



## TREND ANTECIPATORS: COOLHUNTERS OR TRENDHUNTERS?

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**Abstract:** *One of the principles that defines fashion as and industry as well as a social fact is the convergence principle, made visible by the existence of trends. The research of trends, focusing in the fashion industry, has shifted various times during the last few years. This present paper arose from discussions about a proper naming for the practice of prospective research. Contemporary, we face the vulgarization of the word coolhunting. So many enthusiasts are using the word to define themselves as trend forecasters. That implies not only a misunderstanding of the term but also implies a urgent new to outline the real relevance of the work of a trend researcher and find strategies to strengthen their legitimacy and protect their sphere of action before they are hit by the trivialization tsunami. As that being said, we propose the figure of the trendhunter as a trend investigator in contemporaneity.*

**Key words:** *research, trends, culture, innovation.*

### 1. Introduction

One of the principles that defines fashion as and industry as well as a social fact is the convergence principle, made visible by the existence of trends. Trends are focalizations of desire, that have variable capacity and scale and that lead many individuals to adopt for a period of time some attitudes and tastes (Erner, 2005). However trends relate not only to clothing. To the market as a whole, a trend is any convergence of taste to approve, in majority. As an example we may mention the appreciation for macaroons (French pastries), running, 4X4 vehicles even in large cities and the growing consumption of energetic beverages.

In seeking to understand the constant similarities between names given to children by American, sociologists Lieberson and Bell (1992) have identified two important fronts for the consolidation of trends as converging strategies. The first one is related to the cultural background of trends, that is investigated by experts on trends and more recently by the coolhunter. Those trends are deeply rooted in cultural circumstances and are also underlying the operational gear that is not generated by business arrangements.

That first line is extremely useful because it explains, or tries to explain, why people so geographically distant and culturally distinct centralized their tastes and opinions even on items that have little or no economic importance, such as preference for a particular name to be given to the new borns. Erner (2005) cites as an example the inexplicable success of the Birkenstock slipper (Campos, Perassi, 2012).

The second module depends on the trade organizations and social institutions. In the case of fashion industry trends, the research agencies first filter the information and after a whole process of decision's centralization they disclose "scrutinized" information to which producers and consumers of fashion are eager to unravel, and they pay exorbitant amounts to do so. Although the trends derived from cultural conditions, in the garment industry the principle of convergence is ensured by a centralized structure which enables fashion professionals to channel the information that they have difficulty to control, the trends.

The research of trends, focusing in the fashion industry, has shifted various times during the last few years. This present paper arose from discussions about a proper naming for the practice of prospective research. Pedroni (2011) has written a paper very clarifying about the shift of paradigm that converted fashion forecasting into *coolhunting*. What appears at first sight to be a matter of nomenclature or naming, with further attention can be understood as an expression of a much deeper scenario, composed of a multiplicity of factors that converge in a single conjuncture.

Contemporary, we face the vulgarization of the word *coolhunting*. So many enthusiasts are using the word to define themselves as trend forecasters. That implies not only a misunderstanding of the term but also implies a urgent need to outline the real relevance of the work of a trend researcher and find strategies to strengthen their legitimacy and protect their sphere of action before they are hit by the trivialization tsunami.

## 2. The search for trends

### 2.1 Fashion forecasting

*“The forecast of trends is a necessity that emerges in the 60's of the 20th Century with the birth of prêt-à-porter in conjunction with some phenomena that have radically changed the face of the fashion system. The industrial production of clothing begins with the development of its own lines of products, thereby, abandoning the imitation of high-end fashion, and offering the public clothing in mass à la page with accessible pricing”*  
(Pedroni, 2011).

Fashion forecasting relates closely to the aesthetic and appearance of fashion products, that change season after season. The trends are apparent through the look of a garment, for example. Fashion trends gives insights about colors, shapes, textures and looks that will direct the future shape of fashion products. Fashion trends give insights about colors, shapes, textures and looks that will direct the future shape of fashion products. The use of trends in fashion changes in relation to the type of commercial activity in question, varying especially according the position of that business in the supply chain and the need for information.

As an example, Jackson (2007) stresses that the yarn producers tend to worry more with the trends in color than with the overall shape of the body since their *metier* is in charge of operations in the first stages of the supply chain. On the other hand, a purchaser for fashion retail needs to be conscious of a more complete variety of data about the market category they aim to contact.

There are even long term trends, known as macro trends that support designs and conceptions yet to come, and short term trends, known as micro trends that are usually related to a specific period. As a micro trend could be a particular print or bag style, a macro trend is more likely to refer to more or less structure to the shape of garments or a performance or eco-friendly fabric.

