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### The Fashion Cycle

The fashion cycle is a vital part of how designers create and release new lines of clothing. The fashion cycle occurs naturally and describes the 5 step process of a fashion trend that is introduced to the masses, rises to popularity, declines, and ultimately ends in rejection (Masterclass, 2021). This process can be seen in fashion trends throughout history, and continues to be the process that occurs. Although, most recently many argue that the fashion trend cycle has sped up to a fast pace that has never been seen before. Fashion designers and companies must look to this cycle in order to gauge forecasting and what to design. With the only exception to this cycle being the classic pieces which do not go through the entire fashion cycle. Every part of fashion goes through this cycle, this includes color, texture, design, and fabric (Das, 2023). The fashion cycle which in recent years has sped in recent years has caused a strain on the environment.

The first stage in the fashion cycle is the introduction stage, where the trend is first seen and brought to attention. During the introduction stage the fashion trend will be presented by major designers during fashion week and fashion leaders are the ones wearing the pieces (Mollard, 2022). These fashion pieces are considered to be “in-style” and “on-trend” with only very few people able to get their hands on them. The fashion pieces at this point in the cycle are being produced in very small quantities and sold at high prices. This part of the fashion cycle requires a lot of research and trend forecasting prior to the trend being created by major designers (Luong, 2022). Although the fashion trend may be very new at this point and not widely accepted, this stage is vital and the rest of this cycle relies on a successful launch at this point.

The second stage in the fashion cycle is the increase or rise to popularity also known as the fashion acceptance stage, when the trend is beginning to rise in popularity. At this point the style is considered “trendy” and one will see more people wearing the trend, especially the younger market (Barrera, 2021). The fashion trend is no longer as exclusive as it was in the first stage of the cycle and now there is a wider audience who is able to get their hands on the fashion pieces. Due to this the major designers who previously were selling those fashion pieces are now moving away from them and onto the next new look (Savla, 2020). In this stage it is interesting to see how today social media plays such an important role in the rise in popularity of fashion trends. Celebrities and influencers are influential in this stage and this can be through paid promotions or simply someone posting a fashion piece they genuinely love to wear.

During the increase stage of the fashion cycle the term “trendy” is introduced. A trend indicates a current style or trend that has risen in popularity (Merriam-Webster, 2023). In the fashion cycle there are two different types of trends: micro-fashion trends and macro-fashion trends. A micro-fashion trend typically lasts three to five years, while a macro-fashion trend tends to last five to ten years (Vogue Institute, 2023). Macro and micro trends can refer to anything from length, color, cut, fit, or design of a fashion piece. On the other hand, the opposite of a trend or trendy fashion piece would be a fashion piece which is considered to be a classic. Classics will not go through the entire fashion cycle; instead they remain in the rise stage, it will remain more accepted than pieces labeled as “trendy” (Peterson, 1996). Examples of these classic pieces which remain accepted from season to season are the little black dress, white dress shirt, or jeans. Unlike trends, whether they are macro or micro many people will always have staple classic pieces in their closets that they wear regardless of what is trending at the moment.

The next stage in the fashion cycle is the peak stage, in this third stage the trend has reached the peak of its popularity. At this point the trend is now available to the average person and is in a majority of stores. There is a strong demand for the fashion trend, it is being replicated, and the price point is much lower than when it was first introduced because it is being mass produced (Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, 2021). Every company is trying to replicate the trend and ensure they have stocked up on the products because of the high consumer demand. The trend is available in a wide range of price points which opens its availability to more consumers (Crane, 2022). At the same time that this trend is reaching peak popularity it also causes those designers who first introduced the style to lose interest in the product because it has become so mainstream and overproduced.

After the trend has peaked the trend cycle stops moving upwards and will head in a downwards direction in the fourth stage which is known as the decline stage. After the trend has reached its peak and becomes available to all its popularity decreases and brands begin to stop producing it (Masterclass, 2023). Although consumers are still wearing the trendy pieces, they are getting bored of it and will not purchase it for full price anymore so one will see the pieces on sale and sold at lower price points (Mollard, 2022). At this point fashion-forward consumers are ready for the next trend to appear. The current trend has been oversaturated and is no longer of interest to those who are fashion-forward and interested in remaining “on-trend” (Crane, 2022). It is interesting to see just how quickly a trend goes from being at its peak and most in demand to being in decline and not of interest to consumers anymore.

The final stage in the trend cycle is the obsolescence also known as the rejection of a style. At this point in the cycle the fashion trend is out of date and retailers are looking to clear it out of their stock (Barrera, 2021). Even once a trend becomes obsolete it doesn’t mean that later on it will never re-enter the trend cycle because trends do always resurface, it just means the trend is currently not in demand (Savla, 2020). Some examples of how a trend

can go from being obsolete to re-entering the fashion cycle can be seen most recently when mom jeans that were trendy in the 1990's came back into style. That style of jeans had been obsolete for some time and wearing mom jeans made someone look outdated and not fashionable, yet once it re-entered the trend cycle wearing skinny jeans was then considered to be less fashionable. So, although obsolescence is the last stage in the trend cycle, it doesn't mean that a trend completely dies there.

Currently the trend cycle does exist yet most recently many within the fashion industry have noticed just how fast the cycle has become. People within the industry are taking notice that the internet has made each stage of the fashion trend cycle much shorter and young consumers are moving from trend to trend at a speed never seen before. Prior to the increased use of the internet and social media trends would begin in a more natural way such as word of mouth, yet today most trends are gaining visibility through the internet (Freidman & Quinones, 2022). A method such as word of mouth is a much slower process compared to using the internet or social media where in an instance people from all over the world can be reached and instantly make purchases. A few years ago a trend would last for a year or two yet today one can see trends going through the entire cycle in just a few months (Ewens, 2022). Many point to Gen-Z's high use of social media compared to other generations as being the cause of this change in the speed of the fashion trend cycle. Yet, it is important to understand that although the increase in the speed of the fashion trend cycle may seem harmless it is actually harmful for the environment. Trends becoming reaching the obsolescence stage so quickly raises concerns for the environment and how people are disposing of unwanted apparel. If a trend only lasts a few months now and no longer a year or two people will be more inclined to throw out clothing which is deemed to be out of style or not on trend creating more waste in the environment (Fischer, 2023). It is important to understand the fashion trend cycle and how it works in order to find ways to balance it to prevent waste and to control it so that trends aren't running through the cycle so quickly.

In conclusion, the fashion trend cycle is a key part of the fashion industry and through today's technology has become a much faster cycle than has been seen in previous years. The five stages of the cycle, introduction, rise to popularity, peak, decline, and obsolescence explain how the life cycle of a trend. As we see the evolution of a trend within the cycle one can also see the actual stages of the cycle evolve over time through the growth of technology. The rise of the internet and social media has contributed to the speed up of the fashion trend cycle and has shaken up the fashion industry in a way never seen before.

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