

# FASHION OF THE NEW CENTURY – MODERN FASHION OR EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL STATUS AND CLOTHES FOR SUCCESS

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**Abstract:** *In today's digitalized society, fashion is a phenomenon that affects all social subjects, consciously or unconsciously, as an informant of their cultural, social, economic, philosophical, spiritual, and even modern meta-physical changes and understandings. Clothing is one of the first and primary markers that provide information to the environment about an individual's national and class affiliation, wealth, and age, and over time information about the extent of the messages to be sent to others through color, the quality of the fabric, the decoration in the costume, the presence (or absence) of details – fashion elements that are as complex as the structure of society itself. Why is fashion used to achieve career (and even personal) influence and success? In contrast to the traditional capitalist fashion system, in which the elite (wealthy class) corresponded directly to the current fashion trends and consciously imposed them on the lower social classes, today's fashion can be identified as the individual's striving to assert his "self" and to be distinguished by its exterior, by the choice of clothes, through which he demonstrates a certain social position. At the same time, through it he expresses his individuality, one that defies the conformism of the upper classes, eager for rivalry imposed by the strong competition, which grows into a struggle for social superiority and continuous metamorphoses. From a psychological point of view, it hints at a person with increased aspirations and a strong desire for social acceptability in a certain social circle, gaining affection, friends, a desire for professional success and achieving established non-verbal communication and a strong (and above all verified) impression on others.*

**Keywords:** fashion, social phenomenon, social superiority, success.

## MODA NOVOG VEKA – SAVREMENA MODA ILI IZRAZ DRUŠTVENOG STANJA I ODEĆE ZA USPEH

**Apstrakt:** *U današnjem digitalizovanom društvu, moda je fenomen koji utiče na sve društvene subjekte, svesno ili nesvesno, kao informator njihovih kulturnih, društvenih, ekonomskih, filozofskih, duhovnih, pa i savremenih metafizičkih promena i shvatanja. Odeća je jedan od prvih i osnovnih markera koji okolini pruža informacije o nacionalnoj i klasnoj pripadnosti pojedinca, njegovom imovinskom stanju i godinama, a vremenom i informaciju o obimu poruka koje je potrebno poslati drugima kroz boju, kvalitet tkanine, dekoracija, u prisustvu (ili odsustvu) detalja - modnih elemenata koji su složeni koliko i sama struktura društva. Zašto koristiti modu za postizanje uticaja i uspeha u svojoj karijeri (pa čak i ličnom životu)? Za razliku od tradicionalnog kapitalističkog modnog sistema, u kojem je elita (klasa bogatih) direktno odgovarala na aktuelne modne trendove i svesno ih nametala nižim društvenim slojevima, današnja moda se može identifikovati kao želja pojedinca da se nametne i da se istakne po sebi njegov eksterijer, kroz izbor odeće, kroz koji demonstrira određeni društveni položaj. Istovremeno, kroz njega*

izražava svoju individualnost, onu koja prkosi konformizmu viših klasa, žudnji za rivalstvom nametnutom jakom konkurencijom, koja prerasta u borbu za društvenu nadmoć i neprekidne metamorfoze. Sa psihološke tačke gledišta, nagoveštava osobu sa pojačanim težnjama i snažnom željom za društvenom prihvatljivošću određenom društvenom krugu, sticanjem naklonosti, prijatelja, željom za profesionalnim uspehom postizanjem uspostavljene neverbalne komunikacije i snažnog (i pre svega proverenog) utiska pred drugima.

**Ključne reči:** moda, društveni fenomen, društvena superiornost, uspeh.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion is a socio-cultural phenomenon and as such is the subject of research by philosophers and sociologists, as well as by artists, critics and historians. The shape of the garment, the fabric from which it is made, its color, cut and style of dressing, as well as the use of various accessories, have always been object to various tribal prohibitions, royal orders and religious restrictions. The purpose of clothing is to show a person's role, place and social function. For example, we can point to the various uniforms or clothes of the clergy, which differ drastically from everyday or business clothes. On the other hand, fashion can be conservative, at least when it comes to work clothes and uniforms. Soldiers and priests, bankers and politicians, doctors and lawyers can immediately be distinguished from the rest by the clothes they are obliged to wear according to the rules of the profession when performing the corresponding activity.