There is a varied list of qualities in garments that can be handled in order to reverberate the variations in fashion. Every character has a strong potential to express in its own way a very remarkable fashion trend. The common attributes of a fashion garment are: color, fabric, print, silhouette, styling, details and trim. Fashion trends researchers report to the industrial information on future configurations up to 20 to 18 months in advance of a season (Jackson, 2001). During that first report the most relevant information is about color and texture and is directed to yarn industries that have the necessity to know in advance the future needs of fabric industries. That, of course doesn't invalidate the interest of other mills along the fashion garment chain on the subject color or a very incipient glimpse of a fashion trend.

The fashion market has a great diversity of specialists that contribute with creative and intuitive inputs to the future looks. That range of *connoisseurs* is diverse in many levels, from educational background to their arrangement as specialists systems (Guiddens, 1995). The fashion forecasting professionals arrange numerous aspects of the social-economic and cultural analysis with the intention to unravel product direction guides, such as color, prints, fabrics, etc. "Major trends in lifestyles, attitudes and culture, in particular music, art, architecture, sports, film and television, are used to predict changing consumer demand" (Jackson, 2007).

Business directed to interpret fashion trends have a French tradition. That is due the centralization of the fashion expertise as French attributed since the reign of Louis the XIV and the Versailles court (Godart, 2010). Nowadays a large number of companies dedicated to identify and communicate trends are still based in France, Paris more specifically, but it is increasing the number of affiliates all over the globe. Currently, the most famous companies dedicated to the traditional Fashion forecasting are Promostyl, WGSN Fashion, Sacha Pacha Peclers, MudPie, Trend Union, among many others.

After the end of the 1960's decade the function of predicting fashion trends became well established in a fashion oriented world that had two distinct lines of attention: one located inside the fashion system that corresponds to the goal of distinguish shapes, colors and prints from the other collections, through a continuous dialogue with the manufacture units and the monitoring of the competitors. The second line stares to what is taking place "on the streets", creative and bohemian neighborhoods as an effort to comprehend the shifts in the consumers' taste (Pedroni, 2011).

Close to the fashion forecasting profession there is the activity of informing and communicating the trends by the creation and edition of trend books or trend files. Those "reports" fundamentally inform what the future material, colors, lines, texture treatments, shapes and finishes tend to be. Also, many of those reports, as an approximation to the work of a coolhunter, forward data about new consumer behavior and the shaping of the contemporary scenario. The whole package of information is extremely functional as a source of inspiration and as a way of minimizing the risks of the fashion industry's calendar anticipation.

## 2.2 Coolhunting

*Coolhunting* is a term used to designate researchers of what is *cool*, what is new. Basically, they are trend researchers. The name is intimately associated with the prognosis of future trends and changes in consumer behavior. It is, by far, the most used word nowadays identify the practitioners engaged in the search of novelty. The word has countless different synonymous: def, hip, trendy, hot sick, neat, ducky, sharp, slick, swell, decent or ritzy (Riezu, 2009).

Coolhunting was first used in 1997, by Malcolm Gladwell in a section of Annals of Style. Gladwell published a text entitled *The Coolhunt*. The article discussed the story of Coverse's Director, Baysie Wightman. According to the story, she was prepared to listen to young people willing to criticize her mark (Raymond, 2010). The name given by the journalist to that action had a great impact. Today it is known that, more than a conjecture, *coolhunting* implies to keep eyes and ears wide open to discover what is new.

*The coolhunting* emerged as a way to substitute or complement traditional quantitative market researches. As main goal of this new modality of market's recognition we can outline the discovery of what is going on in the youth culture and what will be more important in the future, in a sense of building the trends with high probability of consumption (Hernandéz, 2004).

*"Coolhunting has attracted the interest of journalists, essayists, and scholars, even inspiring novels and fiction often spoiled by a celebratory tone depicting the coolhunter as a young man travelling the world with his digital camera in hand searching for cool images to send to customers and research agencies"* (Pedroni, 2011).

Authors, such as Pedroni (2011), understand *coolhunting* as a professional activity in growth and as an emblematic clearing of symbolic mechanisms that are crucial to understand fashion as a system and the cultural processes of production and consumption of material goods enriched with immaterial components, in other words, subjective and emotional values. To the author, still, the word *coolhunting* indicates an investigative approach that during the 1990s proposed a paradigm breakthrough in the traditional marketing schemes and directed a more holistic comprehension of the world of consumption through the immersion in the daily occurrences and experiences with characteristic frequencies in certain portions of the population, usually the youth.

