The Semiotics of Fashion and Lifestyle.  
Their Discursive Construction in the Media

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1 Introduction

“Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street; fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening” (Quote by Coco Chanel, cited in Horton and Simmons 2006:102).

The renowned French fashion designer Coco Chanel eloquently expressed the fascinating nature of fashion. Her statement emphasizes the significant meaning of clothing and style as it defines fashion as an omnipresent phenomenon.

In recent years, the study of fashion has received increasing attention as it has come to represent an important cultural phenomenon (cf. Manlow 2009:9). Within the field of social sciences, Manlow (2009:9) proposes five major theoretical approaches to fashion:

- Fashion as an instrument for creating and maintaining boundaries in society
- Fashion in the interactional process
- Fashion as a semiotic system
- Fashion as a capitalist tool and
- Fashion as a postmodern condition.

Dating back to the beginning of the 18th century, the philosophers Georg Simmel and Thorstein Veblen were among the first to study fashion scientifically. Their “trickle-down” theory proposed that fashion diffuses from the social elite to lower classes. Since then, many theories concerning the dissemination of fashion have evolved. The aim of this thesis is to examine the elements which facilitate this diffusion process today. To be more specific, it attempts to ascertain, by means of a semiotic analysis of fashion advertising and reporting, which strategies the media uses to construct the need for adopting a fashion trend. The international survey conducted among students and young professionals will further aid to investigate the media’s level of influence on production, consumption and dissemination of fashion.

The first chapter offers a general introduction to the subject of fashion and highlights its significance within the field of cultural studies. Additionally, it includes a brief overview of the history of fashion and examines the recent developments of the fashion industry. Bearing in mind that fashion is a means of communicating and representing an individual’s personality and lifestyle, this section will also deal with the construction of identity through fashion. With regard to the diffusion process of fashionable clothing, it is crucial
to provide an insight into the production and consumption of fashion. The third chapter is therefore designed to acquaint the reader with the theories of cultural production and consumption. The subchapter “Globalization and Dissemination of Fashion Trends” provides topical examples of how the media facilitates the worldwide diffusion of new styles.

Since the study of semiotics provides a useful framework for the interpretation of promotional strategies applied in both advertisements and fashion magazines, the fourth chapter will familiarize the reader with the semiotic approach to fashion. Furthermore, the semiotics of fashion advertising and reporting will be discussed by means of advertisements and editorial features. An additional part of this chapter constitutes the construction of gender in the media as gender-specific strategies are frequently utilized by the media in order to influence society’s purchasing decisions.

Last but not least, chapter number five presents an analysis of the survey conducted on the dissemination of fashion trends. It attempts to define the diffusion process of fashion trends, specifically the latest styles of spring 2009. In this respect, the criteria which influence an individual’s way of dressing will be defined. Furthermore, the media’s impact on both diffusion and adoption of new trends will be examined. The fact that the survey was conducted among people from seven different countries, illustrates the effect of globalization on the dissemination of fashion. A categorization according to language areas will further illustrate the participants’ adoption of fashion trends. In a concluding remark, the modern diffusion process of fashion will be demonstrated by outlining the interplay of the media, the fashion industry and the individual.

The CD-ROM in appendix A contains the TV commercials which are part of subchapter 4.2. “Gender-specific Strategies in Advertising”. The videos can we watched using either the Windows Media Player or the VLC Media Player. Appendix B includes the list of spring 2009 fashion trends that were identified by the respondents of the survey. All questionnaires that were part of the survey can be viewed in appendix C of this thesis.
2 Fashion and Lifestyle

2.1 Fashion as Part of Culture

The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology* (Hoad 1993) provides the following definitions of ‘fashion’: to make, to shape, mode, established custom and conventional usage. The word fashion is derived from Latin ‘factio’ and ‘facere’, which means to make or to do.

According to Polhemus and Procter (1978:9), in contemporary Western societies, the term fashion is synonymous with ‘clothes’ or ‘clothing’, ‘adornment’, ‘style’ and ‘dress’. Fashion is not only a means of protection and coverage for the human body; it is a “language of signs, symbols and iconography that non-verbally communicate meanings about individuals and groups” (*Fashion Era* 2009). As one French designer claims: “My clothes create an atmosphere not only for the body but also for the mind,” (Crane 2000:163). Through one’s style of clothing, people can express their identity or a specific attitude such as conformity, resistance, as well as social status. According to Giannino Malossi (1998:156), fashion items are “material goods with cultural content”.

In order to better understand fashion as a significant part of culture it is important to also determine the meaning of the term ‘culture’. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson 1928), ‘culture’ is defined as

*cultivation, tending, in Christian authors, worship; the action or practice of cultivating the soil; tillage, husbandry; the cultivation of rearing of certain animals (e.g. fish); the artificial development of microscopic organisms, organisms so produced; the cultivating or development (of the mind, faculties, manners), improvement or refinement by education and training; the condition of being trained or refined; the intellectual side of civilization; the prosecution or special attention or study of any subject or pursuit*

The term ‘culture’ is derived from the Latin word *colere*, meaning to inhabit, to cultivate, to protect and to honor with worship. This definition shows that culture is a relatively complex and ambiguous concept, which has adopted several meanings that can at times, be paradoxical (During 2007:432). Raymond Williams (1965), cited in During (2007:432), describes culture as a
particular way of life which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning, but also in institutions and ordinary behavior. The analysis of culture, from such a definition, is the clarification of the meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life, a particular culture.

For Williams, T.S. Eliot, Roland Barthes and many others, the notion of culture encompasses more than just “high culture”; it represents all facets of everyday life.

These definitions of both fashion and culture imply that clothing is a significant part of culture, and has the ability to convey meaning within a society. Through their sartorial choices, people are able to express their emotions and attitudes about life. It is well understood that people from different cultures, use clothing in different ways, for different purposes and to make varying representations. For example, the national costume of a country is both a result, and representation, of their culture. Moreover, particular ways of dressing can serve as a visual means to identify a group of people as a subculture. In this respect, fashion and clothing are often utilized by individuals to communicate not only personal emotions and values but also the principles and beliefs of the social group to which they belong (cf. Barnard 2002:39).

In this respect, it is also important to mention the styles of different youth subcultures. Starting in the 1950s, most subcultures evolved out of the images created and influenced by film and popular music, such as hip hop and rock. An important facet of sub-cultural groups in general, has been the symbolic use of style (cf. Brake 1980:12). Originally, they emerged as a result of resistance against the dominant, mainstream and bourgeois culture of the 1970s. During this time, one of the major subcultures, still existing today, came into existence. The punk phenomenon aimed to utilize fashion in order to challenge class identities and social positions (cf. Barnard 2002:136). Rouse (1989:297) contends that punk emerged “as a reaction against the massive commercialization of both music and fashion for the young” and therefore began to produce its own music and ways of dressing. Rebelling against the aesthetic of the dominant society, punk style ranged from slashed clothing, dyed hair in colors such as jet black, hay yellow or bright orange transformed into ‘Mohican’ spiked styles, to the entire paraphernalia of bondage. Inexpensive and trashy looking fabrics were turned into garments and safety-pins and lavatory chains replaced jewelry (cf. Hebdige 1979:104ff). Punk, being only one example of the ever increasing number of youth subcultures including hip hop, gothic or “emo”, continues to be used as form of expressing a specific lifestyle.
The meanings that become visible through the clothing style of youth subcultures are also reinforced by the media. It seems that the media have attributed to certain items of clothing a specific meaning that is well known and agreed upon by the teenage public (cf. Crane 2000:185). For young people, these meanings help to construct identity, which is a crucial aspect, particularly in the stage of adolescence.

Fashion is not only an interesting and meaningful part of culture but represents cultural values and ideas. Understanding the meaning of clothes is of great importance as fashion can reveal the nature of a society, culture or even nation. The following remarks of a French designer highlight the importance of understanding the meaning of fashion: “My ideal customer is in her thirties. Very sure of herself. She uses clothes to project a certain image of herself. Her outfit projects seriousness, sensuality, and femininity,” (Crane 2000:164). This statement also implies that this designer knows his clientele very well. He has a clear idea of his customers’ personality and therefore is able to create designs that represent their identity.

### 2.2 History and Development of Fashion

During the past three decades, fashion has changed dramatically. According to Diana Crane (2000:134), a change from “class” to “consumer” fashion can be observed. Until the 1960s, the production and dissemination of fashion trends was extremely centralized. The dominant styles originated exclusively in Paris or London and were created by only a small number of designers. Class fashion was based on very strict rules about clothing, such as the choice of garments for specific occasions or in which manner to wear certain items. Presenting these styles in public, members of the upper class were regarded as role models. In this way, the dominant style diffused to people of lower class (cf. Crane 2000:166).

Differentiation has always been a crucial element in fashion. In the era of “class fashion”, the elite demanded new styles representing “signs of distinction”. Through their particular way of dressing, the upper class distinguished itself from other members of society. These marks of differentiation were of great significance as they enabled people of higher social status to dominate lower classes (cf. Manlow 2009:5). By creating these novel clothing styles, designers incorporated themes from current cultural or historical sources. Thus, they became strongly involved in the creation of new cultural elements as well as aiding in the dissemination of these products (cf. Manlow 2009:5).
Whereas one can encounter a great variety of different styles today, the nineteenth and early twentieth century was marked by sartorial conformity. Adapting to a fashion was of utmost importance since one specific style signaled a higher status in society. Since the 1960s, fashion has become more “consumer-oriented” – a development that can be observed in the greater diversity of styles as well as less consensus on what is considered fashionable at a certain period of time. New styles were no longer solely targeted towards the social elite but also represented the identities and tastes of other social groups. In particular, designers from America began to cater to people who defined their identities through lifestyles (cf. Manlow 2000:147).

Fashion also became less centralized as the production of fashion spread around the world, locating in cities other than Paris and London. As Benaim (1997), cited in Crane (2000:132), contends: “Paris reigns but does not rule”. Another significant change occurred during the post-Second World War period when fashion became linked to the media. New trends emerged from street subcultures, whose styles were then disseminated by the media (cf. Crane 2000:183).

Additionally, regarding the production of fashion and the dissemination of new styles, it is important to mention that the main target group has changed. Before, in the 1950s, fashion was targeted towards middle-aged people, whereas today, the tastes of the young dominate the industry. It is no longer the social elite, that aims to distinguish itself from lower classes but the young, who seek to differentiate themselves from the middle-aged and elderly.

As a result of this change, fashion trends and new styles are adopted by the young and diffuse to older age groups. It is also important to mention that these age groups can be further divided into various lifestyles depending on regional differences (cf. Crane 2000:198). This age-oriented diffusion model opens up new structures within society as it also enables less privileged people to participate in the discourse of fashion. The ones who were “formerly perceived as passive recipients of the dominant culture have […] become fashion leaders” (Crane 2000:198).

In general, the production and diffusion of fashion has become more complex due to a variety factors. Firstly, there has been an increase in the number of organizations involved in the fashion industry. Secondly, the dissemination of fashion in general has expanded and thirdly, the same styles are adopted by members of various social groups. Jeans, for
instance, were originally worn by the working class but later became popular also within high society, symbolizing “casualness”. Over the past decades, they assumed a great number of different connotations, often depending on the manner in which they were worn. For example, jeans and white T-shirt represented conformity while jeans, white T-shirt and black leather jacket were a symbol of rebellion.

Nowadays, it seems that the media determines to a great extend what is fashionable. Grace Mirabella, the former editor of *Vogue* once said: “Finally, finally the magazines dictate what’s at the top. We don’t design clothes, but we can be very selective in our reporting” (Jobling 1999:2). Whether the media is in fact the “dictating” force in fashion may be questionable. However, it is certain that through the act of reporting and thus providing information about new styles, fashion magazines highly influence the sartorial choices of society. The results of the survey in chapter five will attempt to examine the level of influence that the media possesses with regard to fashion.

### 2.3 The Construction of Identity through Fashion

An important function of fashion lies in the construction of identity. Individuals have always used apparel as a means to express themselves. Individualistic expression through clothing encompasses all aspects of life such as age, gender, status, attitudes, and mood.

Stuart Hall’s definition of the term ‘identity’ implies that identities are constructed through difference. In this respect, it becomes obvious that fashion adds to the construction of an individual’s identity as people dress in different ways to express their own sense of self. The codes of fashion, which a group of people agree upon, convey a certain meaning and thus, a society has clearly defined visual concepts of what a certain style represents. For instance, the assembly of particular clothing items might identify someone as belonging to a certain subculture. Hall argues that “identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse” (Du Gay 2000:17). Thus, it is crucial to note that they are created in particular institutional and historical sites, “within specific discursive formations and practices” (*ibid.* 2000:17). Identities are the result of indicating difference and exclusion and appear only in relation to the ‘Other’. (cf. *ibid.* 2000:17).

“Fashion is not only an idea but an actual visual representation of a social reality” (Manlow 2009:261). Thus it can be a vehicle for other forms of representation such as
individuality. Pieces of clothing can function as a means of representation as they convey a strong meaning especially through their creation by fashion houses and designers whose brands themselves represent a certain type of identity (cf. ibid. 2009:261). For instance, the brand Tommy Hilfiger is the symbol of American culture and identity, with its signature colors of blue, red and white and classy sportswear (cf. ibid. 2009:262).

According to Zygmunt Bauman, “one thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs” (cited in Hall and DuGay 1996:19). Through fashion however, one is able to assume a certain position, status or place within society since clothes bear certain codes that can be easily deciphered at least by members of the same society or culture. Since fashion is a means of constructing identity, it aids people in finding their “right place” in the world. By means of a particular look, an individual may relate to or differentiate from others, and thereby, express his/her personality.