Various Western European fashion researchers and analysts give their own definitions of fashion, but I would like to refer to the following synthesized definition by the fashion theorist and president of the fashion academy in Sofia, Prof. L. Stojkov: *"Fashion is a set of accepted and shared values, including forms, symbols, beliefs and preferences that allow a person to express his individuality mostly through the signs of external appearance and clothing; to communicate with others, investing specific and concrete meanings in clothes; to change in accordance with or against individual and social norms, tastes and concepts of beauty, elegance, modernity and diversity; to manifest freedom, creativity, imagination and the ability to represent one's personal culture, to part with the past and to foresee the future, adapting to the new and the unknown"* [1].

As social relations change, so does fashion itself. After the end of the French bourgeois revolution of 1789, and especially at the beginning of the XIX century, during the period of the "tumultuous" development of capitalist production practices, the privileges of the dominant classes over the others (in terms of fashion) were not established by legal acts, but depend on the individual's material capabilities. The change in production methods has a huge impact on

clothing and thus on fashion itself. Fashion is also affected by the appearance of new (synthetic) pigments and new ways of dyeing the fabrics used to make clothes. The creators of fashion themselves are also changing – from royal members and their favorites, as formal and regulated legislators, to today's prominent clothing designers; from unknown royal tailors and their assistants to famous fashion designers, founders of the first fashion houses.

In the context of the topic of this paper, I return to Ambrose Bierce's phrase about fashion *"the despot whom clever men sneer at, but obey"* [2]. On the other hand, in today's consumer society, in which the value system is experiencing radical changes due to the aesthetic emphasis on individualism and conformism that are becoming more and more emphasized, one cannot help but mention the new fashion dictators – the social leaders, who are more surely imposing themselves on the fashion scene and are valued alongside the eminent fashion designers [3].

Just like Bierce, Henry Thoreau also asks the following paradoxical question: *"Dress up a scarecrow in the latest fashion and stand next to him in plain clothes and you will see who will be bowed down to – you or the scarecrow"* [4]. This shows the next characteristic feature of fashion, namely, the fact that fashion is able to reflect the social status of a person. In a society in which vertical social hierarchy is strongly expressed, this is important to maintain peace and social stability in it. In societies where this hierarchy is blurred, fashion manages to create a certain pseudo-democracy – everyone is dressed in the same style with the same clothes, only differences in the quality of materials used can suggest that there is still a difference. The importance of the question is also expressed in the fact that the change of the general aesthetic style of the different eras is always connected with the great ideological social changes, regardless of whether those changes happen in a long period or in a relatively short period of time.

L. Stojkov draws a kind of parallel between fashion and good taste: *"It is difficult to give a universal recipe for good taste and style of dressing, because individuals are different. But you cannot be elegant, if you do*

not achieve harmony between your personality and the clothes you have chosen; if those clothes are not comfortable and beautiful; if they are not made of quality materials and if they are not new (in terms of shape and color) – if it is not in sync with the spirit of the time” [5]. Let’s remember the words of Oscar Wilde from “The Ideal Man”: “Fashion is what you wear yourself. What others wear is unfashionable”. In the theoretical plan, the issues related to the study of clothing production for different layers of the population are underestimated. Regardless of the fact that from a practical point of view, for any society, the issue of cheap, beautiful and comfortable clothes is very important, the same issue was resolved relatively late – in the second half of the XIX century, when the first large ready-to-wear department stores appeared in France. Many professionals work to clarify certain aspects of fashion, such as the marketing of luxury products, including haute couture. On the other hand, few are those researchers who see fashion as a wider social phenomenon or deal with its individual theoretical aspects.

