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CONFORMIST AND NON-CONFORMIST IN AN AMBIENCE OF FASHION INDUSTRY

T. Berdnik

*Candidate of Philosophical Sciences, professor
Don State Technical University
Rostov-on-Don, Rostov region, Russia*

Abstract. The article examines the mutual integration of the two models of social identity in the culture of contemporary society – conformism and non-conformism. The author considers the conditions for the effective functioning of the fashion industry in the context of the conformity of behavior and attitude to the novelty of both consumers and creators of fashion. It is concluded that the effect of the type of social behavior on the formation of subcultural groups, and the attitude of their representatives to the proposals of fashion designers. Presents contemporary fashion structure that develops in the dialectical unity of opposites, and the two systems – Haute Couture, embodies her creative nature, and pret-a-porter, reflects its commercial nature. It shows the location of conformity and nonconformity to this structure.

Keywords: conformism; non-conformism; social groups; social culture; fashion industry.

A human lives and develops in the system of multi-channel relationship with the outside world. This system includes contacts with the objective environment, and interpersonal interaction and social communication, which dictate a set of spiritual, ethical and moral standards. The strength of connection with public determines the degree of socialization of the individual and depends on its ability to conform. Most often conformity is understood as opportunism, which gives conformity a profoundly negative quality. A conformist is seen as a person with a low level of determination, who is always ready to sacrifice his beliefs and to adapt it to the opinion of the majority, so he can earn public ap-

proval and support. Conformists' behaviour and even his way of thinking expresses his intention to be like everyone else, therefore, trying to mimic the majority, while becoming part of the majority itself. Antithesis of conformism is the non-conformism – the desire, at any cost, to oppose the point of view of the opinion of the majority. Its principal position is the denial of principles and rules that exist in any group, society or community; and offer in return its own vision of the problem and ways to overcome it. The rejection of social norms, values and goals expressed by a nonconformist is so extreme, that can even lead to antisocial behavior.



Psychology distinguishes two types of non-conformism: independence as freedom of expression, freedom from rules and conventions imposed by society or social group, and anti-conformism as a consistent and demonstrative opposition to social norms. While the first type of non-conformists is not afraid to look like a "black sheep", the second type goes out of its way to become one. Ironically, with all the alternative views and ways of positioning themselves in the social structure, both conformists and nonconformists are equally active as consumers of fashion. However, it is not strange! The very nature of fashion, as a way of communication between an individual and society, demonstrates the duality: on the one hand, it helps a person to feel adequate among millions of their kind, on the other gives him an opportunity to realize the need to be different, unique. In other words, fashion is a universal mechanism for positioning individual concepts of conformists, as well as for their antipodes – nonconformists. However, in forecasting and marketing of fashion you should understand the difference of goal-setting in the context of consumerism of fashion industry products. Alexander Hoffman – the famous Russian expert in the theory and the sociology of culture, design and fashion – has developed a structure of fashion consumer, in which he has adopted the original typology [1]. Using the terminology proposed by Hoffmann, let's study these types of fashion consumers in the context of the conformity of their behavior and their attitude towards novelty. "Innovators" ("pioneers", "experimenters") – are the smallest group of consumers, being the first to try on all the latest fashions, which are contrasting dramatically with the trends of previous seasons. Their sources of inspiration are the latest and most creative collection of Haute Couture, focused on the future. Objects of fashion for this social group act as a means of personal identification. The quest for originality for this in-

dividuals is so great that it motivates the production of their own style, which exists, to a certain extent, beyond fashion. Thus often "innovators" become customers of young creative designers who create unique collections with a certain degree of shock and theatricality.

Independent nonconformists & anti-conformists belong to this group of consumers, who are not afraid to stand out from the crowd with its unusual views. They need to be at the forefront of fashion, or rather, a head of her. Not all of the new products are accepted by the majority and become a stable and popular seasonal trend. However, non-conformists-"innovators" are not too afraid by the fact that their experiments with the appearance will not in the near future become fashionable. For designers and marketers of fashion business "innovators" are an experimental platform for the study of consumer demand.

The next group of consumers Hoffman called "leaders" (or "community leaders"). "Leaders" are individuals that have an authority in a particular social group. They do not reject the trends of previous seasons radically; choosing only those innovations that are in transitional stage and have a real chance soon come into fashion. Their source of information are the seasonal shows of pret-a-porter and pret-a-porter de luxe, fashion magazines, fashion channels. "Leaders" are often the most authoritative representatives of youth subcultures and dictate fashionable items in their social groups. "Leaders" – are representatives of the independent non-conformism. Their choices give little information suitable for the fashion forecasting, because the "leaders" buy things that are already released in small quantities. But thanks to their authority, they become the propagandists and promoters of fashion concepts in large social groups.

