

Fashion Buying and Merchandising

SECOND EDITION

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Preface

An increasing number of college students view fashion buying and merchandising as a rewarding and prestigious career. In response to this trend, colleges have broadened their fashion merchandising curricula, and hundreds of institutions now offer either two- or four-year programs in this specialization.

Fashion merchandising as a college major is essentially the outgrowth of programs in retailing. Although retailing is the broadest aspect of the marketing of consumer goods and the largest component of our Gross National Product, many students prefer to concentrate on the more specific subjects of planning, buying, and selling of apparel which prepare them for a career in fashion merchandising. (Retailing principles and practices are included in this text as they relate to the buying and merchandising functions.)

Retailers in the past believed that fashion buying did not require special training; a buyer of any type of goods was able to perform in any merchandise sector. And to some extent, this philosophy was valid. At first, buying techniques were limited to when and how merchandise was presented. However, as fashion merchandising became of prime importance to numerous retailers, executives realized that fashion specialization was required to cope with unique characteristics, such as the need of a relatively fast stock turnover; the conditions that necessitate high markdowns; the constancy of the obsolescence factor; the nature of fashion's intrinsic value to the consumer; and the difficulty of evaluating and predicting consumer merchandise preferences.

The overriding considerations of the second edition of *Fashion Buying & Merchandising* remain the same as for the first edition—to present the following subjects in a realistic and “jargon-free” manner.

- Current fashion buying and merchandising practices
- Information about the responsibilities of fashion buying and merchandising, to aid orientation and exploration for career purposes
- Guidelines for effective fashion buying and merchandising practices

This second edition responds to current industry techniques and to the suggestions of teachers and students who used the first edition, to whom we express our deepest gratitude. The following are some of the important revisions:

- Merchandising applications are expanded.
- Sales promotion activities include buyer guidelines for promotional events.

- Information on owning and operating an independent fashion specialty store is expanded in keeping with the current trends.
- Highlights of the fashions from 1920 to the early 1980s are related to the influences that caused them.
- The addition of a unit that explains the interrelationships of the three major sectors of the fashion industry and their effect on retail inventories.

In preparing this text, we have avoided “covering the waterfront,” and deliberately omitted complete units of merchandising mathematics, the history of ready-to-wear, and analyses of the marketing practices of the textile and manufacturing sectors. These subjects, we believe, belong more properly in texts that cover them comprehensively. Our purpose is to give unencumbered focus to the assignments, responsibilities, and practices of fashion buying and merchandising. Our objectives are to assist the reader and to:

- Provide a foundation knowledge that will aid students in their discussion of current policies and procedures in fashion buying and merchandising.
- Create an awareness and an ability to express the knowledge and skill buyers need to make decisions in their day-to-day activities.
- Stimulate interest and encourage further reading regarding the profession in order to obtain a wider point of view.
- Develop the desire to observe, analyse, and criticize the fashion operations of various types of retail institutions as a para-professional as well as a customer.
- Increase the reader’s confidence in his/her ability to obtain an entry-level job that leads to a merchandising position.

1983

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ELEMENTS & IMPLICATIONS OF FASHION MERCHANDISING

- Chapter 1 Fashion Concepts
- Chapter 2 How Fashion Reflects Lifestyle
- Chapter 3 Highlights of the Fashion Business
- Chapter 4 Principles of Fashion Merchandising



