

## **The Theory of Fashion In between Social Studies and Cultural Studies (analytical research)**

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### **Abstract:**

The term "Fashion Theory" refers to a particular system, a cultural and aesthetic image of the clad body is produced, as fashion gives a special dimension to material culture with all what it holds in its meanings. The term "Fashion Theory" also refers to a theoretical approach that constructs favorable conditions and theoretical nominations, prior to any professional experience; by choosing between human and social sciences, including literature, philosophy and art.

### **Research problem :**

- 1 -The main problem of the research is that there is a theoretical dilemma between the connection of fashion theory with social studies and cultural studies.
- 2 - Fashion is governed by the motives of imitation and discrimination that move vertically to society through a certain social circle and accompanied by cultural factors that help to spread or fade away.

### **Research Goal :**

- To clarify the theory of fashion and the differences between fashion (subject to constant change), taste and between fashion and costume (linked to social behavior).

### **The Importance of the Subject of the Research :**

- Emphasis on the method as a form of the aesthetic and the moral forms associated with cultures, which include ways to wear clothes and express individual and social characteristics based on elements such as: sex, taste, or sense of belonging to a social group.

### **Research Imposition :**

Linking the theory of fashion between social studies and cultural studies.

Methodology and Research Plan:-

- The research follows the descriptive analytical approach to study the theory of fashion and its relation to social studies and cultural studies, and to achieve the goal of the research, we must study :-

- 1 - Definition of the term "fashion".
- 2 - Fashion as a social speech.
- 3 - Differences between fashion and taste, and between fashion and costumes.
- 4 - Clothes, costumes and identity.

**مقدمة:**

- يشير مصطلح " نظرية الموضة" إلي نظام معين يتم من خلاله إنتاج صورة ثقافية وجمالية للجسم الملبس , حيث أن الأزياء تعطي بعدا خاصا للثقافة المادية بكل ماتحمله من معاني .  
كما يشير مصطلح" نظرية الموضة" إلي منهج نظري , يقوم قبل أي خبرة مهنية ببناء ظروف مواتية , وترشيحات نظرية عن طريق الاختيار من بين العلوم الانسانية والاجتماعية , بما في ذلك الأدب والفلسفة والفن .

**مشكلة البحث:**

1- إن المشكلة الأساسية للبحث أن هناك معضلة نظرية بين ارتباط نظرية الموضة بالدراسات الاجتماعية والدراسات الثقافية .  
2- الموضة يحكمها دوافع التقليد والتميز التي تنتقل عموديا إلي المجتمع بواسطة دائرة اجتماعية معينة .. ويصاحبها عوامل ثقافية تساعد علي الانتشار أو التلاشي .

**هدف البحث:**

- العمل علي توضيح نظرية الموضة والاختلافات بين الموضة ( يخضع للتغيير المستمر ) , والذوق وبين الموضة والأزياء (يرتبط بالسلوك الاجتماعي).

**أهمية موضوع البحث:**

- التأكيد علي الأسلوب كشكل من الأشكال الجمالية والأخلاقية المرتبطة بالثقافات التي تتضمن طرق إرتداء الملابس والتعبير عن سمات فردية واجتماعية تعتمد علي عناصر مثل: الجنس , الذوق , أو الشعور بالإنتماء إلي مجموعة اجتماعية.

**فرض البحث:**

- ربط نظرية الموضة بين الدراسات الاجتماعية والدراسات الثقافية .

**منهج وخطة البحث:**

- يتبع البحث المنهج التحليلي الوصفي لدراسة نظرية الموضة وعلاقتها بالدراسات الاجتماعية والدراسات الثقافية , ولتحقيق هدف البحث لابد من دراسة :-

- 1- تعريف مصطلح الموضة.
- 2- الموضة كخطاب اجتماعي .
- 3- الاختلافات بين الموضة والذوق , وبين الموضة والأزياء .
- 4- الملابس والأزياء والهوية.

