

# A Theory on Fashion Consumption

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Received: September 29, 2012

Accepted: October 11, 2012

Online Published: October 31, 2012

doi:10.5430/jms.v3n4p84

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5430/jms.v3n4p84>

*This work is supported by University Young Teacher Training Program of Shanghai Municipal Education Commission under grant ZZGJD12081.*

## Abstract

Both the theory of top-down penetration of fashion consumption (Veblen - Simmel model) and the theory of bottom-up fashion consumption have been found consistent with the consumer behavior in the China's fashion consumer market and the trend of such behavior keeps growing. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out a study on fashion consumption to meet the needs of the development of real life and fashion consumption. Firstly, we describe the content of fashion consumption, discuss the connotation and main features of fashion and analyze the relationship among fashion, innovation, classic and prevalence; namely, innovation is the pioneer of fashion while the classic is the denotation of faded fashion and prevalence is the continuance of fashion. Secondly, we examine the psychological motivations and behavioral mechanisms of fashion consumption, pointing out that the psychological motivations of fashion consumption is showing-off and it is of symbolic significance. The general characteristics of fashion buyers and consumer characteristics including the elegant fashion, the popular fashion, the cool fashion and the Bobos fashion are presented. We put forward a decision-making process in fashion consumption according to the influence of fashion, the extent of consumer involvement and the purchase decision time. Finally, by analyzing the fashion consumption behavior of the Chinese consumers, we point out that the core of the cool fashion or the Bobo fashion is actually not materialism and both cool fashion and Bobo fashion will have a profound influence in the fashion consumption in the future.

**Keywords:** Fashion, Consumption, Innovation, Prevalence

## 1. Introduction

China's economy has been rapidly developing since the reform and opening policy have been carried out. It is slowly breaking away from shortage economy into the era of material abundance and prosperity. At the same time, along with the booming of material civilization and the global proliferation of Western consumerism culture, China is quietly and wildly undergoing changes in the way of living, society and culture and values. Chinese consumer behavior has shown its complex diversity in generation, social stratum, conspicuous consumption, unrealistic comparison and inter-temporal consumption. Therefore, the consumer behavior, rather than merely pursuing the satisfaction of using goods and services, has started consuming their symbolic significance.

In the transformation of consumer behavior, mass media have encouraged and increased its influence. Television and the internet have found their way in numerous households and prepared physically for the widespread and cleared the channel of diffusion. With TV playing the ideal way of living in China and the internet creating the ubiquitous chance of online shopping, mass media has gone to all lengths to feed the public with the idea of consuming and new

way of living and to explain what innovation is, what fashion is, which group of people should buy what kind of products and how to stand out and become a member of the desired group. In a word, people's identities have started to be formed by goods consumption.

Rapid economic growth has greatly stimulated consumer behavior, whereas the desire to consume has crumbled the tradition theory of thrifty. The mainstream value on living thus starts to shift, and gradually the industrious and thrift way of managing a household is being replaced by conspicuous consumption. As a result, in order to further spur consumers' desire and tap the actual and potential consuming need, more innovation products have been developed and put on the market. Consumers who welcome newfangled products buy those products and that is how fashion is created.

Big department stores and high-end shopping centers spring up, which boosts the forming of fashion consumption. They bring tons of trendy products to a number of large cities, labeling purchasers as fashionable and superior. Consumers are provided with chances of browsing and buying in these venues where the prevalence of fashion are accommodated, observed, learned and tested. Imported fashion magazines have begun to grow up in the local land. Various articles on fashion trends and fitness and beauty guides as well as advertisements are published, telling readers what the latest fashion is and gradually turning them into consumers. Consumption is promoted by this way and fashion consumption is formed.

The literal meaning of fashion consumption is the consumption on fashion, but firstly what is the definition of fashion?