The German sociologist Georg Simmel, who is said to be the first academic to examine fashion in an elaborate and scientific way, relates fashion to individual and societal concerns of modernity (cf. Lehmann 2000:127ff). In his famous essay “Fashion” (1904/1971:296), he presents his view on this topic and explains its functions:

> Fashion is the imitation of a given example and satisfies the demand for social adaption; it leads the individual upon the road which all travel, it furnishes a general condition, which resolves the conduct of every individual into a mere example. At the same time it satisfies to no less degree the need of differentiation, the tendency toward dissimilarity, the desire for change and contrast, on the one hand by a constant change of contents, which gives to the fashion of today an individual stamp as opposed to that of yesterday and of to-morrow, on the other hand because fashions differ for different classes – the fashions of the upper stratum of society are never identical with those of the lower; in fact they are abandoned by the former as soon as the latter prepares to appropriate them.

In a society or group, there is always the need to conform but at the same time, people want to distinguish themselves from others in order to maintain their sense uniqueness. This discrepancy between conformity and differentiation is invariably reflected in fashion (cf. Manlow 2009:10). Fashionable clothing can provide a sense of community yet individuality. To quote Simmel, fashion can be seen as “adaption to society and individual departure from its demands” (Simmel 1971: 295). Roach and Eicher (1979), (cited in Barnard 2002: 61), propose a similar theory by stating that “the emotional survival of humans somehow depends upon their ability to strike a balance between conforming to society and preserving a sense of self-identity”. This balance can be achieved through
certain sartorial choices as one may select a style that is accepted in society while also choosing more unique pieces in order to reflect one’s sense of individuality.

According to Ratneshwar, (2005:128) “fashion allows consumers to articulate meanings and feelings metaphorically. [...] it offers a unique opportunity for an emphatic, albeit ambiguous, insistence of identity and community”. By consuming fashionable items, people can express their identity and their social status within society.

Baudrillard (1998:92) also argues for the individual’s opposing needs – adaption and differentiation:

Sociology identifies a ‘need of the individual to differentiate himself” that is alternating with the opposite need to conform.” The two coexist happily at the psycho-sociological descriptive level, in the most total illogicality and absence of theory – a state of affairs dubbed ‘dialectic of conformism and originality’

As can be seen, both adaption and differentiation are essential factors in the construction of identity. Through fashion, both of those needs can be satisfied as items can signify either ‘conformity’ or ‘distinction’. In general, each clothing style represents a specific identity and through the processes of fashion advertising and fashion reporting, identities that fit into our society are built. Through the power of language and images, fashion magazines reinforce certain concepts such as femininity and masculinity. Clothes make it possible to assume certain roles and characters and thus influence and facilitate an individual’s construction of identity.

As one young fashion designer stated, fashion can be seen as a dialogue, a process of creating images which enable women to identify with and allow for an own personal interpretation (cf. Crane 2000:164).

2.4 The Fashion Industry

With regard to the emergence of new trends, it is typically not the luxury fashion designers who set trends. With their collections of fashionable clothing, they provide a great variety of new ideas which possibly will be promoted as trends. It is however the fashion editors and forecasters whose roles chiefly concern the selection of styles that have the most influence on emerging trends. (cf. Crane 2000:165).
However, it is also important to mention that new styles produced by designers are not only a product of their own ideas, but also have their roots in the culture of a society itself. Specifically youth culture influences the emergence of new styles as many designers and clothing companies look for inspiration among the culture and lifestyle of the young. For instance, the creative director Jonny Johansson was seeking inspiration from the street when he designed a new clothing line after he saw a woman riding her bike to work wearing leggings and a blazer (*Elle* April 2009:144).

The famous designer Alexander Wang even introduced the term M.O.D. – “model off-duty” - “to describe the look of the girl he envisions when he’s designing.” (*Vogue* May 2009:230). Their style is “superchic but effortless” and therefore attracts the masses. This concept of incorporating street styles in the designing process of collections is an effective sales technique especially for designers who wish to attract a broader audience rather than viewing their designs solely as production of art.

An assistant buyer from Saks Fifth Avenue in New York City stated, “You have to represent whom you work for.” (Han 2003:13). For people who work in the fashion industry it is of utmost importance to be fashionable. The image they present with their appearance is crucial to a successful career in fashion. The meaning of every garment takes on an even stronger significance within the fashion industry, where everyone is well informed about the meanings that are conveyed through clothes.

Another example which further illustrates the importance of fashionable style within the retail industry is the appearance of the salesperson. Retailers often require their salespeople to wear their clothes at work. This is undertaken in an attempt to entice customers to purchase these clothes after having seen the clothes worn in a fashionable way. These salespeople are often regarded as particularly knowledgeable about the latest fashion trends and thus are seen as a trustworthy and competent reference by the costumers. Therefore, the salesperson also plays an important role in the dissemination of new trends and eventually, the consumption of fashion.
3 Cultural Production and Consumption

3.1 Cultural Production

The highly acclaimed French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has made many significant contributions to cultural studies; one of them being his new definition of ‘cultural production’:

[... Cultural production] has particular functions and particular laws which can be rationally accounted for, and which, if understood properly, demystify the old opposition between ‘high’ and ‘low’ or, [...] mean that high art has no more inherent value than other forms of cultural production,” (cited in During 2007:89).

Bourdieu’s definition implies that cultural production has become more complex and transcends traditional forms of high culture. Every product which defines and represents a person’s lifestyle is part of culture and therefore, can be regarded as a cultural product. What distinguishes cultural products from other products is the fact that they bear a strong symbolic meaning in addition to serving a particular purpose. Very often, they function solely as a means of expression or indicators of societal status. Mukerji’s definition stresses the aforementioned purpose of cultural products as she describes them as “‘nonmaterial’ goods directed at a public of consumers, for whom they generally serve as esthetic or expressive, rather than a clearly utilitarian function” (Mukerji 1991:315).

However, as can be seen in the example of clothing, there are many cultural products which are not only useful but necessary. Especially nowadays, as culture encompasses a society’s entire lifestyle rather than just high art, many products which were formerly regarded as “useful” or “practical” only, have now acquired a higher value as they convey meaning that helps to organize social aspects of life.

Economy and culture are closely linked as the commodity system is not only dependent on the marketability of its goods but also on cultural efforts including the creation of popular needs and desires as well as shaping certain lifestyles (cf. Johnson 2004:149). The innovation process in modern, industrial societies can progress with the aid of organizational networks, which are inextricably linked with the production and dissemination of fine art as well as popular culture. However, this interdependence also means that this complex network can regulate and cease innovation (cf. Mukerji
1991:314). In this respect, the media plays an important role in the production of cultural goods as it draws the public’s attention to the product (cf. *ibid* 1991:314). With regard to the advertising of clothing items, the acknowledgment of fashion reporters and forecasters plays a significant role as the major target group for the promotion of cultural products includes “autonomous gatekeepers” such as critics (cf. *ibid* 1991:321).

The “cycle” of fashion embodies a major characteristic of today’s society: the process of cultural recycling; i.e. people have to change, develop continuously whether it is in terms of their own personality, their clothes or their career. At the workplace, it is required to invest in training and advance one’s skills continuously, and it does not only happen within technical professions but in almost every field such as education where there seems to be always a need for new teaching methods (cf. Baudrillard 1998:100).

The production of fashion has changed over time – a development that goes in line with the changes in societal structures. To quote Crane (2000: 237), “changes in the production of fashionable styles are indicative of changes in the relationships among contemporary societies”. During the late nineteenth century, cultural production diffused from big cities, such as Paris and London to the more remote places within a country. The new styles from these centers were adopted by several other European countries and the United States. Particularly since the late twentieth century, fashion, as a global culture, has many centers as the dissemination of trends is more complex. Nowadays, fashion is produced in sets of organizations in various countries that work globally and that are faced with the challenges of a highly competitive marketplace (cf. Crane 2000:237f).

Since cultural production can be seen as a neutral initiative that allows for a co-existence of different ways of life, the production and consumption of fashion, as part of cultural production, can be also regarded as a means to facilitate a peaceful co-existence of various lifestyles.

### 3.2 Cultural Consumption

In his work *The Consumer Society*, Baudrillard (1998:79) defines consumption as “an order of signification, like *language*, or like the kinship system in primitive society”. Baudrillard argues that consumption serves two major social functions: exchange and communication. By offering a structure of exchange between individuals, consumption
functions as a communication system. As an order of signification distributing values and beliefs, consumption also functions as a value system (cf. Baudrillard 1998:78). In this respect, consumption theories play an important role in social sciences and cultural studies including specific aspects of everyday life such as fashion. To be more specific, the theory of consumption, which is the main subject of study in contemporary critical theory and the key issue in cultural studies, originates in the theory of taste (cf. Mukerji 1991:420).

The highly acclaimed French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was an important figure in the studies of taste and consumption. Bourdieu contends that cultural capital (differentiations of status and taste) and social capital (personal relationships and social networks) can be transformed into economic capital (cf. Johnson 2004:150). In his famous work Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste, Bourdieu developed the concept of ‘social stratification’, which implies that class fractions are defined by social, economic and cultural capital and that differences in taste and lifestyle represent differing class fractions (cf. Jenkins 2002:138). Furthermore, Distinction offers a detailed analysis of both artistic and non-artistic culture as well as cultural consumption (cf. Fowler 1997:50). To quote Bourdieu (1984: 175), taste “continuously transforms necessities into strategies, constraints into preferences, and without any mechanical determination, it generates the set of ‘choices’ constituting life-styles”.

Bourdieu’s approach to cultural studies entails a scientific study of society whereby he links cultural consumption to social status. He claims that “status may be conceptualized as lifestyle; that is, as the totality of cultural practices such as dress, speech, outlook and bodily dispositions… status also involves, and to a certain extent is, style” (Jenkins 2002:130). According to Bourdieu, “consumption today is still informally structured despite the removal of all fetters against the free movement of commodities since consumption is controlled by the habitus “(cited in Fowler 1997:49). Bourdieu’s concept of the ‘habitus’ can be described as “a culturally informed consciousness which sets preferences for certain types of material objects and experiences, and promotes mastery of certain skills” (cited in Manlow 2009:13). Taste is a phenomenon that is inherited by an individual and therefore, this knowledge of “good taste” and class privilege is conferred from one generation to the next (cf. Manlow 2009:13). Furthermore, Bourdieu’s work Distinction contributes to Simmel’s “trickle-down” theory, which proposes that the adoption of new styles enables the elite to distinguish themselves as a class. Since their style is soon after its emergence imitated by lower classes, innovative fashion that
constantly produces new styles is demanded by the upper class assuring their desire of being superior is satisfied. However, Simmel adds that due to the mixing of classes, an upward diffusion of fashion, especially from the “street” and youth subcultures exists as well (cf. Manlow 2009:10f).

A slightly different perspective on the consumption of fashion is provided by Blumer (discussed in Barnard 2002:131), who claims that the adoption of new styles is based on what is called “collective selection” rather than a means to mark class distinctions and indicate social status. By adopting new styles, individuals satisfy their need to be fashionable and “to express new tastes which are emerging in a changing world” (cited in Davis 1992:116). Denying the connection between social class and adoption of styles, Blumer points out that this phenomenon of collective selection exists among all classes, rather than only within the elite (cf. Barnard 2002:131).

To sum up these differing concepts of consuming fashion, the “trickle-down theory” simply attributes the adoption of fashionable styles to social status but fails to acknowledge that fashion is not only an indicator of class but also a means to represent various other aspects of identity such as gender, religion or age. In addition, this theory views the individual as a passive consumer of fashion whereas Blumer stresses the significance of the notion of “active consumption”, which implies that fashion in fact, can be used to resist dominant ideologies rather than passively responding to the clothing trends of the dominant class (cf. Barnard 2002:132).

### 3.3 Globalization and Dissemination of Fashion Trends

#### 3.3.1 Globalization

“It has been said that arguing against globalization is like arguing against the laws of gravity” (Quote by Kofi Annan, taken from Thinkexist.com 2009).

Kofi Annan’s statement marks the unavoidable effects of globalization. It has an impact on almost every aspect of life including culture and economy. The Oxford Dictionary of New Words (Tulloch et al 1999) defines ‘global consciousness’ as “receptiveness to (and understanding of) cultures other than one’s own, often as part of an appreciation of world
socio-economic and ecological issues”. Since globalization affects and changes the culture of a nation in general it has also a remarkable effect on fashion and its diffusion.

There are various factors which contribute to the ever expanding dissemination of modern fashion. As it is easier to travel nowadays, people’s clothing choices are no longer restricted to their country of residence. One may spend a weekend shopping in New York or Paris and thus, have access to a wider range of products. Another crucial factor is the Internet, which provides people with a variety of features including general information about new trends as well as the opportunity to purchase items from almost anywhere in the world. Most fashion designers and retailers also present their collections on the internet and their websites often contain an online shop, which makes the purchase very convenient. Furthermore, the Internet eliminates cultural boundaries as it enables and facilitates interaction and communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds.

Another important aspect in terms of fashion and globalization are environmental problems. As ecological disasters increase, raising awareness of environmental issues has become a major concern within the last years. Environmentalists are making many different endeavors to save our planet. Among them are also fashion designers who are concerned about the environment and therefore work with eco-friendly and recyclable materials and continuously search for sustainable ways of manufacturing clothing.

In addition, the number of clothing companies which have started to produce eco-friendly garments is dramatically increasing. Vogue magazine, in its May 2009 issue, reports on a designer’s organic spring collection (Vogue May 2009:122). The former eco columnist and fashion writer Eviana Hartman creates organic fashion for Bodkin – a brand that is known for its sustainable ready-to-wear. Recognizing their innovative ideas, the Ecco Domani Fashion Foundation gave Bodkin the first Sustainable Design award. Hartman’s collection includes organic cotton, fabric that is hand-dyed using a vegetable-based blend and certain clothes are made of 100 percent post-consumer-recycled PET utility mesh, a floss that is essentially spun from recycled plastic bottles. “From the fabric to the lining, I ask, ‘Is there a sustainable way to do this?’” states Eviana Hartman. This attitude is not only beneficial for our planet but also attracts a great number of consumers for various reasons. While organic cotton is very comfortable to wear, eco-friendly clothing generally has positive implications such as ‘respect for nature’. The wearers of this type of apparel may also feel better about themselves as they are supporting a good cause. Their clothing will convey
that they care about the environment, help to save the planet or pursue an eco-friendly lifestyle.