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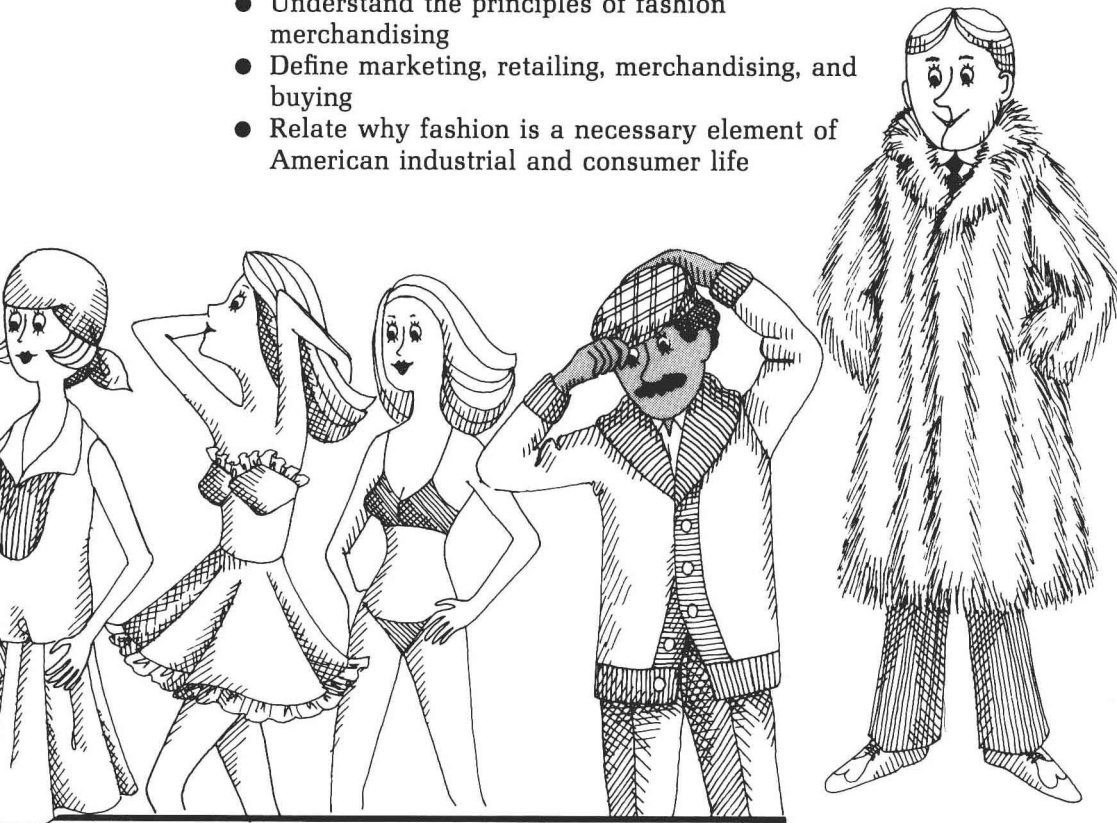
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The nature of fashion and its merchandising demands are far more complex than most people realize. A fashion professional knows fashion apparel as a unique product; one that reflects self-concept, lifestyle, change, a time, and a place. And above all, fashion is a result of acceptance.

Fashion merchandising is the ability to first respond to what, why, and when a style becomes a fashion; and then to determine its suitability for the particular retail operation and for what length of time. Therefore, our initial discussion focuses on fashion: definition, merchandising aspects, and background that led to current merchandising practices.

When you have finished Part One, you should be able to:

- Define fashion as it is understood by fashion authorities
- Explain how fashion responds to environmental factors
- Prove the value of merchandising
- Understand the principles of fashion merchandising
- Define marketing, retailing, merchandising, and buying
- Relate why fashion is a necessary element of American industrial and consumer life



INTRODUCTION

Successful fashion merchandising is based on stocking merchandise appropriate to consumer demand, a condition that leads to profitable sales. A buyer's primary role is that of a selector of merchandise for ultimate consumers. As a member of a retail team, a buyer is assigned the responsibility of building and maintaining a profit-producing stock that reflects the character and image of a retail operation. Management supports this effort by furnishing buying "tools," pertinent information, and standards of merchandising performance. A buyer is a retail executive who estimates the degree of acceptance of merchandise offered for sale by apparel producers, and then selects those styles that are most closely related to consumer demands of quality, taste, and price in such quantities that can be sold profitably.

Planning, buying, and selling fashion is the product of a well-calculated plan by an experienced, knowledgeable professional who knows customer buying habits and the meaning and implications of fashion merchandising. A successful buyer must recognize the relative importance of fashion trends, how long fashion trends will remain in importance, and when and in what depth fashion trends should be purchased.

The information that a fashion buyer accumulates in formal or on-the-job training starts with the fundamentals of:

- The Meaning of Fashion
- The Essentials of Merchandising
- The Evolution of Fashion
- How Merchandising Performance is Evaluated
- The Art of Producing A Profit in Retailing

FASHION—WHAT IS IT?

