

The Concept of Fashion Trend: meaning, history, connotation

- Amanda Queiroz Campos¹
- Brigitte Wolf²

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¹ Phd, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina and Bergische Universität Wuppertal
amandaqc88@gmail.com / Orcid: 0000-0003-2120-5614 / <http://lattes.cnpq.br/9221231968758113>

² Doutora, Universidade de Kassel /brigitte_wolf@me.com
Orcid: 0000-0001-9291-2979

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ABSTRACT

With the intention of contributing to the theoretical deepening of trend studies, the present research aims to understand the historical origins and transformations of the term trend and, more specifically, the fashion trend. The methodological procedure involved a consistent bibliographical review. Firstly, we investigated the etymology of the term in Portuguese, English, and German. In addition, we combined different consolidated bibliographical references - such as Caldas, Lindkvist, and Vejlgard - in order to historically understand the concept and its applicability. The general interpretation of the term tendency relates to a force that leads to a finite but uncertain future. Between 1946 and 1975, trends acquired a comprehension similar to their current meaning, emphasizing their economic relevance, which coincides not arbitrarily with the birth of mass consumption. The contemporary connotation associates trends to changes and transformations that involve different sociocultural and economic aspects. In turn, fashion trends are expressions of sociocultural tendencies in visual and tactile characteristics applied to fashion products.

Keywords: fashion trend, etymology, significance.

O Conceito de Tendência na Moda: significado, histórico, conotação

RESUMO

Com a intenção de contribuir para o aprofundamento teórico dos estudos de tendência, a presente pesquisa aqui apresentada visa compreender as origens e transformações históricas do termo tendência e, mais especificamente, tendência de moda. Para tal, como procedimento metodológico foi desenvolvida revisão consistente de bibliografia, investigando a etimologia do termo nos idiomas português, inglês e alemão. Além disso, buscou-se agregar diferentes referenciais bibliográficos consolidados nos estudos de tendências - tais quais Caldas, Lindkvist e Vejlgard - em prol do entendimento e da aplicação das tendências no decorrer do processo histórico. A interpretação geral do conceito de tendência relaciona-se com força ou vetor que direciona a um futuro finito, porém incerto. Entre 1946 e 1975, as tendências adquiriram uma compreensão semelhante à atual, enfatizando sua relevância econômica, o que coincide não arbitrariamente com o nascimento do consumo de massa. A conotação contemporânea associa tendências a mudanças e transformações que envolvem diferentes aspectos socioculturais e econômicos. Já as tendências de moda são compreendidas como expressões das tendências socioculturais em características visuais e táteis de produtos de moda.

Palavras-chave: tendência de moda, etimologia, significância.

1. INTRODUCTION

Names given to children, adherence to certain scientific theories, the preference for 4X4 trucks, the world's recent "gourmetization", and the aesthetic changes that renew the wardrobes of fashionistas and ordinary people are phenomena dictated by the logic of trend. The literature of the field insists that the meaning of the term has been emptied, and it is no surprise that there is uncertainty regarding the definition of what a trend is, considering that it is quite a popular term in contemporary culture, and it affects individuals, companies, and society as a whole (CALDAS, 2015; VEJLGAARD, 2008).

Colloquially, trends are associated with the ideas of fashion and novelty, and with the ideas of anticipation and uncertainty. Clearly, trends are consubstantial to the idea of fashion (MOCHO, 2012). In the sense proposed by Mocho, mostly defended by Kawamura (2014) and that drives the scope of this work, fashion as a system regards sets of fashion production, development, and communication. The view of fashion as an institution covers, more than the garment production steps and actors, the stages where the concept and the practice of fashion take place, such as the fashion press, advertisement, branding, and retail.

In such context, (fashion) trends appear widely and are considered by readers to be the most interesting content of fashion magazines (BAILEY & SEOCK, 2010). However, the fashion ethos and system has adapted the original idea of a trend (more specifically, tendency) to its peculiarities, involving the concept in the ideas of repetitive volatility, ephemerality, and renewal. Therefore, this paper will

endeavor the task of conceptualizing trends rather within the scope of fashion studies.