3.3.2 Dissemination of Fashion Trends

In the nineteenth century, the consumption of fashion was regarded as a diffusion process that represented a person’s social status and class. This process, which was continuously renewed, suggests that new fashions were adopted by members of higher social status and then spread among the lower classes. However, during the late twentieth century, theories of consumption moved away from this process and focused on evaluating consumers’ responses to fashion as well as on how clothes contribute to the construction of personal identity. Therefore, the main implication of this development of consumption theories was the greater emphasis on consumers’ deliberate sartorial choices rather than on the passive response to whatever is accessible as was the case of the diffusion process. This change is due to the fact that, in the late twentieth century, the diffusion processes within society highly expanded and became more complex (cf. Crane 2000:236).

Nowadays, new trends in fashion spread around the world very quickly. Moreover, fashion has become global as it is no longer only Paris, New York, London, Milan and Tokyo which present new styles during their famous Fashion Weeks. In fact, an ever increasing number of cities host their own Fashion Shows now. Another important aspect regarding the consumption of fashion today is the fact that even the latest trends in high fashion are accessible to a wider audience both socially and geographically. One of the main reasons for this is the new concept of “fast fashion” where the latest trends, presented by high fashion designers at prestigious fashion weeks, are reproduced by cheaper clothing companies. This trend was most successfully adopted by the fashion retailer Zara which produces ten thousand designs per year. Their products only remain in stores for a short period of time and are immediately replaced by new ones – a concept that provides the customer with the latest trends only a few weeks after they have been created (Globalization101 2009). As the consumption of fashion is more complex today, the semiotics of fashion is as well more multifaceted. This becomes obvious in the great number of lifestyles, attitudes and feelings that are represented through clothing.
4 Semiotics of Advertising and Reporting

4.1 The Construction of Gender in the Media

Every day the advertising industry is faced with the challenge of developing new strategies in order to sell products. Advertisements can certainly have an effect on society, but this effect is not easily predicted. It is difficult to explain why certain products can be sold without much advertising effort, whereas some are less successful, although a huge advertising campaign was mounted (cf. Myers 1999:4). Effective advertising strategies include the four significant elements of the well-known AIDA-formula – they attract the consumer’s Attention, arouse Interest in the product, create the Desire to be in possession of the product, which then leads to Action and therefore to the purchase of the product. In this respect, it is very important to know about the needs and wants of the respective target audience and be able to develop effective advertising strategies. With regard to the different target groups, a basic and very significant classification is that according to gender. Advertisers typically design different strategies when targeting each gender. They respond to their respective behavior and lifestyle and even create new desires. However, it may be the case that these gender-specific strategies do not completely differ from each other, and there are also many advertisements which are designed for both genders. The advertisement for the perfume and eau de cologne “Intimately” (For Him and For Her), which shows the famous couple David and Victoria Beckham, is clearly directed at both women and men.
Apart from the marketable appeal of David Beckham, this ad creates the desire to be as glamorous and seductive as Victoria Beckham. The presentation of Victoria Beckham in a seductive pose will attract male attention while David Beckham reflects the eau de cologne’s image of being both masculine and elegant.

Ads are not only a representation of culture but also contribute to its development (cf. Reichert/Lambiase 2003:221). For this reason, advertising strategies are very much concerned with the appropriate presentation of the two genders. Feminists argue that the representation of women in ads is often disparaging since they are mostly shown as passive objects of desire. However, today both women and men are very often represented as objects of desire (cf. Reichert/Lambiase 2003:216). It is important to consider a society’s current needs and perceptions in order to develop effective advertisements. However, advertising functions as one of the principal means of disseminating masculine and feminine images (cf. Reichert/Lambiase 2003:216).

During the 19th century, ads reflected the notion of “the world for men, and the home for women” by presenting them in their “appropriate” roles (cf. ibid. 2003:220). As can be seen in the examples of the following chapter, this kind of representation of both genders
has changed dramatically, allowing men and women to break out of these typical gender roles and be either more masculine or feminine.

4.2 Gender-specific Strategies in Advertising

4.2.1 Advertising Strategies Directed at Women

As a preliminary remark, it should be noted that the term “genderlect”, which is used in the following chapters, refers to the “different lexical and grammatical choices that are characteristically made by men and women” (Stockwell 2002:16).

A very old but still common and successful advertising strategy that is used to arouse women’s interest is to show a beautiful woman in connection with the product. This strategy has proved to be very successful and has been employed from the earliest to the most current advertisements. What makes this strategy so attractive to women? The strategy plays upon the universal desire of most women to look and feel beautiful. Even if women consciously resist such advertising attempts these ads can often work subconsciously and the message “If you use this product you will look as beautiful as the woman displayed” can be successfully transmitted. This method is used to promote a wide range of products from cosmetics and clothes to electronics, cars, and even credit cards and insurances. The following ad is an example of this strategy.

[Taken from Google (2)]
The brand *Dove*, however, introduced a new strategy. Instead of portraying a supermodel, *Dove* uses unknown, average women in their ads and commercials. Their strategy is to show that everyone and especially their target group, average women regardless of their age, benefit from their products. *Dove* communicates the message: We all know that supermodels have smooth and beautiful skin. However, *Dove* products make it possible for every woman to have great skin. Their strategy implies that their target audience will be more likely to identify with the women displayed in their ads and therefore will buy the product.

[Taken from Google (3)]
The following example by *Louis Vuitton* makes use of the strategy mentioned before by showing a beautiful woman and the product. However, it is combined with another strategy often directed at women: presenting only a famous person and the product without giving any information.

![Image of Scarlett Johansson holding a Louis Vuitton bag.](Taken from *Vogue* (2007, March)]

This ad for the brand *Louis Vuitton* shows the famous actress Scarlett Johansson who is holding a *Louis Vuitton* bag. There is neither a slogan nor any other text that may support the picture and there is also no information or description of the product. This lack of information implies that advertisements directed at women often use the strategy of providing no or less information which suggests that women are not very much interested in the technical details of a product. Knowing how a product was manufactured or what exactly it is made of is not considered very important. However, for luxurious labels like *Louis Vuitton*, it is a frequently applied strategy not to include detailed information in their advertisements. Simply showing a picture of the product is sufficient in order to sell it since their brand is already well-established. In this respect, a significant difference in gender-specific strategies becomes obvious. Whereas ads directed towards men often include detailed information and technical descriptions, ads designed for women often lack specific information and focus on the product itself and its benefits (cf. Meßner 2005:109).
Nowadays however, this distinction is no longer as clear since certain strategies are often used for both women and men. The promotion of cosmetics however, provides an important exception. Advertisements for cosmetic products always contain a large amount of detailed information on the product’s functions and effects. The subsequent ad by Clinique uses the male “genderlect” by giving specific information.

Are your lips living up to their full potential?

Give them a boost. With a triple-action plumping formula, new Full Potential™ Lips Plump and Shine instantly and gently creates a fuller, lusher look. The plush effect lingers up to 6 hours.

With continued use, peptides prompt skin’s natural collagen production to foster a smoother, more defined look. Builds moisture cushion, too. With all the comforts of Clinique. In 10 gorgeous, lip-magnifying shades.

Allergy Tested. 100% Fragrance Free. www clinique.co.uk

[Taken from Vogue (2007, March)]
This ad for the “Full Potential” lip gloss by Clinique contains a great deal of information about the product. The text next to the product addresses the reader directly by asking the question: “Are your lips living up to their full potential” followed by the recommendation “Give them a boost”. Then the effects are described very specifically. The customer is even told how long the effect of full and plump lips will last (“The plush effect lingers up to 6 hours”). The product’s descriptions include many technological terms such as “triple-action formula” or “…peptides prompt skin’s natural collagen…”, which are typical of the male genderlect. This strategy aims at selling the product by creating the idea that Clinique lip gloss is not some regular gloss women may use to color their lips. In fact, this lip gloss is a “new technology”- product that promises visible effects. The reason why ads for cosmetics include a lot of information is because details and facts on what the product contains, how it was produced and how exactly it affects the respective body part is of great importance to their target group.

Since the role of women has dramatically changed – from the typical housewife to the independent and successful woman who manages to combine family and career – advertising strategies for women have had to reflect this shift as well. The number of women who have their own income is rising. As a result, women are more independent and invest their money in many things which they probably never considered to buy before. Whereas the man used to be the one in the family who owned a car, most women have their own cars nowadays. And this applies not only to cars but to a wide range of products and services such as electronics, credit cards, insurance and financial services. The advertising industry responded to this change and started to create strategies to attract primarily women. According to an article in the women’s magazine Glam the number of advertisements that are directed to women has grown, as a result of their increasing purchasing power (cf. Mracek and Jacobs 2003). “The fact of the matter is women are autonomous today,” says Michael Bolchalk of Bolchalk Marketing. “It's their decision. They don't need a man to make it for them.” (cf. ibid. 2003).

The advertisers of the following ad were aware of the fact that women have become a significant target group. The advertisement for Hummer SUVs is one of several adverts for cars that appeared in the women’s magazine InStyle. This shows that women have become a new target audience for car manufacturers. The fact that a woman is driving the car sets a new trend – the new woman owns her own car. Ads for cars often combine the look and features of the car with the new look or style in fashion. One example is the ad by Peugeot,
showing two shop-windows with the Peugeot convertible in front of them, according to the two seasons, summer and winter, one open, one closed, accompanied by the slogan “It’s so every season” (cf. Meßner 2005:118).

The Hummer advertisement associates the car with good taste and style by choosing a woman who looks perfectly styled as well as the glamorous lights that reflect in the car’s radiator grill.

The change in gender roles inevitably led to a change in the representation of women in advertisements. They are no longer only presented as mothers and housewives but also as successful and independent women. This is absolutely necessary in order to reach this new
target audience. It is obvious that this change in gender roles is intrinsically tied to a change in the illustration of women in ads.

The next ad for shoes and handbags by JIMMY CHOO goes even a step further by presenting a woman that looks not only independent but also very powerful.

![Image](Taken from Vogue (2007, March))

She is presented in a position of power and control, which alludes to the fact that more and more women work in top-level positions. Besides her powerfulness she looks very sexy, but in a wild and dangerous way. The elements that create this look are her full long hair, her dark make-up, her distant posture; intensified by the burning fire behind her. The portrayal of the man in the pool next to her, who seems to be dead, contributes to her dangerous and powerful image. These elements combined, reflect the desirable identity of a strong and beautiful woman who has everything under control.

### 4.2.2 Advertising Strategies Directed at Men

One of the most effective advertising strategies used to get men’s attention is probably to make an attractive woman be part of the advertisement. Certainly, this seems to be a very
good idea, but in fact it takes a bit more than that in order to make an advertisement really effective. An advertisement should create a desire that will be fulfilled by using or possessing the product. An ad may create the desire to get in contact with beautiful women and then show that with a certain product this desire can be fulfilled. The following commercial by AXE (or LYNX) uses this strategy very well.

Please refer to the CD in appendix A to watch the Lynx commercial.

This commercial by AXE does not only show many beautiful women, it also presents them in a way men would love them to be. It seems as if this product has such tremendous effects that it can even change women’s behavior; altering them to become the “perfect woman”. Furthermore, this commercial generates the idea that men who use AXE will be irresistible for women and therefore will easily meet many ‘ideal’ women. This strategy of making men feel irresistible is used in many ads, especially for commercials by AXE.

Another frequently used strategy is to show a handsome man who also appears to be successful, intelligent and confident. This strategy works in the same way as it does for women. Since the visual part of an advertisement is always more appealing and persuasive, it is very significant to choose the appropriate person for the respective product. Presenting a product in connection with an attractive successful person is therefore often used in advertisements for cosmetics, cars or jewelry – basically everything that is associated with a luxurious lifestyle. As can be seen in the following commercial, this strategy implies that the target group will relate the product to a high lifestyle, success and esteem.

Please refer to the CD in appendix A to watch the Gillette commercial.

By showing men who are attractive, famous and successful, the product receives a very positive image. The commercial for Gillette tries to create the idea of being as successful as David Beckham, for example, when using the same product as he does. It is very effective to link the product with a famous personality and thus deliver the message: be successful, be cool, be strong! Enhance your image by using only high-quality products – our products. This strategy of making men feel strong, cool, powerful and irresistible is very often used by companies, which primarily aim to attract men.

Even nowadays men sometimes hesitate to use any skin care products because they believe these products will make them feel unmanly (cf. Meßner 2005:115). However, the advertising industry is trying to change this attitude by communicating the message that
having soft and smooth skin is not unmanly at all – it is attractive, it is what women want. The subsequent advertisement by L’Oreal for an anti-wrinkle treatment for men is an example of this new strategy.

Please refer to the CD in appendix A to watch the L’Oreal commercial. (Please do NOT skip the intro.)

The man who gives a short introduction is conveying the message mentioned before. He makes men aware of the fact that skin care is a very important issue for men too and assures that it is very easy and simple. Another element which prevents the impression of skin care products being too feminine is the name of the product line: men’s expert. By means of pictures that show men of different ages and with varying concerns, consumers can easily find out which products are suitable for their skin. In addition, the overall composition and style of this website is very practical and informative. Particularly the description of how the product works includes words that are part of the male genderlect (cf. Meßner 2005:115): “ADS, our patented Active Defense System […]”. Interestingly, this is exactly the same strategy that is nowadays often used for women, as could be seen before in the advertisement by Clinique.

The exposure of attractive women in advertisements has sometimes negative effects – when consumers focus only on the women and not on the product anymore (cf. Mracek and Jacobs 2003) The following commercial makes sure that this problem will not occur.

Please refer to the CD in appendix A to watch the Hahn commercial.

All attention is paid to the beautiful woman, until the man “jumps in”. Apart from the appearance of the woman, who will arouse everyone’s interest, men will certainly consider this commercial very funny and not forget the essential message, to enjoy a cold beer.