*Trendhunting* uses techniques adapted from anthropology and from other approaches for qualitative research applied to sociology. Those techniques fulfill the gaps left out from the quantitative techniques of older market researches with subjective finer points and details by using ethnographic observation directed by intuition.

It is also valid to point that the shift in the naming, from trend forecaster to *coolhunting* has much to do with the inversion in the innovation and innovation adoption's cycles. The paradigm of trend construction was structured as a dropping model, the *trickle-down model*. The *trickle-down* comprehends that the social elite was copied by the masses. A more democratic model, such as the *trickle-up model*, consists in style innovations emerging from subcultures and counter-culture and spreads through the upper classes.

Another model, whose explanation seems more plausible, is the *trickle-across model*. This template understands the contaminations of trends by all the social layers in a horizontal way, having figures of style instead of the social elite as a reference or influencers.

If once the fashion market was strongly pronounced by an elite that dictated trends or a selected group of *createurs*, or designers, that delimited colors, fabrics and shapes to be dressed by the public during the following fashion seasons. Nowadays, increasingly, the fashion market reconfigurates itself, facing a new outlook. This new outlook implies not only that the trend collection has widened its angle of interest reaching not so wealthy economic classes, but also that the own interest about the use of trends was amplified, since trends are exceeding apparel boundaries.

### 2.3 The Culture Hunter

There was a time in which culture was shaped by a very restrict group of people, they were publishers and producers in the upper positions of the most famous media companies. Their choices were distributed to millions of consumers and audience. These producers offered us a very limited range of options of paths, and we either followed their lead or we wouldn't move at all. We either watched the great television networks or we wouldn't watch any TV. That time corresponded to the mass media notion because the range of programs and entertainment options were created to the widest audience possible. The idea of niches was inconceivable. However, things started to change and the new commercial relation between producers and consumers may be the most clamant matter in our culture.

We are living the Era of Niches. In the book entitled *The Long Tail* (2006), Chris Anderson argues that due the internet we were able to shift the system of goods retail to a much wider range of products, instead a very limited offer that was supposed to provide for a massive consumer class.

*"His analysis has identified many other IT-enabled markets where consumers' preferences have far greater depth than what one could find in a typical brick-and-mortar storefront. Examples include consumers' preferences for music at Rhapsody and E-cast, movies at Netflix, and custom news and information through various blogs and online communities"* (Brynjolfsson, Hu, Smith, 2006).

The implications of a Long Tail paradigm are far more reaching and influential for managers, consumers and the entire economy. The studies of economy and business administration focus on understanding the phenomenon itself and how it affected the dynamics of the market. What economists lacked in understanding is why a Long Tail paradigm started to have expressive meaning in our culture and how its first utterances were pronounced and perceived. It is necessary to go beyond the cool, beyond what is new, beyond the gimmicks attempting to really savvy the contemporary surroundings.

Authors such as McCracken (2011) attempt to make us aware of the growing need to understand the convergences of both the *status* and the *cool* attempting to perceive the culture as a complex configuration of the time. The culture researchers believe that the *status* and the *cool* are fundamental pieces of the puzzle, representing the *yin* and *yang*. What is relevant for a culture hunter, therefore, is to unravel the structure and the operation offered by them to comprehend the cultural landscape.

Culture hunters are essential to the business world. They cleverly demonstrate the importance of their work offering vital information and helping to answer the greater question: *What is our business?* (Ibidem). The work of a culture hunter is an activity in which if we are able to see the meaning of the change, to sight the sudden transformations in taste and consumer preferences, to test the economy to discover opportunities and risks it is also made possible to recognize patterns in the culture. All in a moment which to recognize patterns is so indispensable.

As an example the name of Chris Hughes admittedly recognized. McCracken (2011) helped to fund Facebook along with Zuckerberg and Moskovitz. While Zuckerberg and Moskovitz were developing the code and creating the infrastructure, Hughes was doing research trying to discover what the goal of Facebook was. He was what Daniel Pink (2006) would refer to as an empathizer. He emerged as an official interpreter of Facebook, he was able to translate what people thought, liked, disliked and expected of the social network.

Hughes acted like a CCO - Chief Culture Officer, concept developed by McCracken (2011). A Chief Culture Officer should be able to understand the moment of the culture, see the opportunities and catch a glimpse of new ideas emerging in the cultural scene. With knowledge and sensibility to perceive the germination of upcoming trends a culture hunter may bespeak who the consumer is and what they need and desire.

