

Four 'S' of Fashion: Fashion Mix for Success



By: Somesh Singh

Four 'S' of Fashion: Fashion Mix for Success

By: Somesh Singh

The term "marketing mix" coined in 1953 by Neil Borden was actually a reformulation of an earlier idea by his associate, James Culliton, who in 1948 described the role of the marketing manager as a "mixer of ingredients". A prominent marketer, E. Jerome McCarthy, proposed a Four P classification in 1960, which has seen wide use. Similarly, it has been debated by many prominent designers and artists on what creates a "perfect fashion product". Fashion & Beauty is as old as human civilization and a part of the three basic needs of human beings. The beauty and adornment has been adopted through many interpretations amongst different societies and cultures. The 'Tunic', for example, has been interpreted as Shirt, Kurta, Camisole, Chemise across cultures based on their requirements. Most fashion products of the 20th Century created phenomenal success if they had a perfect mix of Four 'S' of Fashion (Surfaces, Silhouettes, Styles and Seams). As a part of the fashion design process, the success of the fashion products depend upon the right mix of 4S for any market conditions in correct order & proportion:-

1. Surfaces: -The design process begins with raw material for fashion, the surface entails, variety of graphics, weaves, prints or embroideries, depending on the product type. The aesthetic depends on Color & Composition, Proportions, Layouts, Texts, Play of Light and Shadow and other raw material. Most often surface selections are based on an interesting texture and tactile aesthetic that appeal to the user's eyes and matches with the overall functional need. To create a memorable surface, Mary White drew on the work of William Morris for flamboyant print designs. YSL adapted 'Piet Mondriaan's' work in his collections; Versace used Greek Motif and bold artwork as the signature and Ritu Kumar's 'Tree of Life' has been amongst the celebrated collections. Aesthetics were primarily derived from culture and symbolism, for e.g. Chamba Rumaal, portraying 'RAAS' or 'Worli Paintings' showing cave paintings. Interestingly, surfaces drawn from nature even have scientific balance with beauty, creating camouflage effect, protecting from climate, and most of the functional surface designs are inspired from nature and have wide use in military uniforms, sportswear, trekking wear etc.



Chamba Rumaal portraying 'RAAS'



Fabric with Greek Motif

With plasma & nano technology embedded in fabrics today, finishes like ubercool, UV protection, moisture management, anti-dust and

fragrance finish have brought more sophistication and comfort in surfaces. Even legendary designers like Issey Miyake and Hussain Challayan had introduced surfaces that were extremely multi-functional. Medical fabrics and technical textiles measure metabolic activities of a boy and the use of intelligent surface in “Clima-Gear Clothing” using silver finish fabrics have improved conductivity for heat/cold flow in garments. However, the raw materials shall not exceed more than 50% of the total cost of a product with clear wash and care instructions and wear & tear analysis based on its use in climatic condition, geographic terrain etc. Most often color fading, shrinkage; abrasion and even piling have been observed as regular problems. Surfaces in future need sustainable aesthetics matching quality standards & compliance needs to curb ‘Carbon Foot print’. Organic fabrics in recent times have been very popular and leading brands like Levi’s, CK, Diesel, and Tommy Hilfiger are working sustainable & eco-friendly fabrics. Levi Strauss & Co., H&M announced last year to stop all sandblasted products – a process that makes jeans look worn-out, but wrecks havoc on workers’ lungs. Health and compliances have taken a toll on fashion to move it away from ‘Dangerous’ to more noble and hygienic products, it would be wise to state that, like automobiles, even majority of clothing design in future would be driven by compliance norms.

2. Silhouettes: They are often confused with fit, though they are the outer-form of the garments. The depiction of silhouettes have been dramatically different in functional clothing, cultural and traditional wear, dance costumes, costumes for rituals & mythological performance and many other culturally, socially, religiously relevant clothing and adornment.

Origin of silhouettes goes long back with the invention of ‘LOIN cloth’ during Egyptian period in 5000 B.C. The outlook of silhouettes changed from ‘Fluid’ OR ‘Draped’ during the prehistoric period to more structured and constructed forms during the 20th Century. Today futuristic clothing shows more complex forms as portrayed in films like Star wars, Space Odyssey, Planet of Apes, 5th element. The journey from draped garments to super constructed garments has held back imagination & multi-functionality.