4.2.3 Advertisements that Attract Both Sexes

In addition to the gender-specific strategies mentioned before, there are many ads which do not focus on a gender-specific target group but are directed at both women and men. Creating an ad that attracts both sexes is a productive way to sell a product – for obvious reasons: it will attract a higher number of people and thus enlarge the target group. Certainly, this strategy can only be applied to particular ads and will not work for all kinds of products.
However, there are many products for which it is possible to include both strategies; those that work for women and those directed at men. As can be seen in the following commercial, this even functions with products that can only be used by one sex.

Please refer to the CD in appendix A to watch the *Victoria’s Secret* commercial.

Although such lingerie is a something that is only (or at least mainly) worn by women, this commercial manages to attract both genders. The commercial encourages women to feel sexy and pretty. With the exposure of famous supermodels, this commercial creates the idea that every woman will be desirable and look fabulous wearing *Victoria’s Secret* lingerie. Women who watch this commercial might start to think that it is time to get something new to feel beautiful in. In addition, the brand *Victoria’s Secret* is a well-established and popular one, and therefore it is sufficient to simply show the product in order to achieve the desired result.

With regard to the impact this commercial has on men, there are several factors that contribute to its success. Firstly, men will be delighted to watch beautiful supermodels, who are not wearing anything except sexy underwear. Secondly, this commercial may strongly persuade men since its language is used strategically. The supermodels clearly address the male audience by giving orders in a very seductive way. This may also stimulate fantasies such as having a girlfriend who looks as amazing as these models. Having created these desires, the final step of this strategy is to suggest that their desires can be fulfilled when buying the product. For men, it is no longer a dream to have such good-looking girlfriends – they just need to get them a gift from *Victoria’s Secret*. The statement *there’s no gift like a Christmas gift from Victoria’s Secret* at the end of the commercial reinforces this idea and stresses how valued and unique this lingerie is.

The next two commercials by *Mercedes* and *Suzuki* are also directed at both men and women. Their strategy is to incorporate and link elements that respond to women’s and men’s different needs.

Please refer to the CD in appendix A to watch the *Mercedes* commercial.

The commercial by *Mercedes* attempts to combines gender-specific needs. It relieves women of the fear of being late by letting the man be the hero who manages to still be punctual due to the car’s speed and durability. He also appears as very smart since he always knows “a shortcut”.

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Please refer to the CD in appendix A to watch the *Suzuki* commercial.

This commercial emphasizes the feature which is probably most appreciated by men with respect to cars: high speed. A further aspect, which makes it attractive for men, is the theme ‘competition’, supported by the common strategy of showing a beautiful woman. At the same time, the commercial aims to arouse women’s interest too. It tries to abolish the stereotype of women being bad drivers by showing that the woman portrayed can easily compete with the man. She even seems to be superior to him, which is indicated by her cool statement when they switch vehicles: “Do you think you can handle it?” Although the man immediately replies (“Can you?”), there is still the impression that the woman is more dominant. The commercial hereby raises the sensible issue of gender equality and encourages women to drive fast cars in order to be more independent, competitive and confident.

The previous examples have shown that gender-specific strategies sometimes contain similar or even the same elements. However, these objects are displayed in different ways. For example, a woman in an ad for men is more likely to be very seductive and sexy as a whole, whereas a woman who is part of an ad for women rather has one specific feature that is exceptionally beautiful. In addition, the advertisement for *CHANEL* uses the common linguistic strategy of consonance: “Audacious Sparkle. Arresting Shine”.


In the field of marketing and advertising it is crucial to think of new ways to reach the target group. Since the main aim of today’s advertisers is to create the desire to have a certain product, rather than simply informing the consumer about the advantages of it, the effective application of gender-specific strategies plays an important role. Although these strategies differ from each other, there is a strong tendency to apply strategies that were traditionally used for a male audience to ads directed at women and vice versa.
As could be seen in the previous examples, ads that chiefly attract a female audience often include beautiful women. Another strategy that has been used for example by Dove is to move away from this traditional exposure of supermodels and show average women in order to increase the probability that many women will identify with the women displayed and therefore will be more likely to actually buy the product. In contrast to the traditional strategy of focusing on women’s beauty, more and more ads nowadays tend to present women in powerful positions.

Furthermore, “masculine” elements such as the detailed information provided in the Clinique ad are often used in ads for cosmetics. This strategy of portraying women in a more traditionally “masculine” way is effective and even necessary since the role of women in our society has dramatically changed – from the typical housewife to the independent business woman. Whereas women used to occur only in ads for products such as cosmetics, jewelry, clothes and household goods, they now appear as well in ads for products such as cars, which originally attracted chiefly a male target group.

The most common method to arouse men’s interest broadly manifests itself in two strategies. One is to show an attractive woman and thus create desires that will lead to the purchase of the product. By including the portrayal of good-looking, powerful and strong men, the second one tries to achieve the same effect as does one of the strategies used for women: showing a desirable image of the same sex in connection with the product in order to create the desire to possess the product. In addition, it is a crucial point that the representation of men in ads is no longer restricted to images of power and control but allows for “feminine” aspects as well. This is proved by the fact that the market for male cosmetic products for men is growing. However, the strategy differs from the one applied to women. The main focus is not beauty but, as advertisers call it, health. By adding “masculine” elements such as emphasizing a product’s usefulness, this method suggests that the product is necessary for every man’s health and well-being.

As a result of the fact that gender-specific strategies tend to conform to each other, an increasing number of advertisements attract both women and men. Whereas one strategy that is used for these ads may contain specific elements for each gender, it is also possible to include only one element such as the seductive exposure of models for example in the commercial for Victoria’s Secret, which arouses both men’s and women’s interest. Another strategy that is used for both genders is to make women appear superior to men, as could be seen in the commercial for Suzuki.
Considering the aim to expand the target audience, it is useful to combine several gender-specific strategies in one ad in order to attract both men and women. Due to the changing role of women in our society, companies have changed their advertising strategies too. Moreover, the change in gender roles has resulted in the emergence of new markets such as beauty products for men or SUVs for women.

4.3 Introduction to Semiotics

Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything which can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which the sign stands for it (Eco 1976:7).

Semiotics, the study of signs, has become a significant discipline within cultural studies. Originating in the work of two major cultural theorists, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the American philosopher Charles Peirce, semiotics or semiology, serves as an efficient tool for analyzing how signs convey meaning. Semiotics encompasses not only the study of linguistic signs but everything that communicates meaning (cf. Bignell 2002:5). Charles Morris, another influential semiotician, also stated that semiotics has an “interdisciplinary scope”, encompassing signs of every form (cf. Nöth 1996:49). Therefore, it can be applied to many different fields, including poetry, nonverbal communication as well as aesthetics and visual communication such as music, architecture, photography and advertising.

Saussure coined the term ‘sémiologie’, which is derived from the Greek word semeion meaning sign, and defined it as “a science that studies the life of signs within a society” (Nöth 1996:57). Furthermore, his linguistic concepts of the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’ are crucial to the semiotic approach as the combination of these two produces a sign and by using signs, meaning can be communicated (cf. Hall 1997:36).

According to Peirce, on the other hand, semiotics is the formal doctrine of signs that is closely related to logic. He established three categories of sign, the ‘icon’, the ‘index’, and the ‘symbol’. These three types of signs differentiate from each other in the way that an icon bears a resemblance to its object, an index contains some link to the actual object whereas in a symbol, there is no connection between the sign and the object – it only communicates because society agrees on its meaning and significance (cf. Fiske 1990:46).
Another important figure, specifically in the field of text semiotics, was the structuralist Roland Barthes who used Hjelmslev’s theory of connotation for his semiotic analysis of culture. Barthes utilized this theory of connotative semiotics to reveal the concealed meanings in texts. In his famous work *Mythologies* (1972:131), he characterized such secondary meanings as ‘myths’.

Barthes also investigated another interesting aspect of culture, namely fashion. Semiotics of fashion, as Barthes stated, is concerned with the circulation of fashion as a meaning (Barthes 1983:437). In *The Fashion System*, Barthes attempted to study sign systems beyond language and literature by investigating fashion in France using two magazines of 1958-59 (cf. Nöth 1996:312). He examined the language of fashion, defined as “written clothing” and claimed that the language gives a specific meaning to the clothes that are displayed in fashion magazines. Not only does it tell people what is fashionable and what is not, it also provides suggestions on how, where and when to wear certain clothes. For this analysis, he used the differentiation between the ‘vestimentary code’, the system of fashion elements and rules, and ‘garments’, the means by which the code is individually expressed. On the denotative level in the fashion system, the ‘vestimentary code’ defines the fashionable garments of a season. On the other hand, the level of connotation in fashion is represented by a magazine’s comments on individual styles, possible ways of wearing a certain fashion item and its effects on society (cf. Nöth 1996:312).

Semiotics can be divided into three major fields of study. First, the study of the sign itself examines the many ways in which a sign communicates meaning as well as how it relates to the people who construct and use it. Second, the study of the codes or systems into which signs are organized explains how various codes have evolved in order to fulfill the needs of a society or culture. Third, the study of the culture within which these systems operate investigates how members of a society use certain signs (cf. Fiske 1990:40).

### 4.3.1 Denotation, Connotation and Myth

Similar to Saussure’s concepts of signifier and signified, Barthes introduced the two levels of denotation and connotation as constituents of a sign. The term ‘denotation’ represents the descriptive level and can be defined as description or label. ‘Connotation’ refers to the associations and ideas which people attribute to a particular sign. In this regard, as a third order of signification, it is important to mention Barthes’ concept of ‘myth’. He defines it
as “a semiotic phenomenon of everyday culture” that focuses on shaping a particular message through signs and their connotations in order to promote a specific idea (cf. Bignell 2002:16).

As Barthes proposes in his work *Mythologies* (1972:114), “in myth, we find again the tri-dimensional pattern [...] the signifier, the signified and the sign. […] Myth is a second-order semiological system”. The combined associations of a concept and an image which represent the sign in the first system become only a signifier in the second (cf. Barthes 1972:114). The chart (1) which is displayed below provides an overview of this system.

![Chart](chart.png)

Table 1

According to Barthes, ‘myths’ are “the dominant ideologies of our time” (cf. Chandler 2002:144). They can be regarded as extended metaphors, which give meaning to peoples’ experiences within a culture (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980:185f). Barthes claims that myths have an ideological function: their purpose is to ‘naturalize’ historical and cultural values, attitudes and beliefs. Through this process of ‘naturalization’, dominant beliefs and values become generally accepted as “normal”, “natural” or “obvious”. Thus, myths are “the result of meaning being generated by the groups in our society who have control of the language and the media” (Crow 2003:62).

All in all, the three orders or levels of signification are important means for a semiotic analysis and can be summarized as follows. The first order of signification, also called denotation, is mainly regarded as representational and self-contained. The second, connotative level of signification demonstrates the meanings that are associated with a sign. The third and mythological or ideological order of signification displays cultural ideas that are framing a specific worldview such as femininity, masculinity, freedom, power or individualism (cf. Chandler 2002:145).
4.3.2 Codes

Barthes also argues that connotation and myth are semiotic codes. The concept of codes is crucial to the study of semiotics, as can be seen in the work of many influential philosophers such as Saussure or Roman Jakobson. While Saussure understood that signs only convey meaning when someone interprets them in relation to each other, Jakobson strongly emphasized that production and interpretation of texts relies on codes and conventions, which can be used in communication. The meaning of a sign depends on the code within which it is placed and therefore, codes offer a framework that allows signs to become meaningful (cf. Chandler 2002:146f).

Umberto Eco (1968:130ff), cited in Nöth (1996:211), defines the code as a system of significant units with rules of combination and transformation. A code is a “system of rules given by a culture”. It can be also described as “a set of practices familiar to users of the medium operating within a broad cultural framework” (Chandler 2002:147f). Codes enable us to relate concepts to signs and thus, understand signs and communicate effectively. To quote Stuart Hall (1980:131), cited in Chandler (2002:148), “there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of a code”.

Similar to grammar in language, fashion has its codes which are unanimously understood by a society or smaller group of people. In the fashion system, codes are of vital importance as they give clothing a significant meaning. Through codes, a garment becomes more than just a useful item to protect and cover the body – it can provide information about the person’s character, social position or attitude. Fashion codes or dress codes tell us what is appropriate to wear and people generally follow these codes unless they intend to distinguish from the masses and make a certain statement (cf. Berger 1999:44).
4.4 Semiotics of Fashion Advertising

“As consumers of visual art we have become highly sophisticated readers of signs and signals. We decode meaning from compositions with subconscious ease” (Crow 2003:8). Particularly for artists, designers, as well as everyone who is working in the fashion or advertising industry, it is crucial to know how meaning is created and how one may use the combination of words and images, our visual language, to convey meaning to the recipient (cf. Crow 2003:8). Since people’s desires as well as their sense of identity are strongly influenced by the signs of their environment (cf. Crow 2003:9), advertisers make use of these signs and thus, are able to create desire.

The study of semiotics plays an important role in the field of advertising since it can be used to decipher the “hidden meaning” that, on an often subconscious level, triggers the decision of purchasing the advertised product. Understanding semiotics is therefore a highly important prerequisite for everyone who is involved in advertising and marketing.

Saussure’s model of the sign is a useful tool for analyzing the language of fashion. According to him, the actual clothing items, a style or specific fashion trend represent the ‘signifiers’. Through the codes of a society these items are linked to certain concepts, which represent the ‘signifieds’ (cf. Hall 1997:37). The association of a ‘signifier’ with one or several ‘signifieds’ generates specific types of meanings that are designated as ‘signification systems’. To quote Beasley (2002:23), “A signification system in advertising can be defined as the set of meanings that are generated for a product by a systematic association of various signifiers (brand name, logo, ad texts, etc.) with implicit signifieds relating to personality, lifestyle, desire, etc.”.