The English language presents two different words for trend and tendency, which does not occur in other languages, such as Portuguese and German. The differentiation usually defines trend in relation to the idea of ephemeral novelty and fashion, whereas the noun tendency maintains associations with areas such as Statistics and Psychology, referring to a longstanding inclination and predisposition. On the other hand, the use of both words as equivalents causes a great part of the misunderstandings and connotation wastage when it comes to the comprehension of such phenomena.

Although considered synonyms, each word presents particularities and, therefore, specific associations. The general idea that unites both concepts consists of the meanings of direction, extension, and inclination (COLLINS, 2012). The ordinary concept of tendency implies, however, that the vector or direction will most likely be achieved, comprising something that tends to grow and become standard. On the contrary, a trend – more specifically a fashion trend – will rarely standardize, for as a characteristic of fashion as ethos, the wide adoption empties the symbolic meaning of novelty.

Similarly, to what presently occurs with the term design, the word trend was extensively used during the 1990s and 2000s, and forcedly associated with products and services as an argument, qualification, or legitimation. Such a situation, combined with fast fashion logic, has led to a context in which trends are often perceived as negative, referring to mere aesthetic alterations, without any reference or background. Many people disfavor trends, considering them to be followed by the masses, in opposition to the expression of one's own individuality, as defined by the never-ending search of a “newer new” with the goal of social differentiation (ESPOSITO, 2014).

Fashion trends are phenomena that concern taste and style. According to Erner (2012) and Lipovestky (2007), they are convergences of desires

and taste, characterized by cycles of varying duration and rapid modifications. Despite the fact that quick renewals respond directly to the fashion industry's interests – translated into profit –, every trend involves two spheres: [a] an arbitrary cultural sphere and [b] a commercial economic sphere. Hence, this discussion on the concept of trends regards mostly its meaning rather than the causes behind the renovation.

This article consists in part of the studies of the doctoral dissertation entitled "Of tradition and creation: the discourse of fashion designers on trend report usage" conducted under the supervision of Luiz Salomão Ribas Gomez and Brigitte Wolf respectively at Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina (Brazil) and at Bergische Universität Wuppertal (Germany). The joint Doctorate was funded by FAPESC – Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa e Inovação do Estado de Santa Catarina –, CAPES – Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior –, and DAAD – Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst. It seeks to clarify the meaning and the attributes of a trend and, more specifically to address the subject within the extent of the fashion system – thus, fashion trends. Firstly, the etymological comprehension of the term trend is presented with the intention of apprehending its origin, before undertaking the understanding of the history of its meaning, from its origin to the present day.

2. METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This work was conducted within the scientific field of design, justified by the activity of fashion design and the relevance of trend studies in the field – usually entitled as fashion or trend forecasting. As Friedman (2003, p. 1) proposes the field of design has widened and covers a variety of processes, interfaces, and artifacts. For the researcher, to conduct research in design requires comprehending "how things work and why" because it involves the analysis and explanation that may lead to a theory. In that sense, this paper contributes to a deeper comprehension of the

phenomena of trends, by stressing underlying connotations carried throughout time and still attached to the concept.

Likewise, one may justify this investigation supported by Rech (2013, p. 109-110). The Professor states that research on fashion trends and their operations in the context of the fashion system contributes "to the elaboration of theoretical references [to this and] others important fields for the industrial enlargement of developing countries, such as Brazil". Notwithstanding, theoretical investigations contribute to the strategic applicability of fashion trends, now understood beyond mere formal alterations.

This research has a qualitative approach, as it gives priority to deepening the understanding the connotations and transformations surpassed by the term. The nature of the study was explanatory, for it tried to understand how fashion trends evolved to be comprehended the way they are in the current fashion system setting. In order to address the main problem, a systematic theoretical foundation was applied in the form of documentary research. The review of literature included the appraisal of books, papers, theses and dissertations on topics pertaining to this research: the concept and history of trends, specifically of fashion trends.