For fashion journalists, fashion is the basis of events, mostly fashion shows where individual designer collections are presented. In Western Europe and America, and in the last few years also in our areas, where interest is focused mainly on economic indicators, and fashion is seen as a tool for profit, in the so-called “light industry”, in the production of clothing, footwear, accessories and decorative cosmetics, suitable specialists are attracted to get a quality return on investments in this area. An extremely important work in the theoretical sense is the work of Roland Barthes “The Fashion System”, which has a great influence on the semiotic analysis and the description of the aspects in fashion and the fashion costume [6]. However, cultural scientists often prefer to analyze the development of the costume of certain social strata that have ceased their historical and social existence, and their costumes today can be considered as a given with a completed evolution [7].

## 2. FASHION AS A SOCIAL PHENOMENON – SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL MECHANISMS

Fashion fills all the structures of society only at that moment and where there is a possibility for certain social groups or classes to imitate others by borrowing individual cultural images. In traditional class societies, customs and laws establish certain cultural patterns for certain social groups much more clearly and rigidly than fashion does. For example, in medieval Europe, the lower classes were forbidden to wear clothes with bright and strong (intense) colors be-

cause bright and colorful clothes were of significant importance to the upper classes (see also Figure 1.). In addition, the use of certain materials (such as silver, gold and precious stones), fabrics (such as silk and velvet) and the cut of clothes were regulated by royal decrees. Significant in this regard is the edict of the French King Charles VIII, who in 1480 forbade all but the high nobility to wear clothes with gold and silver embroidery and to decorate the clothes with precious stones. In addition to this, he also determines the length of the shoe’s toe, linking it to the social status and titles of their wearers. Contemporary fashion, on the other hand, is essentially mass fashion.



**Figure 1:** “The Emperor Augustus rebuking Cornelius Cinna for his treachery”, Étienne-Jean Delécluze (1781–1863). The Bowes Museum [source: Google]

The special characteristics of the societies in which mass fashion appears and works were first pointed out by the German sociologist Georg Simmel at the end of the XIX century [8]. He recognizes the following signs:

1. In society, there must be differences in prestige between different social layers.
2. Representatives of the lower social strata aspire to occupy a higher position in society, which enables the realization of such aspirations, that is, there are no hard and impenetrable boundaries between the different classes.

This is one of the characteristics of capitalist society as opposed to feudal one. Fashion that operates in such a social system is characterized by:

- (a) dynamism;
- (b) social differentiation and mobility;
- (c) openness and development of communication channels;

(d) overproduction of the material goods production system and the existence of several fashion faces that compete with each other.

In a narrower sense, fashion in clothing represents a process of staged development and advancement of the development of urban culture, which began in the XIII and XIV centuries with the separation of craftsmanship from commerce. New forms of communication are also being developed, and the process is particularly intensified with the discovery of the book printing technique, which allows easy distribution of images of clothes. However, the French bourgeois revolution must come for bourgeois fashion not only to create and acquire citizenship, but simultaneously to acquire social prestige. The scientific and technological revolution, on the other hand, leads to the formation of a society with "equal opportunities", in which class boundaries and formal prohibitions are abolished and mass machine production is developed, which allows meeting the needs of various and cheap goods, including clothing for the mass consumer.

These facts are summarized by Simmel, who creates the concept of "elite fashion", through which he tries to explain the reasons for the appearance and functioning mechanisms of fashion, guided by the peculiarities of psychology and behavior of different social layers – this concept is called "concept of permeating (conductive) effect". According to him, the lower classes try to imitate the elite, to demonstrate some kind of illusory communion with the upper classes by copying their particular fashions. In this way, these fashions (examples) gradually make their way from the top to the bottom, reach the lower strata and finally spread throughout the whole society – this cycle explains the emergence of mass fashion. However, the social elites are starting to adopt a new image in the name of fashion leaders to stand out. The masses try again to master the new standards and this process can be repeated ad infinitum.

In the XX century, Simmel's theory was criticized by American sociologist G.J. Bloomer, who believes that the role of the society's elite (and its participation in the process of formation) of fashion is exaggerated [9]. He links mass choice to mass behavior or mentality. In modern society, the leading role is played by the middle class, which, according to him, is also the fashion legislator, which is a consequence of its middle and stable position in society. Another phenomenon associated with changes in fashion, brought over from the XX century, is that many new "fashions" are emerging in the lower strata of society. Examples include jazz music and denim fashion. In the 1980s, the

famous fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld uttered his famous phrase that "*Whoever ignores the street is a fool. It's the street that's defined fashion for the last 20 years*".