These concepts are crucial for a semiotic analysis of advertisements as they provide a useful framework for the interpretation of meanings in advertising. Beasley (2002: 28) suggests utilizing a series of questions, such as the subsequent three:

- What are the perceivable signifiers of the ads?
- What are the signifieds that are associated with these signifiers?
- What signification systems are generated?

The advertisements that are part of every magazine do not simply provide information about the benefits of a certain product; they create desires, naturalize dominant ideologies and influence gender identity issues. Although they account for a huge part of a
magazine’s content, advertisements are not regarded as interruptions as they almost seamlessly fit in between articles and other features. Very often, they even support editorial pages, for instance, when an ad for shampoo is placed in the “beauty section” next to a report that gives advice on how to get healthier looking hair.

As discussed in the previous chapter “Gender-specific Strategies in Advertising”, it is quite common nowadays to use the same techniques for both women and men. The subsequent advertisements by Versace exemplify this strategy as their advertisements (one for women’s fashion, the other one for men’s wear) are almost identical.

For their spring and summer 2009 ad campaign, Versace collaborated with two celebrities: supermodel Kate Moss and actor Patrick Dempsey. One of the first things to be noticed in these ads is their striking similarity. The location, a glass-walled balcony in front of the ocean is exactly the same in both pictures and the models’ posture is also identical. Furthermore, their clothing style is very similar and epitomizes elegance, expensive taste and a luxurious lifestyle. The modern architecture of the balcony combined with the relaxing atmosphere of a hot summer day by the ocean emphasizes these meanings and evokes associations such as pleasure, vacation and luxury.
Furthermore, the beautiful setting reflects the wonderful season of spring. The details of the dress are a further allusion to spring as both represent the notion of love. The hearts that are incorporated in the dress are the most obvious symbol for love while the season of spring is often also associated with love and romance. Thus, the clothes emphasize the romantic mood of the season. The fact that these ads create the same desires for both female and male customers implies that both genders can be attracted by the same strategy. Both advertisements represent a desirable lifestyle of which the clothes displayed seem to be an intrinsic part. Through this advertising strategy, Versace entices customers to purchase their product.

The advertisement that is displayed below was taken from Vogue’s July 2009 issue and shows one of this season’s major trends, the long flowing dress. Renowned for his elegant and feminine style, the Brazilian designer Carlos Miele again presented an impressive show at New York’s fashion week of spring 2009. For his new spring and summer collections, Carlos Miele found inspiration in the beautiful landscape of his home country. His clothes are marked by warm colors and other allusions to nature. “The shadows, colors, and movement of the vegetation inspired splashy tropical patterns and billowy, whisper-thin layers” (Style.Com 2009). This can be seen also in the advertisement above, which was produced in Rio de Janeiro.
The picture shows two beautiful women who are wearing long flowing dresses and are engaged in a dance. In the background, one can recognize Rio’s Ipanema Beach. The colors and shape of the dresses reflect the beauty of Brazil’s scenery and at the same time, symbolize femininity. This concept of femininity is shaped by the signs that are part of this advertisement. The style of the dresses is very flirtatious and glamorous and represents a woman of elegance and confidence. As the designer himself stated, “I was inspired by the dance between the woman’s body and Rio’s nature” (Fashion Week Daily 2009).

The designer Liz Claiborne, who established her brand in New York City, was among the first to address a new trend in women’s business wear in the 1970s. As this era was marked by an increase in women entering the workforce, she designed fashion for career women, specifically suits, enabling them to dress professionally while retaining their femininity (Lizclaiborne Inc. 2009). Since then, many other fashion houses have adopted this vision and business attire for women has become a worldwide industry.

The following advertisement, which is taken from the issue of March 2009 of Elle magazine, clearly perpetuates this concept and aims to attract the independent woman of
today. The photograph displays several women on a street in New York City, all dressed in colorful business attire. The bright colors, which immediately catch the viewer’s attention, signify an air of happiness, enthusiasm and also represent one of spring 2009’s new trends. The fact that the women are dressed very much alike creates a sense of community and thus power. What emphasizes this myth of a “women’s world” is that there are only women on the street – not a single man is displayed.

However, the advertisement not only presents successful independent business women but also suggests that it is possible to manage both career and family life. This is illustrated by the woman who is holding a baby but is dressed in a professional and very elegant way. Another interesting aspect is that the ad is targeted towards different age groups by showing very young women, middle-aged women and one elder woman. Implying that Liz Claiborne clothes suit everyone regardless of age, the brand aims to increase their target audience.

Furthermore, the advertisement incorporates a rather old but still very popular strategy: the “mirror effect”. One of the models is directly facing the viewer and is thereby evoking the idea that this could be you. This conception of the “mirror stage” was introduced by Jacques Lacan as a contribution to psychoanalytic theory and refers to the psychological process of identifying oneself. This mechanism occurs in childhood when the child first sees its image in the mirror. This stage is crucial for the child’s personal development since the conception of the self or “I” is being formed.

The fact that people are rarely satisfied with who they are and constantly seek to improve is a struggle that originates in the “mirror stage”. This state of discontent arises at a very early stage in childhood – the baby’s first look into the mirror presents a “better” or more developed version of the child and thus, triggers the need for betterment. From this moment onwards, an individual compares him/herself to other images within his/her surroundings. The direct gaze of models that are displayed in a picture resembles the effect that is achieved when looking into a mirror and therefore, the person who is viewing it may experience a feeling of inferiority and dissatisfaction. Similar to the child who wants to be its better version that is perceived in the mirror, a person who is viewing an advertisement may want to be like the model displayed.
The following ad for *Longchamp* handbags features supermodel Kate Moss and the French actor Gaspard Ulliel sitting in a café.
Including celebrities in ad campaigns is a popular advertising strategy as they often represent role models and idols for the masses. They epitomize what many people are longing for - a luxurious lifestyle and fame. As a fashion icon, Kate Moss’s personal style is admired by young women and fashion designers alike. Her strong influence on the masses is often used by advertisers to promote their products.

In this ad, Kate’s posture is very seductive and feminine, revealing the curves of her body. The sensuousness of her facial expression adds to the “signified” of “femininity” while the fact that she is turning away from the young man evokes distance, but also an air of unattainability. In addition, her black clothes signify elegance and style.
These connotations serve to create the desire for purchasing the advertised product, the *Longchamp* handbag. By matching the model’s elegant clothing style perfectly, the handbag acquires the same positive connotations as the rest of the picture. Furthermore, the man’s direct gaze at the model confirms her alluring nature and makes her seem even more desirable. The fact that the handbag is casually placed on the chair right next to Kate Moss – failing to catch the viewer’s attention immediately – implies that the concepts conveyed through this ad are its crucial element. In this regard, this strategy emphasizes the significance of signs in advertisements.

Using black-and-white photography for the advertisement highlights the importance of the meaning of clothes rather than their specific details. One may assume that especially in fashion advertising, colors are of vital importance. This ad however proves that very often, the signs or images that are visible in the picture are more important than the actual piece of clothing or accessory as those are the vehicles through which meaning is conveyed. In general, black-and-white pictures are associated with old memories or artistic photography. What emanates from its use in this case is that the significant element of this ad is the particular mood rather than the colors of the clothes. Depicting a well-dressed, beautiful couple, the ad generates connotations such as good style, youth, and romance.

The location of the photo shoot, the famous Café de Flore in Paris, contributes to the romantic atmosphere. Now a major tourist attraction, Café de Flore used to be a popular meeting point for the literary and artistic scene as it was frequented by famous artists and writers including Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Ernest Hemingway and Pablo Picasso. In this way, the location also symbolizes cultural value and makes the couple appear sophisticated, refined and intellectual. The reference to Paris in general, makes people think of love, beauty, and culture – connotations that are highly appreciated in society. Thus, utilizing a popular city for this advertisement is an effective advertising strategy. This was not the only time that *Longchamp* applied this strategy for promoting their products. The skyline of New York as well as some of the city’s famous buildings serves as background for several *Longchamp* ads. All in all, the advertisement facilitates the viewer’s wish to be like the model displayed – a beautiful, intelligent young woman, accompanied by her handsome boyfriend in the “most romantic city in the world”. The picture conveys a clear message: purchasing the new *Longchamp* handbag brings you at least one step closer to this desired identity.
4.5 Fashion and the Media

It is well understood that the media plays a significant role with regard to fashion and lifestyle. The media adds new meaning to clothing as well as to ways of living and thus, influences the production and consumption of fashion. In addition, the media serves as a source of information for various issues surrounding fashion and lifestyle. Since the media popularizes certain trends, it is able to create dominant ideologies or “myths”, which leads to the naturalization of dominant tastes.

Media culture, including film, television, popular music, and fashion, are strongly intertwined as they pursue similar goals. Both the media and the fashion industry redefine the meanings of different cultural fields in order to create new meanings (cf. Crane 2000: 244). Due to the media, fashion can be more easily diffused and thus, the promotion of dominant lifestyles, trends, and tastes reaches a broader audience nowadays.

It is obvious that the media has a huge impact on consumption in general and therefore, also strongly influences the dissemination and consumption of clothing. Through fashion magazines, new trends are circulated, values and ideas are shaped and the high amount of advertisements that are part of each magazine persuade to purchase consumer goods including clothes, beauty items and a wide range of other products. Similar to the social elite in the late nineteenth century who presented new styles in public, it is now celebrities who function as role models in terms of fashionable styles and new trends. Choosing one’s outfit and way of dressing may depend on several different things such as the comfort of a piece of clothing or a friend’s style but it is certain that the media influences to a greater or lesser extent what people wear.

However, it is interesting to think about how exactly one’s personal way of dressing is influenced by the media. Which means are used by the media to construct the need for purchasing a fashion item? And to what extent is the adoption of new fashion trends influenced by the media? To further investigate and to provide explanations for these questions, the subsequent chapter will focus on the meaning of signs in fashion reporting, followed by a survey conducted in order to examine the dissemination of fashion.
4.6 Semiotics of Fashion Reporting

Fashion obtains a particular meaning through the process of reporting. For instance, a piece of clothing can express several different meanings depending on how it is recommended to be worn. Furthermore, a certain style can be described as either fashionable or out of fashion. Generally, the information that is provided by fashion reporters greatly influences the meaning of a particular style or certain item of clothing. Fashion magazines serve three main purposes: providing information about new trends, advertising and entertainment.

Regarding their informative function, these magazines report on new trends and new products. In addition, they make suggestions on how to wear certain clothing items, which pieces work best in combination and what outfits to wear for different occasions. For instance, a popular feature of many magazines is a styling guide that presents one item that can be worn for various purposes. By combining it with other garments and accessories, the same dress can be worn at various locations: at work, at a dinner party or in a more casual setting.

With regard to advertising, these magazines serve to promote fashionable consumer goods including cosmetics, clothing, jewelry, and also cars, electronic devices, and food. It is interesting to observe that advertisements often overlap with editorial pages. This happens when the magazine adds a more detailed description and provides information about the product and emphasizes its value and effectiveness. Another way of achieving this effect has been to produce ads that assume the appearance of an editorial page as can be seen in the recent Dior 2009 cosmetic campaign (Marie Claire March 2009:193).
Next to the face of a model is a short description on how to get this look as well as a picture of the Dior products that were used. This makes it more difficult for the consumer
to identify it as an advertisement and can therefore be a successful promotional strategy. Another form of advertising is the magazine’s testing of cosmetics. The magazine’s staff conducts research in the cosmetic industry and selects one or several products that will be awarded the title “best product(s)” in a number of categories. It is also very common to use celebrities for this feature as their popularity attaches a positive image to the product. In addition, the voice of stylists, hairstylists, make-up artists, and dermatologists is highly valuable for advertisers because the advice and recommendations of experts are considered more credible and thus, more persuasive.

Through its stories, biographies, celebrity news, and articles on relationships a magazine also provides entertainment. Every issue of Vogue and Elle also contains reports on politics as well as various forms of art and popular culture. Sometimes, women tell their personal stories and how they managed to overcome serious struggles – real stories that real women can identify with and which give them hope and strength. In this respect, a magazine is not only entertaining but also can be highly interesting and informative.

These three functions combined help to shape a society’s culture as they promote a certain lifestyle and influence consumption. In other words, fashion reports serve as a means to verbalize tastes, attitudes and worldviews and thus, have a great impact on culture and consumption. However, it is important to mention that obviously the media is not solely responsible for the development of culture and society. Of course, many cultural aspects that are promoted by the media originate within a certain group or society. Since culture can be explained as an interdependent system that includes several processes such as the construction of identity, representation through language, production and consumption, it becomes obvious that a society’s concepts and values are formed by the interplay of the aforementioned activities.

By examining the semiotics of fashion reporting, it is possible to ascertain the way in which society and its consumption of fashion are influenced by the media. The language of fashion magazines reinforces the concepts and ideologies that are part of our culture.

As mentioned before, editors often choose one specific clothing item and show how to wear it for different occasions. This also represents a popular form of advertising as illustrated by the following advertisement for Havaianas flip flops.
The ad covers four pages, each page displaying the same model who is wearing various Havaianas at various locations. It seems as if these flip flops can be worn in every situation. On the first page, the model is riding a bike in Manhattan, New York. The second page shows her on her way to work while on the third page, she is enjoying a cup of coffee. On the fourth page, she is adorned in an elegant evening dress while wearing
Havaianas in shimmering silver grey and small diamonds. In each photograph, the model is wearing a different pair of Havaianas suggesting their appropriateness for each situation. This ad sends the clear message that Havainans flip flops are suitable for every occasion while at the same time being stylish. By adding text to these pictures, the Havaianas advertisement underscores this message. The short text in each photograph resembles a dictionary entry, which provides several definitions of the word “Havaiana”. On the last page, for example, “Havaiana” is defined as “to wear Havaianas instead of evening shoes or when your feet just need a break”. “<Time to Havaiana the night away!>” (Vogue May 2009:114). In addition to recommending when to wear these flip flops, which is done by the “dictionary’s definition”, the entry even uses the word Havaiana to replace the verb “to dance”.