3. ETIMOLOGY³

The etymologic research was conducted firstly in the Portuguese language, since that is the author's native language and, therefore, the language in which the greater part of this research into fashion trends was conducted. Subsequently, the article presents etymologic research conducted in the German language – due to the second location of the binational Ph.D. – and lastly, in the English language, which is the language in which the final dissertation is written. Other

³ Etymology is the study of the composition and origin of words, and their meaning throughout history.

languages such as French and Czech contributed to the formulation of the word in the studied languages.

In Portuguese, the word trend has the meaning of inclination, propensity, disposition, intention, movement, and determining force (BUARQUE-DE-HOLLANDA, 1999). The derivation of the Latin adjective *tendente* created from the verb *tendere* formed the word *tendência* (MACHADO, 2003). In Latin, the vocable *tendō* corresponds to the meanings of (1) to extend; (2) to submit an offer; and (3) to proceed, resume or continue. In a figurative connotation, the term corresponds to the actions of tending and leaning towards (FARIA, 1962). Such a connotation also relates to an Indo-European root, *ten*, whose meaning encircles the idea of stretching, tending, and tensing (ARTIGUES & ROBERTS, 1997).

In German, the word tendency (*Tendenz*) is a feminine noun variant of the French term *tendance*, with the definition of direction (*Richtung*) and propensity (*Neigung*). Also, as a reference, the French word *tendre* implies the meanings of stretching, expanding and extending. The Latin term *tendere*, which also corresponds to the root of the Portuguese word, reinforces the concepts of spread and elongation. Commonly, the word *Tendenz* is associated with the word *Streben*: yearning, longing, striving to achieve something (KÖBLER, 1995).

The word tendency in the English language dates from 1620 and originates from the Medieval Latin term *tendentia*, varying from the Latin term *tendere*, mentioned above. The word tendency refers to the Old French word *tendre*, likewise a version with Latin roots (COLLINS, 2012). However, the term trend is used with greater recurrence. In this case, the word refers to the term *trendan* of the Old English, whose meaning refers to the verb to turn. According to Lindkvist (2010), the Northern European word *tendr* corresponds to the term, describing the course of a river or maritime currents.

In summary, the words trend and tendency aggregate the ideas of propensity, inclination, growth, expansion, driven movement. In addition, due to the English and German understandings, the term has

connotations of movement and something to be achieved, indicating a relational condition, and suggesting the existence of an end (CALDAS, 2015; RAYMOND, 2010). Based on those meanings, the semantic concept of trend rests on three main pillars: (1) otherness, in the sense that a trend exists upon an external force that attracts or leads it; (2) movement, identifiable in the ideas of inclination and propensity; (3) coverage, reporting on the meanings to extend, expand, and unfold (CALDAS, 2015).

Therefore, a trend (in the general sense of the word) is the predisposed inclination towards something, someone or some situation likely to happen in the near future. Having a final attractive force, the general idea of a trend is something that tends to reach this otherness, and therefore, the idea of a trend presents a sense of finitude; i.e., a situation that will be achieved; and futurology; i.e., suggesting that the situation will happen in the future. The relationship of the trend with the concept of propensity also involves the consideration of uncertainty: although the situation is likely to happen, it has not yet happened, and there is no assurance that its course will not change.

Of course, the ideas associated with the term have varied throughout time, as well as the scientific paradigm in vogue, and the situation and aim of what it was used. In order to identify how the original connotations and meanings acquired their current configuration, a historic bibliographical study was conducted, of which a summarized report will be presented in the following pages. The goal is to elucidate how the first connotation of the term, used as romantic inclination during the Middle Ages, was altered to the current meaning and gave birth of a vast range of related terms, such as trendy – one who is up-to-date with trends – and trendsetter – influencer who defines and establishes trends –, which date from the 1960s (COLLINS, 2012; HIGHAM, 2009).