Fashion also has functions of a social regulator, demonstrating social inequality on the one hand and smoothing the differences between social groups on the other. It is not only a means to demonstrate social status, but also a means of communication. It successfully fulfills its role both in intragroup and in intergroup communication. It connects it to the main socio-psychological mechanisms of communication – suggestion, persuasion, imitation. Even in the XIX century, Spencer interpreted fashion as imitation: "*Fashion is in its essence imitation*". In bourgeois society, public figures become objects of imitation. Actors like Talma and Taloni, actresses like Sara Bernard, poets like Lord Byron, politicians like Simon Bolivar and Giuseppe Garibaldi.

In the XX century, Hollywood movie stars, popular pop and rock musicians, politicians, and top models become the subject of fashion imitation. In the second half of the XX century, the phenomenon of *youth fashion* was first noticed (the concept of *street fashion* is also encountered). After the end of the Second World War, the rebellion of the younger generations took different forms, thus the youth counter-culture was formed. In the 1940s, it was *zuts* in the US and *zazu* in France, in the 1950s, *hipsters* and *bikers* in the US, *teddy boys* in the UK and *stiletto*s in the USSR; in the 60's *rockers* and *hippies* appear in the West, in the 70's *shaved heads (skinheads)*, in the 80's - *punks, new romantics, rappers, greens* and so on until the early 90's, when *grunge fashion* appears.

Anti-fashion often becomes a mass fashion that influences the fashion of all strata of society. An example is the fashion for jeans, which in the 1950s and 1960s were mainly seen as clothing for young people protesting against official norms – *hipsters, hippies, "leftist" students*. Today, denim fashion is ubiquitous and is losing its aura of rebellious fashion. This shows that the alternative culture has a huge innovative potential, which is assimilated and processed by the modern officially launched fashion. For example, from the hippies was taken the tendency to individualize the appearance of a particular person as opposed to depersonalizing official fashion, especially that of corporate culture. Hence the interest in using elements taken from other nations (for example, different nationalities from India), as well as old (vintage) jewelry – elements that add a certain eclecticism to clothing. Strong and bold colors, as well as aggressive accessories, make-up and hairstyles have been borrowed from the punk counterculture. All these chaotic and

uncritical (bold) borrowings in fashion cause a whole host of fashion researchers to pay attention to such an occurrence and I would say a phenomenon such as kitsch in fashion (Figure 2, 3; Figure 2. explanation: Celebrating her 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, the young entrepreneur who founded her own cosmetics company, *Kylie Cosmetics*, in 2015, launched her collection of money-themed cosmetics. It includes make-up emblazoned with US dollars, the number 22 and catchphrases like “You’re \$0 money, baby”. She has also released products named “On a Budget”, “Work for It” and “Build Your Empire”. From here we can rightfully conclude that expressing power, prestige and independence through clothing is one of the leading markers in the fashion industry today. Figure 3. explanation: Left to right: The first model wears Retrosuperfuture sunglasses, a Sikh Im shirt and trousers. The second model wears a Siki Im poncho, a Samsøe and Samsøe turtleneck, Universal Works trousers, Scotch & Soda socks, Dr Martens sandals and Carrera sunglasses – Branded clothes with bold prints and colors anchor a wardrobe of standout features).

In today’s digitalized society, fashion is a phenomenon that affects all social subjects, consciously or unconsciously, as an informant of their cultural, social, economic, philosophical, spiritual, and even modern metaphysical changes and understandings. This raises the question of how the new XXI century fashion differs from the one of the past. The question is erudite, complex, and requires deep conceptual breakdowns, analyzes and conclusions. First of all, it is most important to lay the foundations and characteristics of today’s fashion trends – those that favor pronounced individualism, conformity, commercialism and unconventional modernism. Fashion that violates Simmel’s previously mentioned laws.

Clothing is one of the first and primary markers that provides information to the environment about an individual’s national and class affiliation, wealth and age, and over time information about the extent of messages to be sent to others through color, quality of fabric, the decoration in the costume, the presence (or absence) of details – fashion elements that are as complex as the structure of society itself.