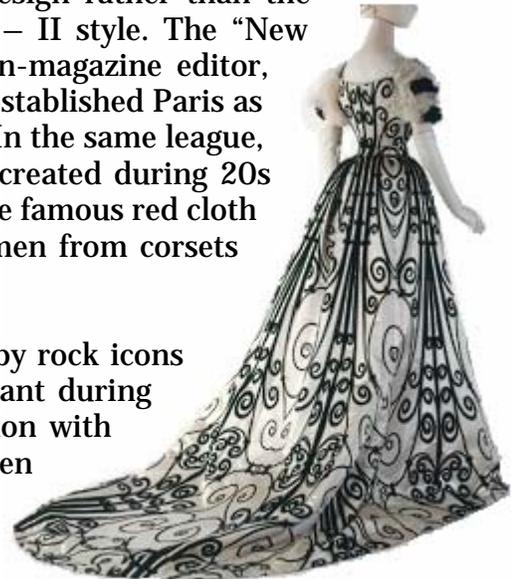


A Sari

For example, a sari a 5-mtr piece of cloth having hundreds of variations in terms of wearability, persona and context appropriateness. The life of Sari used to be in decades and was a perfect example of universal design. It was attire that fits all sizes, thin and fat, even a dynamic fit for people who gain weight over a period of time, in case of a pregnancy or even with aging. A sari has been worn by all caste and creed, all heights of women without alteration for all skin colours offering multi-functionality for day-to-day activities. It will be wise to quote that fashion silhouettes have moved from universal forms to more individualistic forms limiting multi-functionality, multi-morphing & metamorphosis as unique characteristics.

Silhouettes, today, need a more universal concept with the

changing consumer and context. Some of the international designers who have done incredible work in founding silhouettes have been Charles Frederick Worth's 'Court presentation dress'; Christian Dior's voluptuous design rather than the boxy, fabric conserving shapes of the World War – II style. The "New Look" (a name given to it by an American fashion-magazine editor, Carmel Snow, revolutionized women's dress and reestablished Paris as the center of the fashion world after World War-II. In the same league, designer Paul Poiret, for her master piece dresses created during 20s and 30s that didn't have the "concept of waist" – "the famous red cloth cape" and the designer was known for freeing women from corsets and hobble skirts.



Charles Frederick Worth's 'Court Presentation Dress'

In 70's, Hipster or Hip Huggers were popularized by rock icons such as Jimi Hendrix, Jim Morison and Robert Plant during disco ways; 1980's saw a somewhat confused fashion with designers like Polo Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klien creating unisex and power dressing; in 1990's, Issey Miyake introducing 'Permanent Pleats' in the garment creating a new genre of silhouettes.

John Galliano's style in 'French revolution' and "Lost innocence"; OR Alexander McQueen "I enfant terrible", "Bumsters", "Highland rape-staging of cruelty" created new language of silhouettes in modern fashion. In 90's Hussein Chalayan was the one to introduce collection of I-clothing through the collection "tangent flows" where LED dress were introduced with laser technology.

The key revolutions in last 100 years of fashion have been in waist lines and pockets. Leading designers like CoCo Chanel introduced post World War – I era a "youth ease", a liberated physicality and full un-encumbered supportive confidence, it was clear that functionality had been on the top of agenda. One such leader of modern times has been Geogio Armani whose ensemble offers phenomenal functionality & comfort even today. The function embedded into form necessitates functionality with changing environmental needs and wants. Today, Nokia Labs has been engaged into developing wearable computing keeping in mind, there are no pocket that can carry credit cards, /USB ports, mobile phone or even I-pads. It seems that in future multi-functionality will infuse with technology creating range of possibility for interaction & behavioral aspects.