The language in fashion magazines often expresses the meaning of fashion very explicitly, which emphasizes the strong connotations of clothing and suggest that clothes actually “speak”. This can be seen in the following example of the famous female tennis player Venus Williams’ quote in Vogue’s May 2009 issue: “This suit says to me, I’m sexy; get
out of my way.” This statement confirms that clothing style expresses meaning and sometimes even conveys a specific message to others. Clothes not only communicate meaning to other people but also and probably even to a greater extend, evoke a particular mood, feeling or attitude to the person wearing them. Considering the example of the suit, this garment can make the person who is wearing it feel more secure, more confident, stronger and sexy.

To promote one of the new trends of spring 2009, the jumpsuit, Vogue presented photographs with strong connotative meaning in its February 2009 issue. The underlying “myths” and ideologies are emphasized by the comments of designers.

“"I love the idea of a woman dressing in men’s clothes and having the confidence to play with her sexuality”
—Riccardo Tisci, Givenchy

[Taken from Vogue (2009, February)]
Referring to Saussure’s concept of the sign, the ‘signifiers’ in this photograph are the black jumpsuit and black high heels. The jumpsuit including its specific cut and color represents the concept of or ‘signified’ “masculinity” as well as “casualness”. On the other hand, the high heels epitomize “femininity”, “elegance” and “sensuality”. The model’s athletic posture and the determined expression of her face symbolize strength, power and control. These concepts combined – the masculine elements yet feminine touch - display the image of a strong independent woman. It is obvious that the text supports the picture’s message as the designer’s comment explicitly references the interplay of both feminine and masculine features. As an assumed expert in the field of fashion, the designer’s personal taste and opinion also endows the clothing items with a positive image and popularity. This aspect is highly important also from an economic point of view as it encourages consumers to purchase the products. This editorial feature is an example of how the media constructs the need for purchasing fashion items and thus influence consumers’ buying behavior.

In order to promote new trends and advertise products, the media constantly reports on the clothing style of famous people. Prominent fashion magazines such as Vogue and Elle comment on celebrities’ latest styles in each of their issues. Usually, the magazine also displays a selection of items that match the celebrities’ respective outfits so that consumers can imitate the look. Copying the style of celebrities happens frequently since their clothing represents a luxurious lifestyle. A celebrity’s outfit is part of his/her image and thus, clothes function as a crucial indicator of lifestyle, beauty, wealth and success. Sometimes, every little piece of a celebrity’s wardrobe is discussed, analyzed and interpreted by the media – a fact through which it becomes obvious how “meaningful” clothes can be.

The following example, featured in the issue of April of Elle magazine, illustrates the fact that clothes can take on a variety of different meanings. Their Creative Director, Joe Zee redefines the concept of women’s business attire and gives advice on how to look stylish yet professional. He visits Washington D.C. with the purpose of styling several well-educated young women who are part of the White House staff. He understands that the busy work schedule of those women does not allow for an extravagant and time-consuming styling. For one of these women, he therefore turns an evening dress into an outfit that is also appropriate at the workplace. In order to “dress it down”, he suggests combining the dress with a belt and a more casual cardigan. This example shows that “restyling” can give clothes a totally new meaning. Whereas a cocktail dress is usually
associated with dinner parties and other social activities, it can also, when styled appropriately, function as a sign for a successful, independent, elegant and ambitious business woman.

Elle’s March 2009 issue includes a style guide, which presents the new trends of spring 2009 and tells readers how to wear these items. By calling this guide “The ELLE Spring ’09 Survival Guide” the magazine stresses the vital importance of appearance and fashionable clothing. In addition to fashion reports and photo shoots displaying the latest
trends such as the jumpsuit, bold futuristic accessories and shoulder pads, the guide contains a feature that exemplifies the well-know design concept of turning street style into high fashion.

Frequently, fashion designers seek inspiration for their new collections from subcultures and the street and thus, the clothing style of certain subcultures is turned into high fashion. For instance, the designer Stephen Sprouse created a handbag for Louis Vuitton, with ‘Louis Vuitton Paris’ written all over it in graffiti style (cf. Manlow 2009:11). As can be seen in the example of Elle’s magazine below, the clothing items displayed are inspired by the biker looks. This particular style serves as a basic element for a new trend and as the garments which are used in the photo shoot are created by various well-known designers, the magazine’s editorial team promotes this new style as a must-have of this season.

Usually, styles that originate in a certain subculture entail a strong image and are therefore a popular means of self-representation. The biker look represents a particular lifestyle and attitude and a person dressed in such a way may be described as cool, edgy, rough, and rebellious. The language of the clothing that is shown in the picture also conforms to this image. However, the clothes are also sexy and feminine – attributes, which are highlighted by the fact that a beautiful young women is wearing them. The representation of subcultures through clothing clearly shows that fashion and culture are closely intertwined.
The following example, which was taken from an online trend report, illustrates very classic and formal menswear that was presented at one of spring’s fashion weeks. The picture’s description was: “When a classic American outfit like this appears on the Italian runway of two Canadian designers [Dsquared²], you know there's a trend happening” (Men.style 2009). This statement attaches strong meaning to the style displayed by defining it as a symbol of ‘Americaness’. Furthermore, the outfit’s classic and formal style signifies ‘elegance’.
The handbag’s original connotation of femininity is neutralized by the way the male model is carrying it – not on his shoulder but firmly in his hand, almost like a briefcase. Thus, the model’s style can still represent ‘masculinity’ although it includes a traditionally feminine element. In fact, mixing masculine and feminine pieces is very popular in today’s fashion world. In addition, it is not unusual nowadays for men to carry handbags. Many products traditionally associated with femininity, are now also the province of men such as cosmetics and certain accessories.

The semiotic analysis of fashion reporting shows that the discourse of fashion has a high impact on culture. Through the task of reporting, the meaning, that clothes themselves construct, is emphasized or sometimes even altered. Clothes and personal style are representations of culture and through language, the cultural meaning of fashion becomes visible even more so.
5 Analysis of Survey: Dissemination of Fashion Trends

It has been argued that the media strongly facilitates the dissemination of fashion trends and thus, aims to popularize certain styles. By using the semiotic approach to fashion, the previous chapters of this thesis aimed to illustrate how the media constructs the need for purchasing a fashion item. A brief survey, conducted among students and young professionals between the ages of 20 and 30, serves to further investigate the diffusion and consumption of fashion. To be specific, the survey attempts to ascertain to what extent the media influences the adoption of new fashion trends. In addition, it examines the global dissemination of fashion trends of spring 2009. In order to obtain a better insight into the diffusion process, participants were asked to name the sources of information they used in order to acquaint themselves with these trends, and how they obtain information about this topic in general. Assuming that various factors, other than the media, influence the consumption of fashion, the analysis also focuses on these additional criteria. Moreover, the general significance and reception of fashion was investigated by asking people if they usually follow the latest trends, and which of the new styles of spring 2009 they adopted.

Due to the globalization of fashion, it can be presumed that trends diffuse more rapidly around the world and no longer vary drastically from one country to another. To examine this aspect more thoroughly, the survey was conducted among a multinational group of 21 participants including people from Austria, England, France, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand and Spain. The qualitative evaluation method attempts to highlight individual views on the promotion of fashion trends.

The analysis of the survey not only shows the adoption of new trends in general, but also with regard to people’s respective country of residence. To structure the outcome more clearly, the participating countries were subcategorized according to language areas. All questionnaires that were part of the survey can be viewed in appendix C starting on page 92.

As mentioned before, the language of fashion enables us to express ourselves in a very distinct and creative way. This insight is also crucial from an economic point of view. Knowing the kind of personality, lifestyle, and attitudes of one’s customer or target audience is one of the main elements in effective advertising and eventually, high sales figures. For instance, certain customers are very specific about what they are looking for.
They disregard any advice from either fashion magazines or designers and are very determined about their purchasing decisions. Such customers are usually very independent and possess a strong individual sense of self (cf. Crane 2000:164). However, what exactly influences their style and buying behavior if it is neither the media nor the producers of clothes? Apart from having a strong personality and a determined personal taste, it is possible that people often simply use the clothing styles they notice on the streets or within their close environment as an inspiration for their own look. Women in particular, pay a lot of attention to other women’s clothing and if they are fond of it, adopt a copied version. This important phenomenon, along with additional factors, will be further illustrated in the following analysis.

5.1 Dissemination of Spring 09 Fashion Trends

Regarding the dissemination of fashion trends, participants were asked to describe the fashion of spring 2009 and to name a few items that represent the style of this season. In response to that, the group identified 59 different trends including all items that the media promoted as major trends. (Please refer to appendix B for the complete list of trends.) Generally, the survey showed consensus on what the new trends of spring 2009 are: colorful designs, exotic prints, bold jewelry and accessories, hippie chic, and retro style.

With regard to the participants’ country of residence, New Zealand’s response was very interesting since the trends of a particular season reach them later as compared to the other countries due to their geographical location. Being part of the southern hemisphere, New Zealand’s fashion shows only presented fall and winter collections so far. To be specific, New Zealand’s fashion week for spring 2009 is held in late September. Therefore, the spring collections of the majority of designers had not yet been released, with the exception of two designers, Karen Walker and Trelise Cooper, who design northern hemisphere collections. Due to the northern hemisphere’s influence on New Zealand’s fashion, these collections displayed the same trends: shoulder pads, prints, retro style and the nude look. To quote one of the participants from New Zealand: “I find N[ew] Z[ealand] fashion is quite unique and while it is obviously influenced by the northern hemisphere’s collections/trends which come out six months before, our designers definitely put their own swing to it” (Appendix C). These styles were also presented in northern hemisphere fashion magazines and other forms of media. For instance, the website www.style.com, a
notable source for fashion and lifestyle, announced these styles in their spring 2009 trend reports.

The results of the survey reveal that people, regardless of location, are quite well informed about the latest fashion trends. However, less than 50% claimed that it was important for them to follow the latest fashion trends. The majority stated that they adopt some styles depending on their personal taste. Thus, the survey’s outcome clearly shows that a person’s way of dressing represents their identity rather than a simple copy of the clothing styles that are promoted as trends. In addition, some statements were particularly interesting in terms of the media’s and retail industry’s dominant position as well as the general dissemination process. One of the participants from Austria said that he normally does not adopt the latest trends but being out of fashion is almost impossible since most retail stores
exclusively offer fashionable clothes. Therefore, it might often be difficult for people to dress entirely according to their own personal style since, in some way, unless they produce their own clothing, they are always dependent on the fashion industry. Another Austrian who took part pointed out that it takes her some time to adapt to new styles: “It happens to me often that when I finally start liking a trend it is already out of fashion […]” (Appendix C). This shows that the diffusion of fashion trends can be a long process simply because a person’s taste does not always change quickly. In addition, new trends are not always catered to suit every person. In these cases, people may tend to purchase “classic” items that suits them rather than a “must-have” that is less well-fitting. Furthermore, some might simply base their clothing style on what feels most comfortable. The dissemination from high fashion to the street can therefore take several years. On the other hand, as was mentioned earlier, adopting a new style immediately is an easy endeavor nowadays due to the concept of “fast fashion” that is used by certain design houses such as Zara, which offer “knock-off” versions of the latest trends soon after they are presented at fashion shows.

Another interesting finding concerning the diffusion of the trends of spring 2009 is that the global dispersion of styles is dramatically expanding. From the major fashion capital of Paris to the small city of Graz, Austria, all participants listed similar trends. Of course, there were some variations but those could not be attributed to a specific region. All in all, the results of the survey confirm the global culture of fashion.

### 5.2 The Media’s Influence on the Diffusion of Fashion Trends

Having examined the diffusion of fashion trends, it is also significant to consider the various factors that facilitate this process. Therefore, the participants were asked how they informed themselves about the spring 2009 fashion as well as new trends in general. The result was unanimous: Every participant listed at least one form of the media, mostly fashion magazines, the Internet and TV, among other sources of influence. The fact that everyone enumerated at least one favorite fashion magazine also affirmed the media’s strong influence. It is obvious that the media assumes a very dominant position with regard to the consumption of fashion as it represents a prominent source of information. This is also verified by the outcome of the survey as all participants listed the media as their main source of information regarding new trends.
As was discussed earlier, the media greatly influences the fashion industry, production and consumption of clothing as well as the meaning of fashionable items. Therefore, it can be assumed that the media also plays a crucial role in the actual adoption of fashion trends and highly affects people’s individual clothing style. In order to determine the media’s influence on fashion buying behavior and society’s way of dressing, one of the survey’s aims was to ascertain which criteria influence people’s individual style most. The following chart (2) provides an overview of the most influencing factors.

**Table 2**

**Media**: As can be seen, the media is the number one criterion for people’s sartorial choices. 12 Participants listed the media as the most influencing factor with regard to their personal way of dressing. Among the various forms of media, it was the fashion magazine that was most frequently cited.

**Personal Taste**: Seven Respondents mentioned that their personal taste is a significant criterion when deciding what to wear. This factor also includes clothing choices that are based on one’s mood and personality. It was emphasized that fashion is an expression of one’s lifestyle and personal identity.
**Friends:** Since fashion is about communicating meaning within a certain group or society, the people who surround us have a major impact on our own clothing style. Therefore, it is quite common to seek advice from friends in this matter. A friend’s opinion of what is fashionable as well as his/her style highly influences a person’s own way of dressing. Four participants considered their friends to be the most influencing factor with respect to sartorial selections.

**People on the Street:** Three respondents stated that their personal style is mostly inspired by people they view on the streets. Specifically, it was mentioned that the garments of very fashionable people catch other people’s attention and thus affect their own style. Furthermore, the participants specified them as people who seem to have good taste. To explain “on the street” in more detail, it should be noted that this factor refers to streets in general but also to the streets of big metropolitan cities.

**Other Cultures:** Three participants stated that other countries and cultures inspire their personal way of clothing. Through encounters with people from different cultural backgrounds, they obtain new ideas and inspiration. Travelling to big cities is therefore also considered to have an impact on a person’s style.