**Introduction:**

Fashion has a long history. "As early as the fifteenth century where fashion was considered so important in France as Charles VII was asked to establish a separated ministry of fashion. As it were, "fashion has been one of the most influential phenomena in Western civilization since the Renaissance. In the modern civilization, fashion has kept its permanent brand in every aspect of human activity, just it has become almost "second nature to us" as it was believed. "Fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles"

For centuries the phenomena of fashion behavior have been the varied subject of social analysts, cultural historians, moral critics, academic theorists, and business entrepreneurs. Spanning decades and centuries of changing fashions, literally thousands of commentaries focusing on the vagaries and nuances of fashion behavior have been published. Taken collectively, this major body of analytical commentary and anecdotal opinion describes fashion as a complex, diffuse, often perplexing, highly visible characteristic of civilizations. More importantly, however, the core of this literature may be integrated into a basic structure of interrelated concepts of fashion behavior. These concepts comprise the "state of the art" in the contemporary development of fashion theory.

In the most recent decades, consumer investigators from a variety of academic disciplines have taken an increasing interest in describing the unique patterns of consumer fashion behavior. In terms of comprehensive theory development, these efforts have been relatively modest. With respect to the development of principles of consumer fashion behavior, the product has become more substantial. However, the contemporary status of fashion theory development is largely an amorphous network of creative ideas, rather than a structured and interrelated set of concepts, constructs, and principles.

### **Fashion and Its Definitions:**

The individual derives the satisfaction, of knowing that as adopted by him it still represents something special and striking, while at the same time he feels inwardly supported by persons who are striving for the same thing. It is peculiarly characteristic of fashion that it renders possible a social obedience, which at the same time is a form of individual differentiation. It is therefore to define the fashion as:

1. Its products are often new, fresh and original whether visible or not. However, it is the endless aspiration for innovation and is a pursuit of novelty.
2. From an aesthetic point of view, is a pursuit of beauty, it has to be dazzling and enchanting; fashion possesses this peculiar quality that every individual for a certain extent makes its appearance as it intended to live forever.
3. Fashion is a pursuit of change. It changes constantly within a certain timeline. It is absolutely original at a lapse of time but capable of rapid changes in another.
4. Fashion is a pursuit of peculiarity as it has a peculiar character. "From the fact that fashion as such can never be generally in vogue points out that "it is characteristic of the dude that he carries the elements of a particular fashion to an extreme". Fashion expresses and at the same time emphasizes the tendency towards equalization and individualization, as well as desire for imitation and conspicuousness.
5. Fashion is a pursuit of uniformity. It has to be up-to-date and at the same time what is generally accepted by consumers. The pursuit of uniformity and that of individualization are contradictory in their very nature at most times but the conflict has to be dealt with if fashion is to be produced successfully.
6. Fashion is a pursuit of mental demands. Fashion, rather than answering to consumer behavior caused by existence needs, has to satisfy the need and desire of human nature and consuming preference.
7. Fashion is a product of imitation. It is the copycat of innovation and it is imitable in its essence. Based on Simmel's theory, "fashion is based on adoption by a social set, which

demands mutual imitation from its members and thereby releases the individual of all responsibility - ethical and aesthetic”.

8. Fashion constantly breaks through boundaries set by different social classes and groups and diffuses through them. The slightest infraction or opposition, however, is immediately noticed and places the individual in an exceptional position by calling the attention of the public to his action.



**George Simmel**

**George Simmel** draws a conclusion that the peculiarly piquant and suggestive attraction of fashion lies in the contrast between its extensive with all-embracing distribution, its rapid, complete disintegration; and with the latter of these characteristics the apparent claim to permanent acceptance again stands in contrast. He considers fashion as “a universal rule that makes personal behavior becomes a model” and it is the combination of social uniformity and individual difference.



**Adam Smith**

**Adam Smith** is one of the first philosophers who attached importance to the study of fashion. He suggests that the first and most important application field of fashion is the field of those grade concepts occupies a central position. It can be related not only to dress and furniture, but also to architecture, poetry, music and may even have an influence on morality. **Immanuel Kant**, however, believes that fashion is the changes taken place in the way of human life. **Anne Hollander**, the art historian, who defines “fashion” as the entire spectrum of attractive clothes styles at any given time. Cultural historian Elisabeth Wilson expresses very close to her definition.