It is never easy to be the first generation of a new *metier*. Of course some may think that the culture that a hunter aims to investigate is related to Erudition or elite culture. Others may imagine that they are dealing with the corporate culture or popular culture (McCracken, 2011). But it is applicable to address that as Chief Culture Officer is, obviously, coherent with the cultural momentum that they have launched as professionals in the market. The corporations have kept distance of the culture for a long time and now they sense the need of growing a close relationship to it. And it is in this perspective that the CCO finds its relevance in the market.

### 3. Trendhunting

The experts in the profession of trend researchers are known as cool hunters, or trend hunters. They also respond to the term *retrievers*. Breed of British dogs who is recognized by its skilful hunting vocation and intelligent and easy to train profile. The name innovators, or innovative, coined by Everet Rogers (1995) could also be used to refer to this type of research, although with reservations.

Trend hunter was chosen by the MOOD LAB Group to denominate the professional dedicated to identify future patterns in the changing culture. To him it is designated to comprehend the aesthetic and cultural movements that could possibly influence the whole market canvas. Through deep investigations on how people live, eat, shop, pray, behave and signify their experiences the trend hunter aims to read those significations and find a common base of expectations, and direct them to a close or distant future.

Theories from Sociology and other Human Sciences, in general, are the base of the activities of a trend hunter. Among them, we can highlight the theory of *Symbolic Interactionism*, which comprises society from

a perspective of meanings shared and legitimized within the same cultural background. This theory focuses on how people interact throughout symbols: vocabulary, visual expressions, gestures, manners, conventions and roles (Campos, 2010).

In addition the observation and analysis techniques, it is imperative to emphasize the relevance of personal skills, such as a strong and well grounded intuition. These professionals are trend identifiers. More the cool hunters, they can perceive sudden textures of fresh cultural practices and for that the need to stay in the know. Some authors indicate that to search trends it is imperative to be young. However, that concept becomes fluid and age is irrelevant, for youth is now remarked as a mental state that attests a predisposition to everything that is new and authentic. Thus, people of young spirit are more able to understand the changes caused and distinctive behaviors likely to become major trends.

Trend hunters don't need to map the entire globe searching for new information and behavior styles. The scope of the trends they search can be found in the spheres where consumption changes faster and touches the innovative part of society more effectively; in the sense of emotion, intuition. Those spheres are such as fashion, movies, television, music, new consumer technologies, pop culture movements, the internet; either in large or small cities (Riezu, 2009).

It is always necessary to a trend hunter to be positioned ahead of their time. Kolopoulous (2010) defends the idea that a researcher of the culture needs to stay on the edge. Walk on the sidelines with attention both in what is outside and what it is. Since culture is a semi-opened system, it is possible to that professional to identify what characteristics of the inside world could be addressed with the emerging counter cultural information perceived in the outside.

At MOOD LAB it is believed that a trend hunter should be aware of its time. The qualified hunter should be able to notice subtleties in Standards, distinguish great ideas in the camouflage of everyday's simplicity. That implies that the researcher is, above all, a well-informed, sensitive and curious person. Is it also required the ability to build a non-linear map of how society behaves and based on that information, insightfully, identify any subtle or innovative idea.

According to Raymond (2010), the trend hunters are, by definition, detectives of ways of living. Are men and women that use their time to detect patterns or variations in attitude, mentality and ways of living that contrast with the predominant paradigm or with the way we are used to behave, life, dress, communicate and consume. The researchers endow a set of techniques and procedures originated from areas such as anthropology, sociology and psychology, and other methods of scenario prospection, interpretation of roles models in society and the planning of situations to try to predict the future.

## 4. Conclusions

A *trendhunter* can be younger or older than the established standard. A *trendhunter* doesn't necessarily need to go to trendy night clubs, pubs or shows. To the real trend hunter, to go to fashion shows is just like search for a monkey in a zoo. You will find it, but so will everyone else, searching or not for trends. What is imperative to those researchers is to acquire information and know the methods to find the most innovative and relevant inside the culture.

*Trendhunters* can have graduated from fashion, communication, engineering or management school. It does not matter. What truly matters for a *trendhunter* is to know how to interact with intelligence and perspicuity the everyday events. It is not necessary to understand a lot about technology or anthropology. The important is to concentrate in finding close to technology and anthropology new business opportunities.

It is no longer enough to be in the right place at the right time. It is also need to correctly interpret the ongoing events, to not lose the opportunity to build knowledge and new information starting from a immediate or millennial culture. Thereunto this professional that we may name *trendhunter* and no longer *coolhunter*, needs to create his/her career starting with a continuous education and assemble his/her own

methodology to analyze and interpret human behavior in order to translate them into trends.

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