership, and the status of consumers.

Trend forecasters spend a considerable amount of time tracking what's being looked at online and who's doing the looking. These forecasters look at which websites attract certain demographics and what pages are being explored. They track the movements of celebrity trendsetters and underground early adopters to see what fashions are being promoted and worn. They read blogs and popular interactive trending sites for the latest gossip and filter through the images and files receiving the most attention. They include trends promoted by popular designers to come up with their predictions.

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