## 2. Fashion

The word "fashion" (or fad) is not strange in the eyes of modern men. As a matter of fact, fashion has a long history. "As early as the fifteenth century fashion was considered so important in France that Charles VII was asked establish a separated ministry of fashion" (Svendsen, 2010). As it were, "fashion has been one of the most influential phenomena in Western civilization since the Renaissance" (Svendsen, 2010). Fashion has kept its permanent brand in every aspect of human activity in the modern civilization, just as Svendsen believes "it has become almost 'second nature' to us". However, he also mentions that fashion is "a notoriously difficult term to pin down".

Adam Smith is one of the first philosophers who attached importance to the study of fashion. He suggests that the first and most important application field of fashion is the field of those grade concept occupies a central position. It can be related not only to dress and furniture, but also to architecture, poetry, music and may even have an influence on morality. Immanuel Kant, however, believes that fashion is the changes taken place in the way of human life (Svendsen, 2010). Simmel (2001) considers fashion as "a universal rule that makes personal behavior becomes a model" and it is the combination of social uniformity and individual difference. Any specific form of attire, art, form of behavior and perception can turn into fashion. However, the general understanding of fashion is often limited to clothing. Some scholars even link fashion only to clothing. Among them is Anne Hollander, the art historian, who defines "fashion" as the entire spectrum of attractive clothes styles at any given time. Cultural historian Elisabeth Wilson expresses very close to her definition: "Fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles" (Svendsen, 2010). Relatively speaking, Svendsen's definition on fashion seems to be a better summary. He divides "fashion" into two main categories, "one of which is that fashion refers to clothing, the other is that fashion is a general mechanism, logic or ideology which applies to many fields and clothing is one of the field". Zheng (2006) raised a point that "fashion", literally speaking, is the worship and pursuit in an era or at one time. From the point of view of semantics, "fashion" is what people highly advocate at any one time. Then how does one judge "fashion"? The first criterion is whether it dazzles. The word "dazzle" means either the bright light that an object emits or the strong admiration that someone feels. A common ground between them is the strong perceived characteristics (Liu, 2008). Liu (2008) thus defines fashion as the perceptual dazzle. From the point of view of semiotics, fashion can be thought of as a code, or language that helps us to decipher these meanings (Solomon, 2009). Fashion is also considered to be a specific life style and cultural phenomenon appeared at a certain period of time. It is displayed as people's worship and preference toward the perception, behavior or subject with specific meanings. It is usually first raised by a small group of people and then a trend is formed with more and more followers and copycats till it becomes outdated (Cheng & Huang, 2010). Practitioners' definition may be much plainer: fashion is business, but not a simple one, which contains innovation in the field of culture, design, science and technology, business models, fund management and consumer psychology (Xiang & Tang, 2010). The life cycle of fashion can be categorized into six stages, namely innovation, rise, acceleration, general acceptance, decline and out-of-fashion, which slightly differs from that of a product (Solomon, 2009).

To summarize, our definition is that fashion is the social norm recognized and advocated by a particular social class

at one time. It affects all the fields in society, especially and famously in clothing. Sometimes, short-lived fashion is referred to as style.

The features of fashion include that:

- 1) Fashion is a pursuit of novelty. Its products are often new, fresh and original whether visible or not. So to speak, it is the endless aspiration for innovation.
- 2) Fashion is a pursuit of beauty. From an aesthetic point of view, it has to be dazzling and enchanting; as Simmel pointed that fashion possesses this peculiar quality that every individual type to a certain extent makes its appearance as though it intended to live forever (Simmel, 2001)
- 3) Fashion is a pursuit of change. It changes constantly within a certain timeline. It is absolutely original at a lapse of time but capable of rapid changes in another.
- 4) Fashion is a pursuit of peculiarity as it has a peculiar character. "From the fact that fashion as such can never be generally in vogue, the individual derives the satisfaction of knowing that as adopted by him it still represents something special and striking, while at the same time he feels inwardly supported by persons who are striving for the same thing.... It is peculiarly characteristic of fashion that it renders possible a social obedience, which at the same time is a form of individual differentiation" (Simmel, 2001). Then Simmel (2001) points out that "it is characteristic of the dude that he carries the elements of a particular fashion to an extreme". Fashion expresses and at the same time emphasizes the tendency towards equalization and individualization, and the desire for imitation and conspicuousness.
- 5) Fashion is a pursuit of uniformity. It has to be up-to-date and at the same time what is generally accepted by consumers. The pursuit of uniformity and that of individualization are contradictory in their very nature at most times but the conflict has to be dealt with if fashion is to be produced successfully.
- 6) Fashion is a pursuit of mental demands. Fashion, rather than answering to consumer behavior caused by existence needs, has to satisfy the need and desire of human nature and consuming preference.
- 7) Fashion is a product of imitation. It is the copycat of innovation and it is imitable in its essence. Based on Simmel's theory, "fashion is based on adoption by a social set, which demands mutual imitation from its members and thereby releases the individual of all responsibility - ethical and aesthetic".
- 8) Fashion is a product of class distinction. It always occupies a dividing line between different social classes. That is to say, it functions as a divider to distinguish a certain social classes from others and just when others start to imitate this class, and it abandons the fashion and creates a new one.
- 9) Fashion is a product of border-crossing. It facilitates a social class to integrate into its desired class through consumption. Thus fashion on the one hand "signifies union with those in the same class, the uniformity of a circle characterized by it, and, *uno actu*, the exclusion of all other groups" (Simmel, 2001). On the other hand, fashion constantly breaks through boundaries set by different social classes and groups and diffuses through them. The slightest infraction or opposition, however, is immediately noticed and places the individual in an exceptional position by calling the attention of the public to his action. Simmel (2001) believes that "the double function of which consists in revolving within a given circle and at the same time emphasizing it as separate from others". He draws a conclusion that the peculiarly piquant and suggestive attraction of fashion lies in the contrast between its extensive, all-embracing distribution and its rapid and complete disintegration; and with the latter of these characteristics the apparent claim to permanent acceptance again stands in contrast. Therefore, in the domain of fashion class distinction and border-crossing form a unity of opposites; both are indispensable.

### **3. Fashion's Relationship with Innovation, the Classic, and Prevalence**

#### *3.1 Innovation: The Pioneer of Fashion*

Innovation refers to an object, act or notion that becomes a new product, service or idea in consumers' perception after the production and integration of market factors. It is believed that innovation the pioneer of fashion.

Factors influencing consumers' innovation adoption include perceived value, perceived costs and perceived risks. If consumers perceive innovation as more valuable than the present products, it is considered to be of perceived value. Innovation with perceived value is more ready to adoption. Perceived costs contain purchase costs and switching costs. The higher the perceived costs reach, the bigger barrier for innovation to be accepted, and the slower the diffusion becomes. Hence, innovation adoption is improved when new products are highly compatible where perceived costs are largely decreased. Perceived risks are constructed by the perceived reliability of innovation, the

degree to which consumers change their behavior on account of innovation adoption and the need consumers feel for learning innovation adoption. In other words, sophisticated new products are often avoided in the decision-making process of consumers because it takes too much trouble to learn to use them. Product trials and proper guidance from sales people could reduce consumers' perceived risks.

It would be safe to say that the core feature of innovation is the new value it produce and provide. In the light of the value it creates and offers consumers, innovation can be categorized into four types: functional value innovation, referring to the new functional value that created and provided with by innovation; aesthetic value innovation, referring to the aesthetic value that innovation produces and offer; hedonic value innovation which refers to the product value that perceptually satisfy the consumers; and symbol value innovation, through the code and symbolic meaning it manifests consumers are provided with mental satisfaction after buying the new products, services or notion.

Any type of the hereinabove innovation, if accepted by a specific social class at a certain time, will become the social norm recognized and adopted by this class, and thus produces fashion.