4. HISTORY

Historically, the first usage of the word tendency occurred in France during the Low Middle Ages, more specifically the thirteenth century. The term was uttered with the connotation of inclination. However, one would apply it to suggest a romantic inclination to another, as a manifestation of romantic love, which characterized the period of the rise of the bourgeoisie (CALDAS, 2015; SANT'ANNA, 2009). The meaning reinforces the sense of otherness, for it requires an external element, that is, something or someone who causes the attraction.

The word tendency was rarely used until the eighteenth century, when recaptured by science with the meaning of strength in a specific direction, tending to an end, dynamism, effort, and impulse. It was due to the time, during the Enlightenment, French Revolution, and the encyclopedia, that the concept of tendency adopted one of its most recurrent associations: finiteness, a movement that expends itself. During the same period, the area of Physics consolidated the meaning of trend, corresponding to attraction and force, which is used by physicists and other scientists to the present day.

Conversely, the word tendency reached considerable propagation only after the nineteenth century, when psychologists started employing it in the plural form – tendencies – in the sense of propensity or predisposition of a certain individual in acting in a certain manner; his or her particular modalities of desire and orientation of individual needs. Under this prerogative, psychologists added a crucial signification to the contemporary meaning: the pointed direction that will not necessarily or completely be reached or fulfilled (CALDAS, 2015). Such an idea is central to the associations of uncertainty that are emblematic of the study, research, and adoption of trends – and evidently, fashion trends.

It was also during the nineteenth century that the word acquired its evolutionary connotation, and which, for many, seems intrinsic to the notion of a

tendency or trend. Contemporaneously to the Industrial Revolution, the enrichment of European potency and positivism, the meaning of tendency assimilated the implications of progress and evolution, suggesting that history treads a straight and direct path to an inexorable fate (Ibid). The positivist doctrine sustained by Comte grounds the current understanding of the concept of tendency – and, as a consequence, of the trend. One notices such associations in the affirmation of William Gibson (2003), who states: “The future is already here –it’s just not evenly distributed”, and of Florence Müller (2012), who considers the history of trends as the evolution of practices.

Also, in the nineteenth century, with the growing popularity of statistics, the word tendency began to be associated with mass and demographic movements and data, widely used by the traditional fields of sociology and nature sciences. For the greater part of the twentieth century, economists and statisticians would use the word in relation to the findings of their research. In such scientific fields, a tendency is a direction a certain curve takes on a graph. Statisticians commonly apply the word tendency when the direction of a curve is not completely evident (VEJLGAARD, 2008). It is noteworthy that the concepts of stretching results, broadly used in statistics, echo the meanings of the words tendency and trend, and the practice of trend studies.

The first record of the word trend to designate an object in the field of design is from the year 1936, in the pages of a magazine which itself was entitled Trend. The DIA – Design and Industrial Association established in 1915 – edited the magazine. The English Association had similar goals to the Deutscher Werkbund (German Association of Craftsmen) formed in 1907: to promulgate cohesion among designers, producers, industries, dealers, and retailers; as well as a better understanding of what should be perceived as good design by the public, regarding design items for the household and daily routine (MONÇORES, 2013).

Between 1946 and 1975, trends acquired a comprehension similar to their current meaning,

emphasizing their economic relevance. Their emergence in this scenario coincides not arbitrarily with the birth of mass consumption, which inaugurated a period designated as “The Glorious Thirty”, in allusion to its duration. It is evident that the objective of advances in industry and productivity were and are concerned with programming continually renewed income (ERNER, 2012). The fashion industry adopted an institutionalized and edited form of trends only in the last third of the twentieth century. However, from then on, the interest in trends is an indissoluble part of people’s lives (VEJLGAARD, 2008).

Individuals were avid for novelties, and the system developed after the Industrial Revolution had the ability to provide them. With “innovation” as the main engine of the system, the contemporary term planned obsolescence replaced creative destruction, a concept of the 1980s. Trends, with a specific focus on fashion trends, occupy a central place in society and the economy because they solve the contradictions of capitalism: to produce the same consumer goods without interruption (ERNER, 2012). By producing limited quantities of certain products in a series, industries introduced innovation in every series of product, encouraging consumers to renew their goods; i.e., every new offer has possible demand.