Historians and fashion experts would probably differ on the words used to define fashion, but there would be unanimous agreement that the elements of fashion are: *people*, *acceptance*, *time*, and *place*. It follows, therefore, that a fashion is anything that is *accepted* by a substantial

group of *people* at a given *time*, in a given *place*. One could say that the definition covers an almost infinite range of products, ideas, practices, and attitudes. In a broad sense, fashion is the culture of a time; a set of learned beliefs, values, attitudes, habits, and forms of behavior that are shared by society, and are transmitted from generation to generation within that society. The meaning of fashion is so broad that it covers almost every aspect of human behavior.

The requirement of a substantial group of people is relative. For example, one hundred people with considerable means could purchase a yacht and make it the fashion of rich people. This fashion would be characterized as limited, restricted to those with wealth. But, on the other hand, when students in the 1960s adopted blue jeans, it had mass acceptance. In one instance substantial is one hundred people; in the other, substantial is a majority, more than half the group. Substantial can be interpreted as a group of people who have an influence on others and/or who can obtain the recognition of others.

Fashion is associated with a particular time or period. What is important today can be "old hat" tomorrow. Try this practical test—watch an old movie on television. The cars, interior decorations, clothes, and even the acting are dated. Our present lifestyle is far removed from what was accepted at the time of the film.

The *place* strongly affects what is acceptable. Different people in different places have different levels of aspiration, taste, education, and experience. Particular groups have particular guidelines for acceptance. It does not take close examination to identify food fashions of different countries and the styling of foreign automobiles. Even in the United States, different regions have different values of fashion in foods, in apparel, and in lifestyles. These are referred to as sub-cultural or regional values.

The fundamental characteristic of fashion is *acceptance*. Styles offered by producers and designers are not fashions until consumers *accept* them and *purchase* them.

THE OBSOLESCENCE FACTOR

In a society that generates an annual Gross National Product at the unprecedented figure of three trillion dollars, fashion is meaningful to manufacturers, retailers, and consumers. If we used products until they were no longer serviceable, the country's industrial rate of production would be limited to replacement. Retailers would sell merchandise less frequently, and our economy would reflect a lower standard of living. We need a constant flow of new ideas to produce new styles that age the products in the hands of the consumers. In our affluent society, consumers discard serviceable goods in favor of those that are newer. This practice is known as the consumer *obsolescence factor* and is by

definition—the rejection of present ownership in favor of something newer even though the old retains utility value. How often have you discarded what you own simply because something else was newer in fashion?

As a country dedicated to mass production for mass consumption, the obsolescence factor is a key requirement to economic health. Produce, sell, redesign, sell is the marketing progression of most producers of consumer products. The industrial and consumer practice of constantly seeking the new, in economic terms, is an extravagance. However, the acquisition of the new, from a consumer's point of view, has the psychological value of making one feel good, and enjoying the pride of ownership, not to speak of the status value.

For many years an automobile was an outstanding example of a status symbol and of the design of obsolescence. Automobile manufacturers far too often brought out new models with essentially a change in styling, in silhouette, with additional chrome and more luxurious upholstery. Consumers, in turn, traded in their cars, which were in working condition, because the newer models were more fashionable and were overt evidence of financial status. Unfortunately for the industry its ability to influence consumers to practice the obsolescence factor has diminished. The high cost of oil, foreign car competition, and inflation, etc., have caused many consumers to rationalize their car purchase behavior—to consider the factors of service and cost. The automobile business in the United States is battling a loss of its share of the market. In turn, our entire economy has been affected adversely.

Television commercials can give testimony to the effectiveness of product romancing and how style causes consumer acceptance. “Buy the new and improved . . .” is a repeated message. A message that identifies one of the characteristics of fashion—change. Old becomes obsolete, even when its aging process is in a retailer's or producer's inventory. Old becomes valuable only when it is very old—an antique—an item in limited supply.

WHY PEOPLE BUY

One of the exciting areas of fashion is apparel, a very big business in the United States, one that generated approximately \$100 billion at retail annually in the early 1980s. The fact is that the combined producers of fabrics and finished apparel represent the largest commercial employers in the United States, about two-and-a-half million people—and that is big business by any standards.