**Celebrities:** People are enthusiastic about copying the style of celebrities, which is very self-expressive and usually has positive connotations. Three of the participants listed the style of famous people as most affecting criterion.

**Shoes:** It might seem odd to have shoes listed as a criterion for how to dress but participants explicitly mentioned them (and only them!) since they buy clothes that match their favorite shoes. It is interesting that in terms of specific items of clothing, shoes are often considered to be the part of apparel which most accurately defines an individual’s personality. This may explain why they attain such high significance.

**Retail Industry:** Only one respondent considered retail stores to have the highest impact on personal style. However, the importance of the retail industry should not be overlooked. Through their shop-windows and sartorial range, retail stores have a great influence on the masses since they can diffuse trends even to those who are oblivious to fashion magazines, fashion shows and other forms of promoting fashion. Although fashion is a global industry and new styles are disseminated across the world, the actual supply of clothing varies from one location to another. The stores’ supply of apparel can therefore persuade people to dress in a certain way.
Through the establishment of international fashion houses as well as the Internet, the dissemination of fashion has become more global. It is easier nowadays to go with the latest fashion since many clothing brands can be found in almost every capital of the world. However, there are regional differences even within the same fashion house. Considering the variety of clothes of *Mango* and *H&M* stores in several locations including Graz, Vienna, Munich, Paris, London and New York it can be seen that although the assortment is very similar, noticeable differences still exist. The higher number and larger size of the stores of both *H&M* and *Mango*, especially in New York, Paris and London obviously allow for a broader selection. In addition, the shops sell differing items in each city. This proves that even nowadays, the variety of fashion that is being sold in stores often differs from one country or city to another.

**Job:** One participant mentioned the type of profession as the most influential criterion in terms of clothing. Usually, a person’s workplace requires a specific dress code, which may affect people’s clothing style in general. They might either dress more formally even during their leisure time, or extremely casually as a result of longing for some change and variety in their style.

**Designers:** Another respondent identified the designer as having the most influence on individual clothing style. As producers of fashion, designers naturally have an impact on society’s clothing. By sharing their visions, they contribute to shape the meaning of fashion. They also influence consumers in a more direct way: through fashion shows, websites and other forms of promoting their designs they communicate the meaning of their clothes. In this regard, it should be noted that designers usually promote their clothes through the media.

### 5.3 Additional Factors that determine an Individual’s Personal Style

In order to further discover the meanings attributed to certain styles as well as to investigate how the diffusion process functions, participants were asked to list everything that has an impact on their personal way of dressing. In this respect, it should be noted that all participants listed various additional influencing factors other than the media. Of course, the media is strongly involved in the dissemination of fashion but other factors should not be overlooked. Table 3, which can be seen below, displays these influences.
The results imply that a great variety of factors influence people’s sartorial choices. This outcome also confirms that fashion reflects lifestyle, culture, ideas, and emotions. Trends emerge from many different sources, such as new experiences and interaction with other people. In addition, the survey suggests that the dissemination process resembles a cycle rather than the bottom-down structure as discussed by Simmel. Many participants mentioned that travelling to other countries as well as fashionable people they view on the streets inspire their own clothing style. This proves that fashion is a significant means of communication; it facilitates creativity, and reflects culture. ‘Street style’ has a huge influence on people's perception of what is fashionable and on what they would choose to wear. On the other hand, as was mentioned earlier, many designers find inspiration for their collections on the street. These aspects designate the “street” as a crucial origin of the emergence of new trends.

The circular structure of fashion becomes obvious through the fact that the emergence of new trends is facilitated by various factors and different social groups rather than emanating from a single source. In fact, styles originating in a subculture are often incorporated into the collections of both high fashion designers as well as lower-priced clothing lines. Specifically, fashion designers create new looks by weaving materials from various social groups into their designs. For instance, elements from the punk subculture can be frequently viewed on the runway and thus, punk developed into a mainstream fashion trend. The picture below, displaying a model on the runway in New York, is an example of how sub-cultural elements are incorporated into high fashion.
5.4 Adoption of New Trends (Spring 2009)

It was mentioned earlier that for most people, following the latest trends was not of vital importance. Personal taste seemed to dominate over the latest style. If compared to the fashion from previous times, for example the early nineteenth century, it is noticeable that people have a lot more confidence about their own style nowadays. They refrain from the passive copying of “fixed clothing trends” and compose their individual style by means of personal taste, comfort or suitability. This change is due to the fact that today’s society is
more tolerant in terms of clothing. In the past, the meaning and appropriateness of clothes was more fixed whereas today, people experiment with various styles. People use fashion to express their feelings, mood and attitudes and choose a certain style that reflects their identity. There are various reasons why people use fashion as a means of expression. While some are simply intrigued by it and love to go with the latest style, others may choose a bizarre outfit in order to attract attention. Furthermore, fashion is also used to express resistance or protest against something, especially when people cannot find another way of communicating their message.

In order to examine people’s reception of new trends, one of the survey’s questions was: “Which of the items you listed [as part of spring 2009 fashion trends] do you actually wear?”. The results show that all respondents adopt at least some of the trends of spring 2009. The detailed results can be viewed in the diagram (4) below. Again, the outcome proves that there is a strong tendency towards selecting fashionable items from the latest trends and adjusting them to individual taste.

![Most Popular Trends](image)

Table 4

The following statement by a participant from Austria shows how the meaning of a clothing item is dependent on various aspects, such as occasion. In response to which of the previously listed items one would actually wear, she said: “Well, [it] depends on the occasion. For the beach or a summer party I love wearing shorts but […] for every day
student life they are way too sexy” (Appendix C). Her answer implies that the connotations of clothes can change due to different occasions. There are various reasons for the change in the meaning of fashion: in this case, the most obvious criterion is climate. Shorts are considered as an appropriate garment at outdoor events held in the summer and at the beach because the typically hot weather allows for less clothing and provides shorts with the positive connotations of ‘naturalness’ and ‘comfort’.

In addition, these specific occasions are marked by a relaxed atmosphere and therefore, it these contexts shorts are usually associated with casualness rather than “provocative clothing”. In contrast, a woman who is wearing shorts at a location where it is not considered “necessary” (such as at the university), might come across as too seductive, or ‘too sexy’. It is possible that her way of dressing will be regarded as provocative and therefore inappropriate.

With regard to the aforementioned question, the participant also noted that she frequently wears blue clothes as they complement her eye color and therefore suit her very well. In addition, she said she loves ‘Wedgies’ (sandals with comfortable plateau heels) because they are much more comfortable than regular high heels. These answers clearly demonstrate that comfort as well as what suits one’s type play an important role in people’s clothing choices. Of course this is a very natural criterion for selecting garments but it still implies that a person’s style strongly reflects his/her identity.
5.5 Adoption of Fashion Trends according to Language Areas

The survey was conducted among people from seven different countries in order to ascertain possible regional differences with regard to the adoption of new trends. The chart (5) below illustrates the participating countries.

As can be seen in the chart above, the number of participants from Austria was dramatically higher than the participation in other countries. However, the numbers of each country’s respondents is not a major factor of this analysis since it is more important to obtain information regarding each nation’s general reception of new fashion trends. In order to provide a clearer overview of the results, the survey’s participants are divided into three different subcategories according to language areas: German–speaking, Romance and Anglophone areas. Furthermore, this categorization is useful since fashion and lifestyle are very similar within these language areas. Table 6 displays these language areas.
With regard to the German-speaking language area, Austria and Germany resemble each other not only in terms of their general culture, but also with regard to their culture of fashion. To be specific, the clothing style of the masses is the same in both countries. Additionally, the styles of the existing subcultures in both countries are also similar. The respondents from Austria exhibited a strong tendency to follow trends only if they complied with their own taste. Individual style and taste were considered to be more important than following the latest fashion. The explanation for this tendency is very simple: people’s sartorial choices are based on what they like rather than the need to conform to a trend. In Germany, the response was very similar as people simply select what they like and feel comfortable wearing. Although an interest in fashionable styles can be observed, they are not obsessed with adapting to whatever trends are promoted by the fashion world.
Fashion and clothing in the Romance language area, represented by participants from France and Spain, is also very similar as can be seen in the picture below. Both pictures were taken on the streets of Paris (left) and Barcelona (right) and display a similar style: a lot of black, leggings, high heels.

Participants from France appeared to be eager to dress according to the latest trends. However, one statement in particular was very interesting: “New trends are old trends for those who are really [into fashion]” (Appendix C). Whether one agrees with this assumption or not, it suggests that fashionable people are always one step ahead and have their own distinct ideas about what is stylish. In this respect, being fashionable may be defined by uniqueness and a strong personal identity. For Spain, going with the latest fashion is also quite important and therefore many trends of spring 2009 are being adopted. However it was also mentioned that one would not adapt to all styles as can be seen in the following statement: “There [is] some trendy stuff that I wouldn’t wear” (Appendix C).

The countries of the Anglophone area, England, Ireland and New Zealand, bear a strong resemblance to each other with regard to clothing as these countries’ fashion industries are strongly influenced by those of the United States. Respondents England generally expressed an interest in following the latest fashion but also mentioned that it depends on personal taste. The Irish are very enthusiastic about adopting the latest fads and fashion.
Particularly, when a trend is easy to copy, as items are being mass-produced by many clothing companies, people are very likely to go with the latest style. In general, it should be noted that Ireland adopts many trends from England – a fact that shows again the similarity within the Anglophone areas. Participants from New Zealand tend to adopt at least parts of a new trend. It seems that they have strong personal tastes and are proud of their national designers. They choose certain items that they like and arrange them in their own way. As can be seen from the survey, the respondents are both creative and resourceful when it comes to purchasing and wearing clothes. One of them stated that she loved vintage shopping because it is less expensive and therefore allows her to purchase more pieces. The other one mentioned that she usually buys a few items which she then wears through several seasons but changes the overall style by means of different accessories. New Zealanders are fashion-conscious yet they retain a strong individual sense of style, one of them mentioning that her way of dressing is a mix of new trends and her own personal style.

These results show that people’s reception of spring 2009 fashion trends with regard to their country of residence is quite similar. The effect of globalization is probably the main reason for this outcome, one participant from Austria mentioning that her favorite fashion magazine was the French Vogue. Additionally, the media, as a main source of information regarding fashion and lifestyle, contributes to the diffusion of the latest trends. Furthermore, this analysis confirms that for most people, regardless of origin, personal taste is more important than conforming to society’s trends. This is due to the fact that fashion is also used to signify individuality and people wish to express their identity through their distinct way of dressing. However, this general perception of new trends is not the only reason for the lack of enthusiasm for spring 2009 styles. The answers also imply that people were not particularly intrigued by many of the items which were part of this season’s fashion.

It is obvious that not everyone responds to the fads and fashions that are promoted by the media and advertisements. As the survey also shows, many people instead seek inspiration from the style of their friends or random people on the streets. The media responds to this development by reporting on the actual clothing styles of society. For instance, they incorporate styles of unknown but very well dressed people into fashion magazines. This section of the magazine is usually named ‘street style’. A similar feature is provided by the Internet in terms of fashion blogs, which display photos of people on the streets of various cities whose style is considered to be very distinct and unique. Additionally, these websites function as communication platforms since they encourage visitors to state their opinion on
the styles displayed. Photographers and designers also contribute to this fashion dialogue as they comment on their looks. The following websites are an example of popular fashion blogs: http://thesartorialist.blogspot.com/, and http://jakandjil.com/blog/.

These changes in the creation and dissemination of fashion trends not only confirm the more customer-oriented nature of the fashion industry today but also show that nearly all members of society can facilitate the emergence of a new trend. Fashion has become a dialogue in which everyone can participate. Designers produce styles that reflect not only their creative visions but also elements from the street. The media also promotes trends from both designers and the culture of a society. To complete the cycle, individuals choose from the wide range of high fashion, mainstream and street styles to create their own personal look. The chart (7) below displays the “cycle of fashion”.

Table 7
6 Conclusion

Fashion is an intrinsic part of culture as it constitutes a means of communicating lifestyles, values and beliefs. Throughout history, fashion and clothing have served various purposes, ranging from dominating other social groups to simply expressing one’s personal style. Today, the attribution of meaning to fashion is generated by members of various social groups.

The semiotic analysis of fashion advertising and reporting has shown that clothes bear a strong symbolic meaning. These meanings that are attributed to particular items of clothing are used by the media to promote certain values and ideologies. The media’s choice as to what they report on can thus facilitate the diffusion of fashion. In the particular case of the advertising industry, the discursive strategies applied, idealize certain lifestyles and thereby, construct the social need for purchasing the promoted item.

Examples from topical sources provided in this thesis have served to illustrate that the dissemination of fashion and the emergence of new styles are globally expanding. In addition, the survey has shown that the reception of new fashion trends was very similar in all three language areas, implying that the diffusion of fashion has become more global.

In promoting new trends worldwide, the media constitutes the most influencing factor with regard to the dissemination of fashion. This assumption has been verified by the results of the survey conducted in the framework of this thesis. Firstly, respondents listed various forms of media as their main sources of information regarding new fashion trends. Secondly, participants identified the media as the most influencing criterion in terms of their sartorial choices.

The discursive construction of fashion and lifestyle in the media facilitates the dispersion of specific concepts and worldviews, thus aiming to construct the need for adopting a fashion trend. The ways in which the media attempts to achieve this goal can be summarized as follows:

- The discursive use of signs evokes positive connotations and thus links the product with specific images such as a desirable identity.
- Ideologies or “myths” are constructed to shape society’s concepts and worldviews and thus, facilitate consumption.
- Reporting on the clothing style of celebrities and other fashionable people (on the street) in order to promote certain trends.
- Gender-specific strategies are applied to cater to the respective needs of both men and women.