**She divides “fashion” into two main categories:**

1. One of which is that fashion refers to clothing.
2. The other is that fashion being a general mechanism, logic or ideology which applies to many fields and clothing is one of the field”.



Anne Hollander

Immanuel Kant

A common ground between them is the strong perceived characteristics. Liu thus defines fashion as the perceptual dazzle. From the point of view of semiotics, fashion can be thought of as a code, or language that helps us to decipher these meanings. Fashion is also considered to be a specific life style and cultural phenomenon appeared at a certain period of time.

There is a various approach to defining fashion, that can be used to show the presence and role of theory even in the apparently practical and theoretical. One such approach would be to suggest that fashion is simply "what people wear". Another approach would be to point to one's CDG shirt and say "this is Fashion", as with all ostensive definitions, pointing to one's shirt presupposes, first, that one knows what is being pointed at and, second, that one knows what it is about the shirt that is fashion. When one points and says "this is fashion", it is one indicating that the cut, the fabric, the buttons, the color, the pose one has adopted or something else about the shirt is fashion? When one says "this is fashion" while pointing at one's shirt, one says nothing about what fashion actually is or is thought to be as such the statement begs the questions by assuming that we know what fashion is. The statement raises and presupposes, while not explicitly providing as answer to, the questions, "will the shirt be fashionable next year?" and "was it fashionable last year?", the ephemeral and changing nature of fashion is central to, and presupposed by, the definition of fashion but nowhere implied or indicated in the statement "This is fashion". So, we can see that there are theories of what fashion is presupposed by the statement but not addressed in the statement.

A contemporary theory of consumer fashion behavior. The central objective of this development is to define basic constructs and structured concepts which delineate a contemporary theory of fashion.

**Three conceptual frameworks form the basis of this development:**

1. The Generalized Concept of Fashion.
2. Fashion: An Object and a Process.
3. The Mechanisms of the Fashion Process.

### **The Generalized Concept of Fashion:**

Fashion may be defined as a broadly based behavioral phenomenon evidenced in a variety of material and non-material contexts. A generalized definition of fashion is constructed to reflect the generalized concept of fashion represented in a wider realm of non-material as well as consumer behavioral phenomena.

### **Fashion: An Object and a Process:**

"Fashion" may be conceptualized both as an object and as a behavioral process. The critical characteristics of a fashion, both as an object and a process, are defined.

### **The Mechanisms of the Fashion Process:**

The fashion process may be mechanistically characterized as a process of social influence and diffusion. The conceptual basis of the fashion process mechanism is developed based on perspectives from the classical and contemporary literature.

### **The Generalized Concept of Fashion:**

#### **(Some Definitional Perspectives):**

The concept of fashion may be illustrated by quoting a variety of definitions offered in the past half century:

1. Psychologist Ross quoted by psychologist Hurlock 1929 defined fashion as "a series of recurring changes in the choices of a group of people, which, though they may be accompanied by utility, are not determined by it."
2. Economist and marketing professor Nystrom 1928 suggests "Fashion is nothing more or less than the prevailing style at any given time."
3. Retailer Daniels 1951 states "Fashion is a conception of what is currently appropriate".
4. Sociologists Lang 1961 treat fashion as "an elementary form of collective behavior, whose compelling power lies in the implicit judgment of an anonymous multitude."
5. Economist Robinson offers fashion definitions: "...Fashion, defined in its most general sense, is the pursuit of novelty for its own sake." Fashion is change in the design of things for decorative purposes."
6. Marketing King 1964 writes: "Fashion adoption is a process of social contagion by which a new style or product is adopted by the consumer after commercial introduction by the designer or manufacturer."
7. Home economist Horn 1968 defines fashion as "...a manifestation of collective behavior, and as such represents the popular, accepted, prevailing style at any given time."
8. Webster's Unabridged Dictionary offers fashion as "The make or form of anything; style, shape, appearance, or mode of structure; also, peculiar shape or style."