Why do we wear clothes? It seems like a fairly easy question, but it has more meaning than a first analysis would reveal. There has always been a need for clothing. Climate made wearing certain coverings necessary: in the Arctic furs served best; in the tropics loincloths

sufficed; in the desert loose-fitting robes gave protection from the rays of the sun and heat. So primitive society's first consideration was protection.

But man is inventive. He soon learned that decorations and covering could express individuality and present an opportunity to show superiority. Covering and decorations become status symbols: kings wore crowns and robes; Roman senators wore togas; hunters displayed pelts; soldiers featured medals.

Status, authority, and wealth were reflected in the use of clothing. Uniforms were adopted by soldiers, policemen and firemen to show authority. Even political attitudes were gleaned from the use of body covering. Think of the revolutionary garb of the French Revolution and you recall peasant fashions; look at a picture of Chinese Communist men and women and invariably they will be wearing quilted cotton pants and jackets. Why? Why did the Russians give up this practice? Will Castro continue to wear fatigues and a beard? Will he continue to be emulated by his followers? Uniformity can equate with equality, but can the fashion be maintained over a long period? Do new periods bring new standards? Consider the symbolism of wearing evening clothes which lend dignity and formality; and the college graduation robes which indicate achievement.

One of the satisfactions of clothing is to assist man in asserting his authority and dominance over others. The basic need for bodily adornment or decoration to demonstrate superiority or status when civilization was a great deal younger is still common today. It would seem that wearing clothing is rooted in aesthetic and social yearning, and that the wearer secures a sense of well being and pleasure from the admiration of his fellow man. One of man's superior attributes, as compared to all other living creatures, is the ability to create and wear clothing. And herein is a psychological factor—the desire to show continued superiority over the animal kingdom. The “second skin” man acquires, which he can change at will, separates him from the animal kingdom.



The Eisenhower jacket—the modern version (see page 15).



One of the most compelling reasons for the use of clothing is to seek a state of betterment. *Better than what?* Better than we are. Better than we are endowed. Few of us are completely satisfied. We admire those with features we do not possess. When one is short, one desires to be tall. When one is fat, one desires to be slim. Clothing gives us an opportunity to improve on our natural endowments. Certain colors enhance the shades of our eyes and features. Specific silhouettes, such as a single-breasted garment, make us appear slimmer. Belted garments with a bloused effect make us appear more robust. How often do you hear, "I wear a certain type of garment because it makes me look better."

Parenthetically speaking, billions of dollars are spent by both men and women on cosmetics in their desire for self-improvement. This does not include the monies spent on beauty treatments and hair styling. It must be remembered that beauty is not created in a beauty salon, the salon merely enhances the appearance of the customer. One feels better following a beauty treatment because the improvement is largely a state of mind.

The explanation that betterment is the prime consideration may be an oversimplification. Betterment is a general term that must be put into psychological perspective and studied as to what motivates an individual to seek a state of betterment at a particular time. Also why is one garment favored over another? Our concern is to recognize that man constantly seeks change—for betterment.

We must consider that what is betterment depends on who is making the decision. A thirteen-year-old girl's interpretation of what is better for her may not be understood by her nineteen-year-old sister. Different individuals—different points of view. Is there a generation gap in clothing? Did you ever hear a father tell his son what clothing was considered appropriate in his time? Can you imagine that college students once wore white shirts and ties to classrooms? Hard to believe? What is appropriate depends upon the time and the place, and by whom. One never says never about fashion. Even crew cuts may one day return to the fashion scene—and longer hair may be out. We often reach back and embrace nostalgia and the fashions of yesterday, though never exactly as they were. There are always differences to make them adaptations of what was.

Yet fashion is evolutionary in its movement. We do not like *drastic* changes. Drastic changes may negate accepted ideas, and we do not like to give up what has been comfortable for us in ideas, clothing, or practice. As one wag once said, "Fashion is something we first find ludicrous, then smile at, eventually accept, and then fight to retain."