Nowadays, the diffusion of fashion is no longer dominated by the social elite. In fact, all members of society can influence this process. Certainly, the media assumes a dominant position and also, the retail industry and designers, as producers of fashion, have a huge impact on the dissemination of fashion trends. However, the individual is not excluded from this process. In fact, the media frequently reports on random people’s clothing styles, while fashion producers increasingly seek inspiration from the “street” when designing new trends. It is well understood that these three components have varying levels of influence. However, as illustrated in the “cycle of fashion”, all of them contribute to the diffusion of fashion and emergence of new styles.
7 Summary

Dating back to the beginning of the 18th century, the philosophers Georg Simmel and Thorstein Veblen were among the first to study fashion scientifically. Their “trickle-down” theory proposed that fashion diffuses from the social elite to lower classes. Since then, many theories concerning the dissemination of fashion have evolved. The aim of this thesis is to examine the elements which facilitate this diffusion process today. To be more specific, it attempts to ascertain, by means of a semiotic analysis of fashion advertising and reporting, which strategies the media uses to construct the need for adopting a fashion trend. The international survey conducted among students and young professionals will further aid to investigate the media’s level of influence on production, consumption and dissemination of fashion.

The first chapter offers a general introduction to the subject of fashion and highlights its significance within the field of cultural studies. Additionally, it includes a brief overview of the history of fashion and contends the recent developments of the fashion industry. Bearing in mind that fashion is a means of communicating and representing an individual’s personality and lifestyle, this section will also deal with the construction of identity through fashion. With regard to the diffusion process of fashionable clothing, it is crucial to provide an insight into the production and consumption of fashion. The third chapter is therefore designed to acquaint the reader with the theories of cultural production and consumption. The subchapter “Globalization and Dissemination of Fashion Trends” provides topical examples of how the media facilitates the worldwide diffusion of new styles.

Since the study of semiotics provides a useful framework for the interpretation of promotional strategies applied in both advertisements and fashion magazines, the fourth and main chapter will familiarize the reader with the semiotic approach to fashion. Furthermore, the semiotics of fashion advertising and reporting will be discussed by means of advertisements and editorial features. An additional part of this chapter constitutes the construction of gender in the media as gender-specific strategies are frequently utilized by the media in order to influence society’s purchasing decisions.

Last but not least, chapter number five presents an analysis of the survey conducted on the dissemination of fashion trends. It attempts to define the diffusion process of fashion
trends, specifically the latest styles of spring 2009. In this respect, the criteria which influence an individual’s way of dressing will be defined. Furthermore, the media’s impact on both diffusion and adoption of new trends will be examined. The fact that the survey was conducted among people from seven different countries, aids to illustrate the effect of globalization on the dissemination of fashion. A categorization according to language areas will further illustrate the participants’ adoption of fashion trends. In a concluding remark, the modern diffusion process of fashion will be demonstrated by outlining the interplay of the media, the fashion industry and the individual.

The CD-ROM in appendix A contains the TV commercials which are part of subchapter 4.2. “Gender-specific Strategies in Advertising”. The videos can be watched using either the Windows Media Player or the VLC Media Player. Appendix B includes the list of spring 2009 fashion trends that were identified by the respondents of the survey. All questionnaires that were part of the survey can be viewed in appendix C of this thesis.
8 Deutsche Zusammenfassung


Das erste Kapitel beginnt mit einer allgemeinen Einführung in den Bereich der Mode und betont dabei deren besondere Bedeutung innerhalb der Kulturwissenschaft. Nachdem die kulturelle Funktion der Mode erläutert worden war, beschäftigt sich ein weiteres Unterkapitel mit den Auswirkungen der Mode auf die Identitätsbildung. Darüber hinaus enthält der erste Abschnitt einen historischen Überblick sowie eine kurze Zusammenfassung der neuesten Entwicklungen in der Modeindustrie um den Leser besser mit dem Thema vertraut zu machen.


9 Bibliography


Pictures:

3D10%26um%3D1%26hl%3Dde%26rls%3DSUNA,SUNA:2006-02,SUNA:de%26sa%3D [2007, July 7]

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10 Appendix A

The CD-ROM contains the TV commercials which are part of subchapter 4.2. “Gender-specific Strategies in Advertising”. The videos can be watched using either the Windows Media Player or the VLC Media Player.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trends Spring 2009</th>
<th>Participants by Country of Residence</th>
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<td>Bold jewelry and accessories</td>
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<td>Boho sandals</td>
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## Questionnaire

**On Fashion & Lifestyle**

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)

Revival of 80ies: leggings, lots of bright colors, skinny jeans as well as other kinds of jeans such as the “boyfriend jeans”; accessories such as bags, belts, jewelry (big bracelets…)

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?

By reading fashion magazines, through the Internet and TV.

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?

I usually wear things that I like and feel comfortable with but I always have a look at the latest fashion trends.

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?

Leggings, lots of jewelry, skinny jeans

What do you think influences your style most?

The fashion trends that are presented in magazines and on TV

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?

Joy, Jolie
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
tunics, high heels, gladiator sandals, ballet flats

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
Cosmopolitan (fashion magazine), TV

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
Yes

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Not all of them

What do you think influences your style most?
Magazines, but also own personality

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Cosmopolitan
How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
I have no idea! It’s nearly winter here. High waisted skirts are very fashionable at the moment.
How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
I find out about trends online.
Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
I usually buy a few pieces every season, but don’t normally try and go with a particular trend.
Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
I wear everything I buy.
What do you think influences your style most?
I like 1950s style, lots of color, scarves and I do a lot of vintage shopping – much cheaper!
Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
FashionQ
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Shorts, dark blue, wedgies, treggings, multicolored scarves, jumpsuits, yellow
How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
Reading fashion magazines and travelling to big cities.
Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
Depends on the style. If it fits my own fashion style why not?! As I’m still young, I like to experience with different fashion styles.
Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Well, depends on the occasion. For the beach or a summer party I love wearing shorts, but for everyday student life they are way too sexy. I like clothes in blue color because I have blue eyes and therefore it suits me well. I love wedgies because they are so comfortable – not comparable with “normal” high heels. And I love scarves in all colors. So apparently, I agree with some trends.
What do you think influences your style most?
My mood. Inspiration from stylish people all over the world.
Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
InStyle, French Vogue
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Colorful prints (butterflies, flowers) and short tailored shirts (exposing the belly), high heels (10 to 15 cm!!), fringed clothing, stone washed jeans, high waistband
How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
Fashion magazines, TV shows, Internet
Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
No, not necessarily. Only if I like the new trend.
Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Fringed clothing, high waistband jeans or skirts
What do you think influences your style most?
New trends, some adds and my own sense or mood
Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Vogue, Cosmopolitan, InStyle, Amica, Woman, Wienerin
I usually read them in a café or during a long journey.
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

Name: N.T.
Gender: Female
Country of Residence: Ireland
Age: 25
Profession: Sales Operation Assistant

How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Stripes, lots of colors, Cowboy trend is back, jeans
How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
Fashion magazines
Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
If they are easy to follow, I have to like them.
Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
All of them.
What do you think influences your style most?
Magazines and fashion from people I see on the street. Current TV shows.
Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Maxi, Marie Claire, Elle
Questionnaire  
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)

Spring/summer 09/10 hasn’t been released here yet, except Karen Walker and Trelise Cooper who have northern hemisphere collections. Karen Walker is tending toward prints and shoulders. Almost a square box feel, especially with jackets. Trelise Cooper has quite a 1950s feel, in neutral shades, with a few splashes of color thrown in. Again lots of prints (floral). Very feminine.

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?

Usually, designers’ websites first, then the magazines, and showcases of runway shows once they’ve been.

New Zealand’s (NZ) fashion week is held in late September when the spring/summer 09/10 collections will be presented.

I find NZ fashion is quite unique and while it is obviously influenced by the northern hemisphere’s collections/trends which come out six months before, our designers definitely put their own swing to it.

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?

I usually get a few new pieces to mix and match with what I have. I try to carry clothes through to new seasons with changing the way I wear them, accessorizing them differently. I guess you could say I try to go with the latest trends, in this case. My style is a mix of new trend/my own spin.

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Can’t answer this one.

What do you think influences your style most?

Shoes – I’ll buy clothes to match shoes. I stay away from mainstream shops as they have stolen/copied the styles from our real designers.

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?

L’Officiel (I love all the haute couture in it!) and Russ, an Australian magazine
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
- Boho sandals
- Gladiator sandals
- Bold chunky jewelry
- Floral prints
- Long blouses
- One shoulder dress
- Draped shirts
- Wide belts
- One piece swimsuits
- Jumpsuits

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
- Internet
- TV
- Fashion magazines
- Friends
- Shops

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
- It depends. There’s some trendy stuff that I wouldn’t wear. But yeah, I guess I still go with the latest.

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
- Boho sandals
- Floral barrettes
- Ripped up jeans
- Long blouse
- One shoulder dress
- Skinny pants

What do you think influences your style most?
- Friends
- Fashion magazines

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
- Vogue
- InStyle
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Long cardigans, carrot pants, peep toe pumps, gladiator shoes, hippie dresses

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
By watching TV or reading fashion magazines, Internet

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
It depends on whether I like the new trends or not. Usually I am going with the latest.

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
cardigan

What do you think influences your style most?
shoes

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Marie Claire
**Questionnaire**

**On Fashion & Lifestyle**

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Skinny jeans, leggings, big sunglasses, biker chic

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
Fashion magazines, TV, other people

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
I only wear what I like but usually try to go with the latest fashion. If I don’t like a particular trend, I don’t adopt it.

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Big sunglasses, skinny jeans

What do you think influences your style most?
A mix of my own taste and the latest style of celebrities

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Elle
**Questionnaire**  
**On Fashion & Lifestyle**

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Lots of colors, “be fresh and young”

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
Probably by reading magazines, but I prefer the streets of Munich where you can see a lot of people from all over the world. They usually have great style.

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
No, I usually don’t. I’m more the type of guy who buys clothes and stuff I need and like. Sometimes I like the new trends.

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Colorful shirts

What do you think influences your style most?
Probably my job, contact with people from other regions, magazines

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
GQ, Men’s Health
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Very colorful, safari style, shorts, long dresses, big sunglasses, harem pants, gladiator style sandals, hats, flower, stretchy material, head bands, gladiator sandals, hats, one piece swimsuit

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
By reading fashion magazines, through the Internet and TV, shops, movies

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
Yes, sure!

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Long dresses, gladiator sandals,

What do you think influences your style most?
Travelling to different countries gives me new ideas about fashion and styles. It’s all about inspiration!

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Glamour
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Orange,

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
New trends are old trends for those who are really into the “fashion world”!

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
No.

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
White shoes, all white

What do you think influences your style most?
Fashion magazines and ads

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Men’s Health
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Colorful, the color purple, ray ban wayfarers, white shoes

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
fashion magazines, websites, shop windows

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
Not really, but it often can’t be avoided since all the stores sell the stuff that is in

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Purple polo shirt, wayfarers, white shoes

What do you think influences your style most?
I guess when I see something that looks good on someone I think has good taste, I try to copy it.

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
GQ
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

Name: M. L.
Gender: Female
Country of Residence: Austria
Age: 20
Profession: Student

How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Gladiator sandals, tunics, bold jewelry

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
By reading fashion magazines, through the Internet and TV

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
It depends on whether I like it or not.

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Bold jewelry

What do you think influences your style most?
Friends, magazines, personal taste

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Cosmo, Vogue
Name: J. F.

Gender: Female

Country of Residence: Austria

Age: 21

Profession: Student

How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Spring 2009 is the time for hippie chic, retro style, jumpsuits, harem pants and colorful designs; items and must haves: high-waisted skirts, pants and shorts; long blouses with flowery prints, hair bands, wedgies, balloon skirt, leggings

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
By reading fashion magazines, Internet and TV

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
Sometimes but I don’t focus on the latest fashion trends.

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Leggings, blouses, hair-bands

What do you think influences your style most?
Celebrities, fashion magazines

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
InStyle, Glamour
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Baby doll dresses, long colorful dresses, “Boyfriend” jeans, high-waisted cuts, bold jewelry and oversize bags, lots of colors, neon colors
How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
By reading fashion magazines, watching TV
Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
Usually not. I wear what I like.
Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Oversize bags
What do you think influences your style most?
Friends, shopping in Italy
Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Glamour
How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
very tight jeans, oversize shirts with prints, gladiator sandals, big sunglasses, “Aviator” style sunglasses
How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
I guess there are a lot of things that inform me about new trends: first of all, there is the media. On TV, in magazines, in cinemas and in advertisements one is always exposed to people styled in a new, fashionable way. Then I am influenced by my friends and by people who I see on the streets.
Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
To be honest, it usually takes me quite some time to get accustomed to new trends. It happens to me often that when I finally start liking a trend, it is already out of fashion and people have begun wearing other fashions.
Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
All of them.
What do you think influences your style most?
People on the streets, my friends, the media, I guess it’s a mix of all these factors
Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Cosmopolitan
Name: T. B.

Gender: Female

Country of Residence: Austria

Age: 24

Profession: Project Manager

How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
- Tunics
- High heels

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
- Fashion magazines
- TV

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
- Not always. Depends on personal taste.

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
- Both

What do you think influences your style most?
- Lifestyle

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
- Woman
**Questionnaire**
**On Fashion & Lifestyle**

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)
Yellow, oversize bags, jeans in color, flares, big sunglasses, points on shirts, dresses

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
fashion magazines and TV

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
At least I try, … if I like it..

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Oversize bags, big sunglasses, jeans in color

What do you think influences your style most?
Magazines and my friends

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Vogue
Questionnaire
On Fashion & Lifestyle

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How would you define the new trends of spring 2009? (Name a few items and “must haves”.)

Ray Ban Wayfarers, Converse sneakers, checked shirts, oversize T-shirts, long blouses, tapered jeans, high waisted cuts, peep-toe pumps, suspenders

How did you find out about these trends? How do you usually find out about new trends?
Watching people on the street, fashion catalogues, magazines, Internet

Do you usually go with the latest fashion trends?
Yes, but I only buy 1-2 selected items

Which of the items you listed do you actually wear?
Converse sneakers, oversize T-shirts

What do you think influences your style most?
Fashion magazines

Which one is your favorite fashion magazine?
Cosmopolitan