### *3.2 The classic: The Denotation of the Faded Fashion*

Fashion and the classic differ in their essence. Fashion vanishes as rapidly as it comes, and that's how Simmel (2001) defines it. Classic objects, on the other hand, possess an air of composure, which does not offer so many points of attack, as it were, from which modification, disturbance, destruction of the equilibrium might emanate (Simmel, 2001). The industrialization of modern society is to blame as source of confusion of fashion and the classic; hence "the classic fashion" was created. The myth lies in the belief that fashion could last forever in consumers mind after long term efforts and accumulation in the market. As it is, the long last fashion has already become the classic. During the process, old fashion dies away, new fashion is on the rise and what remains is the classic.

### *3.3 Prevalence: The Continuance of Fashion*

Fashion and prevalence seem to be synonyms in certain context, but their connotations are in fact different. The peculiar characteristic of fashion is that only a specific class could adopt it because in its very nature it represents a standard that can never be accepted by all (Simmel, 2001). At this moment general acceptance is deprived of such peculiar characteristic and that's when we call it prevalence. Therefore, the classic is deposit of fashion since the old fashion vanishes and it becomes the denotation of fashion. Meanwhile, the fashion generally accepted by the mass turns into prevalence, during which process old fashion has gone with the wind and a new one will mount the stage. Fashion is rooted in the pursuit of individualization while prevalence means popularization (Cheng & Huang, 2010). Prevalence is also deemed as social diffusion during which process a new style is accepted by consumers of a certain type (Solomon, 2009). As it is the continuance of fashion, prevalence shows people what are fashionable at a specific time and place. It has been noted quite generally that the fashion exposed to observance has better odds to prevail. Generally speaking, the more frequently consumers notices the fashion, the more tendency they would adopt it. The concepts of fashion and prevalence are synonymous or binding in some cases and given the name of "fashion trend".

## **4. Theoretical Perspectives on Fashion Consumption**

Veblen once claimed that the English leisure class being, for purposes of reputable usage, the upper leisure class of this country, and so the exemplar for the lower grades. This mimicry in the methods of the apperception of beauty and in the forming of judgment of taste need not result in a spurious, or at any rate not a hypocritical or affected, predilection. The predilection is as serious and as substantial an award of taste when it rests on the basis for the reputedly correct, not for the aesthetically true. Based on this theory, fashion consumption can be defined as the mimicry consumption preferences influence by fashion and consumption exemplars.

In a strict sense, the theory of fashion consumption is not fully shaped. The typical theoretical perspective on this topic has to be the trickle-down theory, also known as the trickle-down effect (Svendsen, 2010). Fashion researchers refer to the term as the Veblen-Simmel model (Zheng, 2006).

The main theoretical perspectives tracing back to the 1970s can be outlined as follows. As the purposes of fashion consumption are showing-off and identity distinction, the consumption adoption flows from upper social classes to lower ones. Once it is adopted by the lower grades, the upper classes initiate a new fashion and cast away the old. In contrast to the trickle-down theory, Paul Blumberg raised a "downward diffusion" model of fashion in the late 70s. He criticizes the trickle-down theory in that fashion is not generally limited to the upper and middle classes. He argues that the fashion standards set by upper or middle class do not outnumber than those created by rebellious and counter cultural youth who have lose their social status. When blue denim work shirts are selling at New York's Bloomingdales and when rock star Mick Jagger voted one the world's best-dressed men, there is obviously

something wrong with the theory that sees fashion style established at the top and trickling down (Blumberg, 1974). The trickle-down theory is only partially right, added Svendsen, “to a greater extent movement over the past forty years has been in the opposite direction.” From his point of view the trickle-down factor did not apply from the very top. The considerable innovation has taken place in the lower classes as well, not least in the form of sometimes major modifications of upper-class fashion. On the whole, Solomon (2009) concludes that the commonly known fashion models include the trickle-down theory, the trickle-across effect which refers to the fashion styles adopted concurrently by individuals in every societal level and the trickle-up theory the concept of which expresses the flow of fashion from lower to upper social classes.