The most massive consumer group, according to Hoffman, is subdivided into "early



majority" ("imitators") and "late majority" ("skeptics"). Regardless of their gradation the "majority" are all of those who are considered as "trendy people". Guided by their look you can see what trends are currently in fashion. Their desire to be like everyone else obviously marks their belonging to the conformists. As a rule, they positively perceive only those tendencies which they were gradually accustomed to by the "leaders". This group promotes the mass replication of products and help to make the major profit from the sale of fashion goods. Despite their conservatism "majority" is the most important link in the fashion industry system, ensuring its economic efficiency. Hoffman highlights another group of consumers – "traditionalists" ("lagging"). Representatives of this group are focused primarily on tradition and affirm themselves out of fashion. In fact, the "traditionalists" are not free from fashion, they are simply far behind her, idealizing tendencies of the past season. Oddly enough, this group consists of non-conformists, or more precisely, anti-conformists. They consciously and deliberately oppose their aesthetic stance to the accepted norm, using this behaviour as a method of standing out from the crowd. The motivation for this kind of behaviour American social psychologist Charles Horton Cooley saw in the exaggerated sense of self-worth, pushing nonconformists to consciously not do what is needed by circumstances or other people. "Asserting themselves and get their way in anything is an enjoyment to them; and if others have anything against this, that is proving their point even more" [2].

The group of "traditionalists" includes, along with the "lagging", representatives of rebellious subcultures, aesthetic preferences of which are determined by ideological factors and depend little on the designers' trendy offers. The "traditionalists" in the system of the fashion industry – are the most inefficient consumer group. However, their preferences

can inspire designers to create a collection, for example, in a vintage style or traditional folklore. Moreover, the rapid acceleration of fashion cycles can become a factor thanks to which tactics of "traditionalists" will become topical – falling behind for a long while can actually lead to becoming super-Avantgarde. Active participants of the fashion process, in addition to fashion consumers, are its creators. Among them there are also distinguished two models of social behavior: conformism and non-conformism, both of which are not only "get along" with each other, but, moreover, can not exist separately. The essence of this dyad is based on the dual objectives of professional fashion designers. There is no doubt that they are artists, generators of new ideas, in their creative ambitions aspiring to the full freedom of expression, to the sense of their uniqueness, to the right to dissent even with the risk of being misunderstood nowadays. At the same time fashion designers are traders, which professional success is shown through financial performance. A contradiction arises: on one hand fashion gives a designer the power to be proactive & forecast trends of the future; and on the other hand – it allows an opportunity to catch a turn in tastes of consumers & gives a chance for higher profits which is the main criteria of a successful business. This contradiction is resolved by the very structure of modern fashion that is developing at the same time in the unity and the confrontation of the two systems – Haute Couture, which embodies a creative subsistence, and a commercial fashion (pret-a-porter), reflecting its commercial nature [3].

Haute Couture is the area of the fashion industry, which "attracts" nonconformists, living them an opportunity not only to reveal the artistic talent, but also to realize the psychological setting on detachment from the crowd. Non-conformists' eternal search for novelty, their need and, at the same time, the ability to overthrow stereotypes, opposing



the vision of conventional models, have gained them a special professional status in the fashion of postmodernism. In the "army" of many thousands of designers working in the field of fashion industry only a few dozen have the right to be called a fashion dictators, and all of them are profound non-conformists. However, the creators of high fashion should not be considered as a subjective idealists, who exist in an ivory tower and do not know what's going on outside. Fashion is the most public form of art, it can not exist without mastering the masses; and to understand their expectations and preferences, a designer needs to be united with these masses. Therefore, the best transmitters of the ideas of Haute Couture are conformists. Designers-conformists are generally employed in the area of pret-a-porter to adapt the concepts of high fashion for the mass replication and to adapt them to the taste of the average consumer, and the most numerous – "the majority" [1]. To maintain the interest of the consumer to the offered novelties of designers non-conformism of postmodernist fashion skilfully uses all the tricks of the artistic (as well as non-artistic) provocation. Sometimes collections presented on the runways of high fashion are so shockingly unusual that they lose their essential functional value – to be human clothes – thus transforming a fashion show into a performance for a handful of admirers of conceptual art. A situation understandable only to a narrow circle of highbrow aesthetes can push away conformist majority which prefers the famil-

iar shapes and ideas. And it would mean that designers' ideas will be unviable from the point of view of the financial and economic aspects of the fashion business. The conclusion is obvious and dialectical: conformism and non-conformism, are in constant opposition to each other, but mixed together can make a strong and effective unity. Mutual integration of the two models of social identity of an individual in the structure of modern society is the very platform on which the development and prosperity of the fashion industry is based.

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