Note: -Dior's designs have been creating flower women. His look employed fabrics lined predominantly with percale, boned, bustier-style bodices, hip padding, wasp-waisted corsets and petticoats that made his dresses flare out from the waist, giving his models a very curvaceous form. Initially, women protested because his designs covered up their legs, which they had been unused to because of the previous limitations on fabric. There was also some backlash to Dior's designs due to the amount of fabrics used in a single dress or suit. During one photo shoot in a Paris market, the models were attacked by female vendors over this profligacy, but opposition ceased as the wartime shortages ended.

3. Style: - Styling is what has defined fashion across ages, which reflects the key mood of people and the influence of events happening across the world.

Stylings were used prehistorically for 'aesthetics' and 'function'. However, styling was used as social & financial classifications in different cultures. In 'Trickle down theory' context, a style has been adopted by the mass for Higher Strata Citizens. Few popular fashion styles that killed people were Crinoline, a hoop skirt in the 18-19th century made of horse hair, thread and steel blew away many women during gusts and wind, similarly, corsets causing breathlessness and cramping of organs, in 1912, female impersonator, Joseph Hennella, collapsed on the stage as a result of tight lacing. Other style like foot binding, the fontage, lead Make-up and the stiff high collars had a much of reverse impact. These fashion styles were not scientifically tested.



Hoop skirt of 18th-19th century

In the last two centuries, the significant change has occurred on the waist line that slipped from Empire line to Hipsters. Interestingly, even political changes such as a world-war had an immense impact on women's clothing and development of 'Unisex look' though in Indian culture the attires like kurta, dhoti etc had unisex elements. Other style influences such as hip-hop music has been influencing fashion graphic, images of ghosts, grunge, punk and graffiti has influenced by a radical change in the youth's mindset. Body tattoos & piercing were also driven by pop art & culture. Some of the most popular clothing items were Khakis, Sweat shirts. In 1938, Sam Friedland patented the reserve weave and in late 1980's the hooded sweat shirt became the universal fashion. Button down collars, bell-bottom pants, are few of the styles that became extremely popular over period of times. 5 pocket basic jeans which was invented in 1850's by Levi's Strauss became neo-classic.

Other style icons were high tops, loafers, sneakers, wings tips, tank tops, bomber jackets, cargo pants, chinos, jeans, gray flannel and gray tropical wool trousers, carpenter pants, western shirts, stadium coat, ski jacket, ski pants, cardigans, jeans jacket, military shirts, Ray Ban aviators and wayfarers, ribbed turtlenecks, hawaiian shirts, boxers and briefs, button down and tab collar shirts, baseball cap, ski caps, flannel, denim, corduroy and chambray shirts, sandals : Doc Martens, military jackets, topsiders, basketball shorts, Speedo swim suits.

The styles have also been in popularity for many bad reasons like 'Zoot Suit' during the World War-II. The style such as Nehru jackets, Jodpur, has emerged out of Royal activities &



'Zoot Suit' during the World War-II

lifestyle. Hence, terming style as a key social and cultural change agent. In functional clothing, styling is used as a functional unit for defense, protection, communication etc. Role of styling is undoubtedly very important. It is said that Louis XIV started to wear wigs as he was getting bald, and to imitate this, his courtiers put on false hair. The wearing of wigs lasted for over a century. By the end of the nineteenth century, the bustle had completely disappeared. In the 1890s, American cartoon artist Charles Dana Gibson who satirized society with his image of 'The New Woman' and a character who was to become known as the 'Gibson Girl'. Her image became fashionable in both, USA and Britain, as women began to copy her look: hair heaped into a chignon or tucked



Hippy Clothing

under a large hat, starched embroidered blouses worn with neck tie cravats and pin bar brooches, and long graceful skirts. From 1940 onwards, no more than thirteen feet (four meters) of cloth was permitted to be used for a coat and a little over three feet (one meter) was all that allowed for a blouse. No belt could be over one and a half inches (four centimeters) wide. Among young men in the War Years the 'Zazou Suit' became popular. In the 1960s, 'high fashion' came under criticism from France's youth culture (including the ye-yes) that was turning increasingly to London and to casual styles. In 1966, the designer Yves Saint Laurent broke with established high fashion norms by launching a prêt-a-porter (ready to wear) line and expanding French fashion into mass manufacturing and marketing (member houses of the Chambre Syndicate were forbidden to use even sewing machines). Further innovations were carried out by Paco Rabanne and Pierre Cardin. In post-1968 France, youth culture would continue to gravitate away from the 'socio-politically suspect' luxury clothing industry, preferring instead a more 'hippy' look (termed baby cool in French).