Another typical perspective is raised from the point of view of Symbol Consumption. In the new “consumer society” described by Jean Baudrillard (2008), the place of consumption is everyday life. In his words (Baudrillard, 2008), consumption is an active form of relationship (not only to objects, but also to society and the world), a mode of systematic activity and global response which founds our entire cultural system. He puts emphasis on culture, ideology and the role of symbols in consumer behavior. He argues that mass media, fashion, art and technology, to name a few, all fall into the category of forms of commercialization and consumption. Consumers thus have gone beyond the mere pursuit of survival and started to seek the symbolic meaning of consumption.

### **5. Psychological Motivation in Fashion Consumption**

On the motives of consumption, Veblen claimed that the end of acquisition and accumulation is conventionally held to be the consumption of the goods accumulated. Such consumption may be conceived to serve the consumer’s physical wants – his physical comfort – or his so-called higher wants – spiritual, aesthetic, intellectual, or what not; the latter class of wants being served indirectly by an expenditure of goods, after the fashion familiar to all economic readers... The motive that lies at the root of ownership is emulation (Veblen, 1997), and over-consumption is actually resulted from the wish to show off. He also believes that admitted expenditure for display is more obviously present, and is, perhaps more universally practiced in the matter of dress than in any other line of consumption. No one finds difficulty in assenting to the commonplace that the greater part of expenditure incurred by all classes for apparel is incurred for the sake of a respectable appearance rather than for the protection of a person (Veblen, 1997). In other words, early in the nineteenth century, Veblen has realized that the psychological need to flaunt and emulate plays an important role in consumer behavior. It is inevitable that the wealthy leisure class will start the pursuit for the luxuries. Even among the time-pressed wealthy class, Vicarious Leisure and Vicarious Consumption take place where women have to consume vicariously for the head of the household (Veblen, 1997). One of Veblen’s achievements is that he introduced a salient psychological feature in fashion consumption: conspicuous consumption. The term conspicuous consumption was soon picked up and has attracted extensive attention in fashion field since then. Conspicuous consumption refers to the consumer behavior when a person consumes to show off his social status, wealth or power. That is to say, the psychological motive behind is to “show off”. On that account, conspicuous consumption can be drawn as the main feature of fashion consumption.

Besides, one may also find the source of fashion consumption in symbolic consumption, psychologically speaking. Symbolic consumption refers to the consumer behavior which embodies the meaning of character, taste and identity. It brings about “Luxus-Mode-Segments” in Rowohlt Verlag GmbH’s book, *Luxus Schafft Wohlstand*. (Li, 2010). The consumer who purchases a fashion product will be slowly assimilated into the life style it sells and internalizes it to become his own way of living. In that sense, the psychological motive of fashion possesses a conspicuous and symbolic meaning.

In modern society, however, psychological motives vary under different cultural contexts. Conspicuous consumption and unrealistic comparison are found to be the major motives in Asia and countries with the new rich class. Whereas in Europe and America, conspicuous consumption is an old story and the major motive is the pursuit of happiness. Fashion consumption can be divided into two categories: social consumption motives and individual consumption motives. Zhu (2006) uses this approach in the analysis of the motives in China’s luxury consumption. Social consumption motives include the purpose of ostentation, conformity, socialization and symbol of status. Individual consumption motives refer to the seek for top quality, self enjoyment and self-gifting.

In accordance with the classification of social consumption motives and individual consumption motives, the psychological motives in fashion consumption can be divided into rational motives and perceptual motives. Rational motives refer to the individual need for high quality, better pricing, convenience, applicability, good appearance and reliability. High quality and better pricing underlines the psychological pursuit for good quality and service with reasonable pricing. Convenience and applicability highlights the usefulness of a product from purchase to application. Smart appearance and reliability indicates the outward appeal and the safety operation of a product. Perceptual

motives include the social consumption motives for novelty, peculiarity, showing-off, unrealistic comparison, conformity and subservience to foreign things. However, it is hard to draw a fine line between rational and perceptual motives just as a person can never be completely rational or sensational. More often than not consumer behavior are generated by all the factors mentioned above.