Complete change has economic significance. If new fashions make present ones look out-of-date, it becomes necessary to refurbish the major parts of our wardrobes. This situation is particularly annoying if our wardrobe was recently purchased.

Consumers are motivated to buy fashion apparel by a search to seek a state of betterment which could be one or a combination of the following reasons:

- Social position
- Authority
- Wealth
- Dignity
- Formality
- A second “skin” as an improvement on nature
- Conformity to peer groups
- Attitudes of conformity—rebellion, etc.
- Religious attitudes
- Aesthetic values

THE DIFFUSION OF FASHION— AN EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

A fact of history is that artists and other innovators were seldom appreciated while they lived. The public neither appreciates nor accepts very drastic changes. It takes time for our eyes and minds to become accustomed to and to accept forward movements. The trend in this age of universal education and changing values, however, has resulted in an increased acceptability of new ideas. The acceptance of any new idea starts with the *avant garde*—the innovators, a relatively limited group of people who by reason of sophistication and/or sensitivity initiate new trends, the direction of fashion. This group is followed by early acceptors—a wider segment of the population—and later by a greater cross section. In any evolution there are some who are the laggards who never follow the fashion of the times. (The adoption process is best shown in **Figure 1–2.**)

Who the innovators are depends on the type of fashion. Blue jeans are the most popular fashion in the world. And they did not originate in Paris (although denim fabric did originate in France as serge de Nimes). On the other hand, a great look of yesterday—The New Look—did originate in France.

Fashion can start at very high prices and trickle down to popular levels and conversely, it can start with groups having little money, rise in interest and eventually take on importance. The latter phenomenon is now due to the influence of youth on the times and their ability to make their weight felt.

High fashion was once the property of the wealthy. High fashion now refers to a limited fashion group—one that is practiced by the front runners—the early innovators—rich or poor.



The fashion of “down.” A new material—a new look.

The evolutionary process at one time took approximately three years—one year to rise in importance, one year to trickle down and one year for decline and final abandonment. In today's fast moving world, the process has been speeded up considerably.

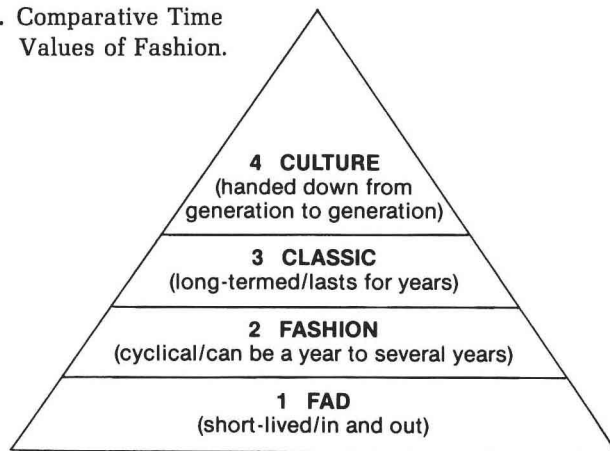
CLASSIFICATION OF FASHION

The duration of a fashion's importance is a critical fashion merchandising concern. A fashion can be brief or of long duration. Once having identified this characteristic, a buyer is in a position to assess a fashion's importance to the retail inventory.

Basic or Classic

When a fashion is constant or “long-lasting,” such as a long-sleeve cardigan sweater, it is called a *basic* or *classic*. It is similar to a standard in music. We do not consider the songs *Home on the Range* or *Old MacDonald Had A Farm* out of fashion. They are part of American music sung on special occasions, and part of any book covering folk music. The basic cardigan is part of the fashion scene—it does not excite a customer, but she has one or more in her wardrobe, to be worn to suit different occasions. In certain times, the basics become the most important promotable fashion, but in or out, they remain part of the fashion scene. There are many items that fall into this classification: loafer shoes, chino pants, shirtwaist dresses, pleated plaid skirts, long-sleeve slip-on sweaters in fine gauge, blue blazer jackets, corduroy separates, jumpers. There are general fashions that last for years, such as the casual look, the length of skirts, pleated skirts, and the single-breasted men's suit.

Figure 1-1. Comparative Time Values of Fashion.



*Above-the-knee hemline fashion of the 1960s.