Note: - In the 1950's, the newer and bluer jeans looked best. Rolled cuffs revealing the reverse weave of the fabric were the rage. According to a newspaper report, ninety percent of American youth wore their blue denims everywhere except in bed and to church. 1960's Old denim became popular. The frayed look was in, Jeans became the unisex uniform of the sixties Woodstock generation. Three piece suits of chemically faded blue denim were added to the Levis line, along with patchwork denim pants and vest combos. In the seventies, jeans got flared legs. It was a sign of coolness to have the bottoms of un-hemmed jeans torn from walking on them. A 1982 TV commercial announced that "nothing" came between Brooke Shields and her Calvins. Tight designer jeans became the rage. Many designers made their mark, but by the end of the decade, Levis were still the most popular and sought after jeans worldwide.

The nineties brought denim shirts into the office, jeans jackets refashioned in leather, satin and corduroy, as well as jeans worn very loose. It was the era of causal clothing and the "relaxed fit" worked for everyone from aging baby boomers to hip-hop fans.

4. Seams: - The seams often also called as stitch lines are the most important part of any constructed garment. However, over locking and linings are only used in finish mechanism in the garments, whereas today, technology enables binding, pressing, heating & bonding creating garments look like seamless. Technically, seams also have aesthetic relevance such as pleats, gathers, tucks, shirring, smocking etc. they play a very important role in contouring, fit and drape of the garments to a body. The primary use of the seams depends on the body part where it is being used based on ergonomics variables, anthropometric needs and even up keep of fashionable products. The reverse of seaming is termed as 'deconstructionism' which questions rules and breaks the conventions in fashion. It includes putting seams and zips on the outside of a garment showing the inner construction workings of tailoring that in the past were the hidden features. It recycles old fashion and makes the undesirable part of a dress, such as a laddered stocking, a desirable feature. Hussein Chalayan, Martin Margiela and Comme des Garçons are all deconstructionists, but Zandra Rhodes first did this 25 years ago when she put huge pinked zig zag seams on the outside of wool coats.



Most often the seam strength, construction also can increase or decrease the making process of garments, and derives the efficiency of production and consumption. Seams are the most important part of fashion engineering and hence shall be paid suitable attention while deriving the specification sheets. The Imagineering of fashion products and use of seams can completely shape the products from being fancy to ridiculous. Terming the discovery of seams as one of the biggest invention in creating the constructed

garments and suits. The seams in future will determine integrated wirings & circuits communication wired technology for data storage, multi-media, communication & sell protection mechanism.

To an extent assembly line production systems & modern manufacturing has also limited scope of garments to evolve as universally functional. Futuristic technologies like e-fit and styku can deliver custom tailor-made garments in 48-72hours at any location in the world. It seems that with the innovation of Body Scanner and Spider-Web technique the mode of construction will change dramatically in future. The cutting, laying, marker making will be completely eliminated from the processes of production of garments and it will be directly inter-woven from the yarns to customized sizes. The same technique has been mainly achieved by Mr. Errol Pireces, Professor at National Institute of Design; Ahmedabad through Camel braiding techniques from Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, only the same technology needs to be computed now. Therefore, 'Concept to Consumers' delivery will cut hundreds of complex processes to more futuristic garments making in easy steps i.e. Yarn, Measure, Drape and Finish (Y MDF).

Futuristic technologies like e-fit today give an idea of garment drapes on current fit, wear and tear report, consumption, fall & feel etc. The construction of garments will see a sea-change in future.

Note: -*Baggy pants and a jacket with oversized shoulders jackets with fitted waist characterized the flamboyant Zoot Suit, during the conflict between Mexican-African American gangs was termed by media as “Zoot Suit Riots”.*

Source: *Wikipedia.*

Image Courtesy:

1. inspiredelegancedc.blogspot.com
2. blog.rubylane.com
3. resources.archedu.org
4. namaskar-portugal.com
5. costumeshop.us.com