### **Fashion: A Re-Definition of the Generalized Behavioral Concept:**

Describing fashion as a generalized behavioral concept represents a basic step to the development of a comprehensive and contemporary theory of fashion. In the broadest sense, elements of what is termed "fashion behavior" are represented in a general milieu of material and non-material phenomena. Classically but in a narrow sense, fashion historically has referred specifically to fashions in clothing, dress, and personal adornment. However, elements of "fashion" are an influence to major consumer purchase decisions in products such

as automobiles, furniture, home furnishings, housing architectural design, foods and nutritional selections. Even in a wide range of non-material contexts. Such as the dissemination and acceptance of ideological movements, educational practices, scientific pursuits, and emerging lifestyles, the forces of fashion may be directly influential to the acceptance process. Though the contexts in which fashion operates may be radically different, the principles upon which acceptance is based may contain a consistent similarity.

**As a generalized behavioral concept, the fashion phenomenon may be broadly defined:**

A fashion is a culturally endorsed form of expression, in a particular material or non-material phenomenon, which is discernible at any given time and changes over time within a social system or group of associated individuals.

Deductively, the generalized definition may be modified to define any specific fashion phenomenon. For example, in the classic arena of clothing fashion, application of the generalized definition may be derived.

A clothing fashion is a culturally endorsed style of aesthetic expression in dress and adornment, which is discernible at any given time and changes over time within a social system of group of associated individuals.

The generalized concept of fashion may have significant interest to social and cultural scientists, as well as to consumer behaviorists. For the remainder of this paper, however, the primary emphasis will be on fashion as a generalized consumer behavioral phenomenon. This development is derived largely from clothing fashion theory, for it is here that research and concept development has been most active. Nonetheless, the conceptual framework is basic, and can be applied to generalized consumer fashion contexts with limited conceptual adaptation.

**Fashion: an object and a process:**

An evaluation of the generalized concept of fashion suggests that fashion may be conceptualized on two separate dimensions, the fashion object and the fashion process. These dimensions have separate and distinct connotations:

1. The fashion object, in consumer behavior theory, may be a specific stylistic product, and in some cases a technological/product functional innovation or a consumer service. As a non-material "social" product, the object might be any behavioral practice or ideological philosophy.
2. The fashion process is a mechanism of stages by which a potential fashion object moves from its creation to public presentation and public acceptance. In the fashion process, a potential fashion object is introduced to the members of a social system, it is adopted by certain leading individuals frequently referred to as innovators, and is ultimately diffused to other social system members to a certain level of acceptance. The fashion process represents a dynamic mechanism by which the object ultimately emerges as an accepted or rejected fashion.

As both an object and a process, fashions have unique characteristics which differentiate them from other behavioral phenomena. A summary of some of the critical characteristics and elements of fashion will illustrate how fashion phenomena may be differentiated as a specific behavioral phenomenon.

### **Characteristics of the Fashion Object:**

The fashion object, particularly in physical product objects, can have a number of unique characteristics:

1. The fashion object must be a non-permanent object which is subject to change, obsolescence, and eventual replacement by "newer" objects. The fashion object may be discarded from the useful inventory of objects before physical or functional obsolescence occurs.
2. The fashion object may have characteristics of functional utility, but in general the acceptance of the object is largely based on qualities other than functional utility. Qualities unique to the fashion object may include styling, aesthetics, social acceptability, ego gratification, status symbolism, and other psycho-social qualities.
3. In any given period of time, the "current" or "acceptable" fashion objects are subject to and defined by public "tastes." The fashion objects of any given time symbolize the "collective tastes" of social system members who have adopted the fashion object.
4. The fashion object; when initially introduced, is characterized by conspicuous newness and novelty, and therefore becomes "exclusive" when compared to existing and accepted fashion objects. The fashion object loses this exclusiveness as a desired characteristic when the object is accepted, utilized, or conformed to by a large number of persons.
5. The fashion object may contain directly relevant psycho-social characteristics, such as high social visibility or conspicuousness, and high ego-involvement. The social characteristics of the fashion object may constitute the critical motivations for object acceptance.
6. The fashion product may represent a "luxury" rather than a necessity or commodity product. Specifically in physical products, the fashion object may qualify as a luxury product in that a premium price is discretionarily paid for "desirable" design, or design which is perceived to be newer, more novel, more aesthetically appealing, or generally more "attractive" as compared to other choice alternatives.
7. The fashion object is socially differentiated for various cultural utilizations such as the creation of sex appeal, social role performance, life-cycle position, occupational position, prestige position, and other life-style functions.