## 6. Behavior Mechanism on Fashion Consumption

The behavior of fashion consumption in its essence is to satisfy a consumer's need to display his social status and uniqueness. In the sense of fashion's relationship to culture, it can be divided into the noble fashion and the common fashion. The former can also be called luxury fashion and latter the general fashion. Based on such categorization, we may discuss the behavior of fashion consumption in two folds: one is the consumption on luxuries, the other the consumption on general goods. Customers of the fashion luxuries are mostly from the wealthy class, and the luxurious products they target on share a characteristic of fame, rareness, extravagance, high cost and top quality. The high-end brands appeals to them embody the symbolic meaning of products. Before the widespread of industrialization, the common way of production was through fine handcraft, and that was before Ford's invention of assembling line which has brought dramatic change to the way of production dramatically. Since then, the luxury industry gains its high reputation on their standard of rareness, ostentation and high quality by means of the successful strategy in limiting production and continuing high pricing. The general fashion arises after industrialization when companies in search for the maximum profits expand the number of their customs and prey on the middle class; thus created the general fashion. Comparing to the luxury fashion, the general fashion lays its emphasis on usefulness, comfort and partial symbolic meaning. At this time, the high-end brands are employed for their high reputation in marketing and the relatively lower pricing of general fashion products meet the need of the middle class's pursuit for function, taste, pricing and quality.

The result of consumer behavior towards fashion, be it luxury or common fashion, has always been one out of two: adoption or no adoption. Gatigon & Robertson (1989) explains that no adoption is the refusal or delay in adoption. Ram's (1989) research points out the source of resistance to fashion lies in perceived risks and habits (also called cognitive resistance). So to speak, fashion buyers or consumers who are willing to adopt fashion are generally characterized as adventurous, well-educated, relatively young, higher in social status and sociable. Fashion avoiders or even fashion opponents, on the other side, are found to be cautious, risk avoiding and they tend to show concern in the source of fashion and its reliability. Furthermore, various fashion phenomena derived from the development of fashion including the elegant fashion, the cool fashion and the Bobo fashion have accommodated more and more types of consumers and thus enriched the variety of consumer characteristics. For example, a buyer for elegant fashion usually pays more attention to the symbolic meaning of a product as he attaches importance to respect, value and the classic. This type of consumer often represents the social image of steadiness and prestige. The buyer of general fashion weighs the usefulness of a product. He is probably a follower for a comfortable and tactful life style and not at all alone among the middle class. Those who go after a carefree and liberated life style fall into the category of cool fashion buyers, and they themselves are typically a production of X generation. The rise of cool fashion backs up the theory that fashion could be trickled up. People from a lower class has sought out for distinction and attention by rebelling and new and original performances. Materialism is rarely found in cool fashion. Zheng (2006) explains that being "cool" is a mixture of attitude, behavior and attire (of a commodity). The Bobo fashion takes a clearer-cut stand in counter-materialism. Bobo fashion is coined by an America journalist, David Brooks. In his book, *Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got Here*, Brooks claims "the grand achievement of the educated elites in the 1990s was to create a way of living that lets you be an affluent success and at the same time a free-spirit rebel... This is an elite that has been raised to oppose elites. In its place that class has created a third culture, which is a reconciliation between the previous two. The educated elites didn't set out to create this reconciliation. It is the product of millions of individual efforts to have things both ways. But it is now the dominant tone of our age. In the resolution between the culture and the counterculture, it is impossible to tell who co-opted whom, because in reality the bohemians and the bourgeois co-opted each other. They emerge from this process as bourgeois bohemians, or Bobos." (Brooks, 2002) Zheng Yefu further interprets that the core in bourgeoisie is the ownership of capital and high consumption. Bohemians, in contrast, worship spirits and character, not material things. Now Bobos a new class with the third culture emerges. The value of Bobos combines the longing for high income and the attitude of counter materialism. Together a social status is formed, and without either it is meaningless. (Zheng, 2006)