The historical literature produced about the constant change phenomenon – referring to a period when fashion trends were not yet institutionalized – often uses the terminology fashion or, in the plural form, fashions. Immanuel Kant, for example, uses the term fashions. When considering fashions, authors deal specifically with changes elapsed due to the taste for change – which overcomes the limits of apparel and clothing and reaches areas considered traditional, such as academia. There may be emotional, intellectual, and even spiritual trends, since a trend is the direction in which something tends to move and provokes a consequent effect on culture, society, and on the business sector in which it develops (RAYMOND, 2010, p.14).

Trend forecasting is mostly associated with clothing and apparel – commonly referred as the fashion industry or sector –, although it can be applied in different social contexts. This dates from the nineteenth century and is explained by, among other reasons, the perception of the accelerated pace with which changes occur in the world of clothes, accessories, and hairstyles. After the rise of prêt-à-porter in 1948, the idea of the trend as a renewed perspective on aesthetic aspects of clothing items ensues. This was due to the institutionalization of fashion trends, by means of a specific calendar for the launch of novelties in the fashion industry, developed by the Comité de Coordination des Industries de la Mode (Coordination Committee of the Fashion Industries). Fashion coordination was first legitimized by the need for the organization of production according to future demand.

From the 1960s onward, fashion forecasting became a multimillion dollar business. Companies such as Peclers, Promostyl, and Carlin long enjoy their recognized and traditional expertise in providing future inspiration for fashion designers and for other creative workers. The world leader in trend forecasting, the English WGSN, affirms to “define what will happen tomorrow” (WGSN, 2018). Along with fashion-oriented trend forecasting, other professionals dedicated themselves to the research of broader trends, operating mostly at the consulting level. Some of them are The Future Laboratory, Trend Watching, Kjaer Global, Future Concept Lab, Trend Union, IPSOS, Institute for the future, PSFK, Observatório de Tendências, BOX 1824; among many others.

5. CONTEMPORARY CONNOTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF TREND COORDINATION AND FORECASTING

Along with Caldas, who works as a future consultant, other important trend forecasters have extensively contributed to the definition of “trend”

within the field of Trends Studies and their proposals should be considered in this regard at this point, in order to make clear the several proposals and their articulations. The authors whose contributions will be regarded in the topic are the Danish Henrik Vejlgard - trend consultant; the Dutch Els Dragt - independent trend researcher; the Englishman Martin Raymond - from The Future Laboratory; Peter Gloor - from the MIT Center for Collective Intelligence -; and William Higham - The Next Big Thing.

In one of the most recent publications about trends, Els Dragt (2017, p.58) affirms that "there is no fixed vocabulary that all trends professionals use". Nonetheless, there is a common ground where these future investigators circulate commonly. For the aforementioned professional, the idea of the trend is "a direction of change in values and needs which is driven by forces and manifests itself already in various ways within certain groups of society" (Ibid.). The author - and many others, as we will see - is clear regarding the main aspect of a trend, i.e., change. For the Dutch, in order to conduct proper trend research, an investigator must be able to approximate and distance oneself from change.

The well-known trend researcher and writer Martin Raymond affirms that "a trend may be defined as the direction that something (anything) tends to move and consequently has an effect in the culture, society or business sector in which it develops" (RAYMOND, 2010, p.14). For him, a trend may also be understood as an anomaly. The idea encircles an eccentricity, an incongruence or a disruption in the norm. That is to say, trends consist of changes. More specifically than Dragt, however, Raymond postulates that trends consist of the direction taken by the change.