### **The Process of Fashion:**

The emergence of an object as an accepted fashion in the mass population is a complex and multi-faceted behavioral process. Subdividing this complex process into its most basic components, the fashion process may be thought of as an interacting behavioral system characterized by six basic elements:

1. The Object, having specific fashion object characteristics, which is introduced to a social system, composed of potential adopters.
2. The Purpose of the Object, which describes the utilitarian, functional, or artistic and aesthetic performance expectation of the object.
3. The Adopters or the individuals operating within their social systems, who may potentially accept the object in their day-to-day life-style or behavioral patterns.
4. The Motivations for Adoption, or the needs, drives, values, or reasons which are activated to stimulate individual adoption of the object. The motivations for adoption may range from a



variety of psycho-social satisfactions which are achieved by object adoption, to a perception of the object's superior functional quality.

5. For the object to reach the status of an accepted fashion, it must reach some prevailing or discernible level of acceptance within the social system to which it is introduced.

6. The Dimensions of Change Over Time, the manifestation of which is the presentation of new alternative fashion objects to a social system of potential adopters, ultimately resulting in a shift in popularity from the existing fashion objects to the newly emerging fashion objects. Change is implicit and critical to the fashion process. Changes which occur over time include change in the object, change among the individuals adopting, and change in the level of acceptance of the various competing fashion objects.

This generalized construction of the interacting behavioral elements of the fashion process may be uniquely applied to any specific fashion phenomenon.

**For example, in clothing fashions the elements of the interacting behavioral system may be specified as:**

1. The fashion object is a style of dress and personal adornment.
2. The purpose of the object is aesthetic expression.
3. The adopters are individuals operating within their social systems who accept the clothing style in their daily dress and adornment behavior.
4. The motivations are represented by a variety of psycho-social satisfactions achieved through aesthetic expression.
5. The level of acceptance is the percentage of social system members who dress in the specified style at any given time period.
6. The dimensions of change are evidence in the decline and obsolescence of established fashions, and the emergence of new style alternatives which ultimately mature into accepted fashions.

**The fashion mechanism may be characterized as a five stage process propagated largely by social motivations:**

1. Adoption Leadership by "Consumer Fashion Change Agents." This phase represents the introduction of the fashion innovation, the purchase of the innovation by certain individuals who function as leaders of collective taste within their social networks.
2. The Social Visibility and Communicability Phase. In this phase, the fashions go into a "use cycle," primarily by fashion change agents operating within their social systems and unique life-styles. During this phase, the fashion is characterized as "new" and "novel," and thereby emerges as a highly visible and communicative alternative to the existing fashions.
3. Conformity Within and Across Social Systems. Having passed the introductory initiation of the fashion process, the newly emerging fashion gains a further base of social legitimation and social acceptance as it is communicated within social system networks and across social systems over time. This diffusion process is propagated by social contagion and social conformity to a new set of fashion "tastes."
4. Market and Social Saturation. The fashion reaches and passes the mass marketing phase. The fashion has reached its highest level of acceptance, and the massed conformity to the

fashion creates a form of "social saturation" in that the fashion is in constant use by a large and visible number of people.

5. Decline and Obsolescence Forced by the Emergence of New Fashion Alternatives. The market and social saturation of the fashion, combined with the emergence of new fashion alternatives, forces the ultimate decline in use of a fashion. The fashion, at this point, has lost its entire connotation as a unique or novel "taste" due to the mass conformity movement which has been generated. As an acceptable fashion, the object is obsolete at the point in time when the level of acceptance or utilization of the fashion decreases to a minimal percentage of the social system members.

### **The Concept of Consumer Fashion Change Agents:**

Though each stage of the fashion process mechanism represents a construct for fashion theory development, the phase in which fashion trends are initiated and propagated are critical to the conceptualization of contemporary theory. In recent research on the initiation of fashion adoption and diffusion processes, emphasis has been placed on the constructs of the fashion innovator and the fashion opinion leader. Fashion innovators, the earliest buyers or users of a fashion innovation, have been found to have unique behavioral patterns and characteristics when compared to mass consumer populations. Similarly, fashion opinion leaders, or interpersonal communicators of fashion influence, have been identified as a uniquely characterized segment of the consumer fashion market.