The process of buying decision on fashion products can be categorized into three types according to fashion influence, consumer interference and decision-making time, namely high influence purchasing, medium influence purchasing and low influence purchasing. High influence purchasing is often linked with the influence of fashion

publisher. For instance, a person who follows a celebrity is likely to purchase a product out of craze to his idol. In the process of high influence purchasing, such consumer is under considerable influence from the fashion inventor. He often lacks active thinking on fashion, ignores the related risks and makes an immediate purchase decision without spending time on product trials. Medium influence purchasing takes place when the fashion issuer has a moderate influence, value and risk along with a hesitation in purchasing. Usually a consumer doesn't need much time in decision making. Although he spends little time and effort in consideration and research in the pre-buying process, he would still go for a product trial before the purchase since the risks are not high. Fashion has minor effect on low influence purchasing when consumers tend to think rationally on the grounds of psychological, social, economic, and financial and safety factors of fashion. They collect as much information as possible, acquire knowledge of fashion actively, consider thoroughly based on the data collected and learned and make decisions as an end product of their judgment. If buying is estimated as profitable, a consumer would go for a product trial. Once the result of a trial is positive, he would make a decision to purchase. If the purchase of a product is evaluated as negative, the consumer will say no to a product trial at a very early stage. In this process, it usually takes a longer time from knowing to purchasing. The three different types of purchasing process based on fashion influence, consumer interference and decision-making time are illustrated in the Figure 1 below.

<Insert Figure 1 Here>

### **7. Fashion Consumer Behavior in China**

In China fashion consumers can be categorized into the wealthy class, the middle class and the petite bourgeoisie class. The wealthy class refers to a social class that is characterized by their ownership of great fortune. Money is more of a symbol or figure to the wealthy. They mostly purchase luxury fashion products out of their own taste. Vicarious Consumption often co-exists with luxury consumption where women have to consume vicariously for the head of the household. The main consumer feature of the wealthy class is the symbolic consumption as the practical value of a product is often ignored. The middle class refers to a social class of educated elites who make a living through intellectual capital. They have accumulated enough social wealth and have equivalent capability of household consumption. They have some leisure time and shoulder the commitment of a caring society. The middle class incline to rational consumption in their consumer behavior. They value the taste, function and cultural background of a product. As a result the type of fashion they purchase remains in and out from the domain of the luxury fashion to that of the general fashion. Their tactics towards pricey products and services of a high quality are going for the better option in the hope to acquire equal satisfaction. When faced with low price goods or services, they will consume given the price/performance ratio is good. The tradition habit of thrifty can be traced in the fashion consumer behavior of middle class. The petite bourgeoisie refers to high income office worker who usually consume the general fashion. "Luxury consumption brands are often coming from the lower luxury brands or the by-products from a high-end brand ... But they are more practical with a higher price/performance ratio. The products are of fine quality and reputation... The petite bourgeoisie class consumes mostly in entry-level luxuries including costumes, leather bags and cosmetics as their absolute price are relatively lower... The consumption behavior of this social class is generally not stable. Act on the principle that number is not so important in armies as quality, the purchase of this class is quite occasional" (Li, 2010).

Credit consumption has also changed Chinese consumers' concept on consuming and at the same time has brought new way of living and novel values. The old Chinese lady, a character in the story "The way an old Chinese lady buys a house and that of an American lady" is out-dated. The American way of payment by installments has become very popular now. Credit cards help conceal the fact that Chinese consumers are paying money for what they buy. Instead their buying are enhance by the feel of satisfying their consuming desire.