Agreeing with the previous authors, the also notorious Henrik Vejlgard, considers a trend to be "a social process in which style or taste changes" (VEJLGAARD, 2018, n.p.). Just as all authors reviewed to this topic, the Danish believes that trends are an extensive phenomenon and concern various aspects of

everyday life: from food to television, from dress to behavior. As some authors, Vejlgard divides different types of trends (short and long-term). For him and for most, fashion trends (fashion changes) are usually considered fads – trends of extremely short endurance – because they last only about one season or two (VEJLGAARD, 2008).

As Gomes (2017, p.5) affirms, one should not forget to stress that “a trend represents a cultural behavioral change, a shift in mindsets that can be seen through small seeds and manifestations of creativity and innovation in the sociocultural scenarios, [being a] form of cultural management”. Therefore, despite their endurance, all trends have a cultural background and are manifestations of changes in the behavior and mindset of a society.

In a review made by William Higham in the book entitled *The Next Big Thing*, a trend may be defined as “a line of general direction or movement, [...] a prevailing tendency or inclination, [...], the general movement over time of a statistically detectable change [...] or a current style or preference” (HIGHAM, 2009, p.14-15). The author, however, considers the definition too wide for its applicability in marketing albeit all trends are important and may drive consumer behavior. In order to be considered relevant, they need to relate to the pace in which consumers change their behaviors. For such reason, Higham affirms that short-term changes are useless to marketing strategy, being reasonable only to tactical marketing. Hence, “a trend is best defined as: a long-term change in consumer attitudes and behaviors that offers marketing opportunities” (HIGHAM, 2009, p.16)

Peter Gloor and the MIT Center for Collective Intelligence apply future studies under the denomination of coolhunting. For them, there are certain criteria to segregate what is a trend and what is not – what is cool and what is not. Cool things: [1] are fresh and new, [2] allow participation of a community and appraise among peers, [3] are fun and interesting, and [4] give meaning to one’s life. (GLOOR, KRAUSS e NAAN, 2009, p.1-2).

The practice of future studies produced consistent bibliography on the subject. Dragt and Higham agree that there is no exact match in what a trend is among the practitioners of the field. However, corresponding aspects can be found – with support in the already revised theory. Without a doubt, a trend is a change. More precisely, a trend is the direction given by the change. Theorists and practitioners agree that trends manifest themselves widely and influence various social and cultural spheres, impacting political and economic spheres. Under an economic bias, marketing scholars consider relevant only trends that have an impact on consumer behavior. Such trends can be applied tactically or strategically, depending on the typology of the trend itself.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The presentation of the etymology of the term trend, and its use throughout history, is intended to clarify the concepts trend and tendency, and how they were shaped over time by diverse scientific paradigms. From various sources, the general concept of the word tendency absorbed the meaning of strength, or vector that leads to a finite future that is its goal, but whose reach is uncertain. More specifically relevant to the present study, the contemporary connotation of trend conjoins three main historic and economic factors: [1] the sprouting of a fashion ethos and the rise of the bourgeoisie in the later Middle Ages, which valued change, novelty, and renewal; [2] mass production in the early twentieth century, after the Industrial Revolution; and [3] the possibility of access to consumer goods for a great portion of the population.

Related to the market dynamic, this concept currently comprises aesthetic novelties mostly adopted by products, which the population will consume in the future, serving as artifacts of the coordination between supply and demand. However, trends are not necessarily fashion trends and do not always involve economic interest. As market strategies, trends also

refer to a socio-cultural background, even in cases when the sociocultural explanation for the trend lies behind the desire and recurrence of change (SVENDSEN, 2010).

According to the reviewed academic literature, it is possible to state that trends consist of changes. They are transformations that involve different aspects of social, cultural, individual, and aesthetic spheres. Such transformations are accepted as positive due to the logic of ordination, renovation, and normalization of change grounded on the fashion ethos. Trends can be self-legitimated changes, but they accord more or less with the spirit of the time. Fashion trends are expressions of trends – which are socio-culturally grounded – in aesthetic spheres, mostly by means of visual and haptic characteristics applied to clothing and apparel products and are often considered fads or short-term trends. These momentary trends are of tactical applicability whereas long-term, more enduring, trends are suitable for strategic praxes.



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