From both a theoretical 1972 and pragmatic perspective, the concepts of fashion innovators and opinion leaders may be broadened in the concept of the "consumer fashion change agent". Although innovativeness and opinion leadership represent alternately distinct constructs, in the specific realm of fashion behavior they appear to significantly overlap. For example, the fashion innovator is essentially an "opinion leader," in that the innovator visually communicates information and influence concerning new fashion objects. Furthermore, the opinion leader is most likely to be influential in the early stages of the diffusion process, by influencing standards of "taste" within his or her peer and social networks. Functionally, the impacts of the innovator and opinion leader are simultaneously and similarly operative, and appear to be uniquely inseparable influences to fashion acceptance.

The interaction of innovativeness and interpersonal influence in fashion argue for the broadened conceptualization of fashion initiation and propagation around the single concept of the consumer fashion change agent. The consumer fashion change agent segment of the population represents a major population segment demonstrating a combination of innovativeness, interpersonal influence, knowledge, and interest in fashion products. In the adoption leadership phases of the fashion process, which are characterized by high social visibility and communicability of the fashion, the functions of innovativeness, interpersonal influence, knowledge and interest are performed simultaneously by a significant population segment. Individuals performing any or all of these roles, as "leaders of collective taste" in an emerging fashion movement, may be categorized as members of the broadened consumer fashion change agent market segment.

## Conclusion:

Each element of the fashion process represents a specific phenomenon for theoretical expansion and empirical investigation. For the purposes of explaining fashion behavior as an interacting system of elements, a conceptual framework delineating the dynamic mechanisms of the fashion process is required for further theoretical development. It recommended by this paper focuses on the dynamics and mechanisms by which the fashion process operates.

The central feature of this conceptualization is that fashion is a process predominantly motivated by social communications and social influence. There can be little doubt that other forces bear on the fashion process, of which market availability, social system attitudes toward fashion change, consumer purchasing power, social system life-styles, and psychological motivations are among the more important. However, of all the conceptual structures on which contemporary fashion theory might be based, the conceptualization of fashion as a sociological process provides the most generalized conceptual framework for both describing the fashion process and taking into account its collective behavior connotations.

When most or all of these characteristics are contained by a physical consumer product or consumer service, the object may be specifically qualified as a fashion object. These characteristics are most dramatically apparent in the major consumer expenditures of clothing, automobiles, and furniture. In other significant areas of consumer decision, including housing, foods and nutritional selection, entertainment, and services, the characteristics of fashion frequently are critical inputs to consumer decision-making.

## Recommendations:

1. The attention of the academic disciplines associated with the fashion industry.
2. To describe the patterns of consumer behavior of fashion.
3. Develop the principles of fashion behavior by introducing new creative ideas for individual and societal differentiation.
4. Pursuing modernity with social and cultural commitment as a basic principle of the fashion behavior.
5. Adoption of a cultural method of aesthetic expression in the fashion and fashion industry within the social system depends on the privacy of the community to the influence and spread.
6. Attention to the various cultural uses of fashion (the social role of fashion) as an interactive and influential behavioral system.

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- (<sup>2</sup>) Simmel, G. (2001). *The Philosophy of Fashion*. Translated by Fei Yong & Wu Yan. Beijing: Culture and Art Publishing House.
- (<sup>3</sup>) Adam Smith (16 June 1723 NS (5 June 1723 OS) – 17 July 1790) was a Scottish economist, philosopher and author as well as a moral philosopher, a pioneer of political economy and a key figure during the Scottish Enlightenment era.

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(<sup>4</sup>) **Immanuel Kant** (22 April 1724 – 12 February 1804) was a German [philosopher](#) who is a central figure in [modern philosophy](#)

(<sup>5</sup>) **Anne Helen Loesser Hollander** (October 16, 1930 – July 6, 2014) was a pioneering American historian whose original work provided new insights into the history of fashion and costume and their relation to the history of art

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