The general fashion consumption is characterized by its nature of popularity, in contrast with luxury fashion consumption. The emergence of popularized consumption can be attributed to the large-scale industrialized production, the prevalence of the internet and the employment of low cost labor. Standardized large-scale of industrialization and the employment of low cost labor facilitate the making of a large quantity of low price industrial products which enable the general public to consume. Moreover, those who long for the possession of luxuries but low in consumption capability are happily settled with the so called replacements, commonly known as "copycats" of luxury products. Hence, high-end luxury brands, popular brands and counterfeit products enjoy their respective roles in China's consumer market shifting constantly to form balance, which paints a colorful and dynamic portrait of the fashion consumption market in modern China.

### **8. Conclusion**

In the rise of the fashion consumption in China, both the top-down fashion consumption theory (Veblen-Simmel

model) and the bottom-up theory have been found consistent with the consumer behavior in the China's fashion consumer market and the trend of such behavior is ever growing. Conspicuous consumption is prevailing, which considerably promotes the growth and booming of China's luxury market. Meantime, the cool fashion that discards materialism is praised and worshiped by the vast number of young consumers. Also the rising of the Bobo fashion which represents the dematerialized fashion has gained popularity among the elite class in China and will profoundly influence the Chinese way of fashion consumption in the future.

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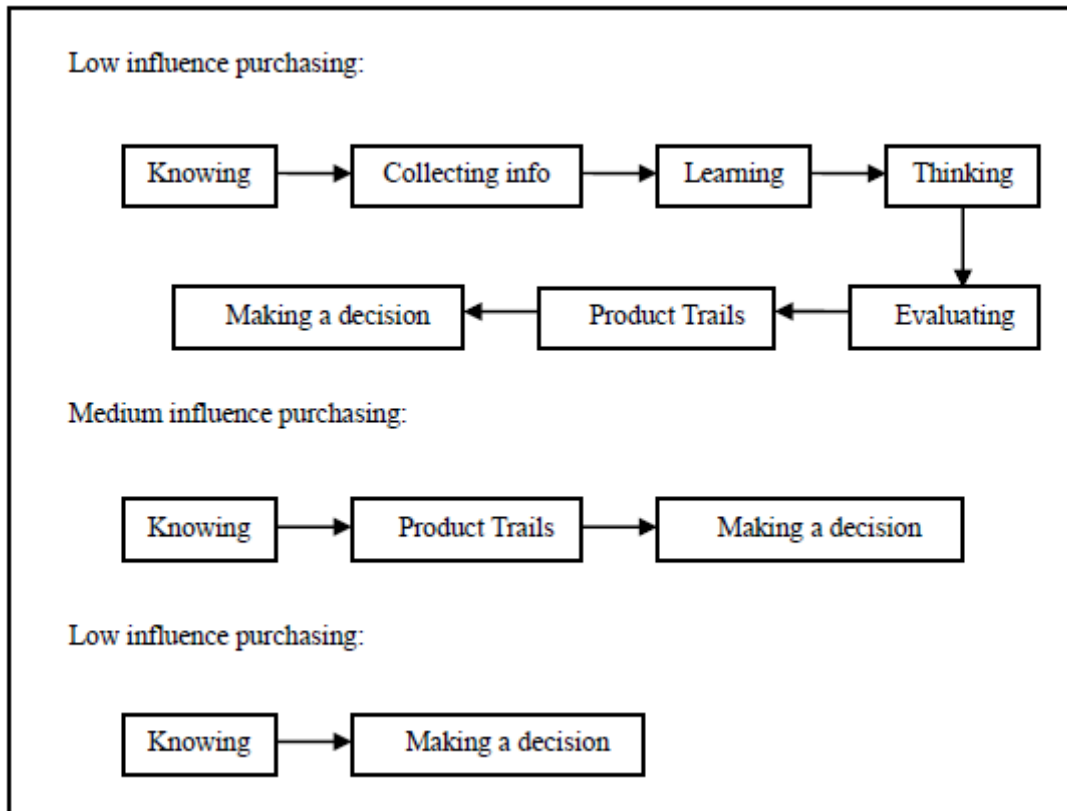


Figure 1. The process of buying decision on fashion products