Each nation, in each of its historical epochs of development, has developed its own system of fashion for men’s, women’s and children’s clothing, which has evolved over the centuries under the influence of various cultural factors, improvements and refinements of production technologies and the expansion of trade relations. Compared to other arts, fashion has a unique feature – the ability to immediately and everywhere respond to different and important events in



**Figure 2:** Kylie Jenner poses as a pinup girl showing off her posh lifestyle for her cosmetics company, *Kylie Cosmetics*, launching her collection of money-themed cosmetics [source: Google]

**Figure 3:** Young men dressed in trendy brands among today’s young population [source: Google]

people’s lives, as well as respond to the change of ideological and aesthetic tendencies in their spiritual life. In this way, fashion art, modern mythological complexes of society and the general course of a society’s history emphasize that fashion can create images and situations that generate certain ideas, some of which are in the field of fashion, so the circle becomes a self-reproducing eternal reality, just like the society they serve.

### 3. FASHION OF THE NEW CENTURY – MODERN FASHION OR EXPRESSION OF SOCIAL STATUS AND CLOTHES FOR SUCCESS

Contemporary fashion is maintained in the spirit of postmodernism, and at the same time it is complemented and modified in the spirit of the new digital society. We live in the time of the Second Renaissance, which in itself erudite cardinal social changes, which are inevitable to be properly reflected in the clothes and the fashion itself. The post-corona period imposed absolutely new social paradigms – a tendency for a more practical way of life, elementalization and reduction of daily obligations, getting closer to nature, healthy lifestyle, care for the environment and nature. In a word, modern practices that impose a completely new lifestyle, and therefore a completely different fashion trend. If in the period before the pandemic we had an emphasis on fashion expression, linear aesthetics, exaggeration in details, tailoring design that followed the line of the body, as well as materials that were less resistant to external changes and functionality; new fashion imposes absolutely differ-

ent manifestations, at least in terms of the shape, silhouette, cut of clothes, as well as the material from which they are made. Today's modern world is a consumer and supporter of practical fashion, with cuts that are elegant but at the same time (if not more) functional, materials that are far more durable (in terms of washing and ironing) and eclectic. Countless possibilities have been created for combining fashion elements that are not so related to each other, in order to reduce the unnecessary number of fashion pieces and create a unique style. On the other hand, there is the so-called ZARA phenomenon [10], which

imposes a serious consumer spirit, above all on teenagers and adolescents, and influences the development not only of seasonal or pre-season fashions, but also of monthly and even weekly fashions! The rapid change of fashion trends was imposed already in the post-millennium period, in the first place by the popular showgirls and Hollywood jetsetters in order to keep their distance from the mainstream and lead the role of fashion dictator. In today's digitalized society, we have a completely different picture – the "fashion influencer" phenomenon that gives any anonymous consumer the opportunity to become influential



**Figure 4:** Part of the set for the "Dinero" (meaning money) music video, in which Lopez poses in provocative and expensive underwear, demonstrating and proudly parading her financial independence and power in the so-called "man's world".

**Figure 5:** Lopez sings, "I just want the green, want the money, want the cash flow", which she brought to life with Tiffany & Co. jewelry worth over \$4.5 million, featured in the 13 different looks she wore throughout the video [source: Google]



**Image 6:** The 46-year-old singer wants her man to grow up – and women everywhere to feel empowered! [some scenes for the video "Dinero", source Google]

and popular among a certain fashion audience, and thus to impose their personal style. Hence, we can no longer talk about theoretical fashion breakthroughs according to Simmel, but to state that contemporary fashion is dictated by the middle class, which has the ambition to stand out and obtain a certain higher social status, while achieving it through the clothes.

In 2018, 46-year-old Latina singer Jennifer Lopez released her single “Dinero” (Money) featuring DJ Khaled and African-American singer Cardi B (see Figure 4, 5). In it, the ultra-popular star establishes a new money cult - a serious contender to be seen as the inevitable tool and possession of any potential future emancipated woman. The video starts with her banging on the phone and having a serious argument with her husband who expects her to be his perfect housekeeper, that is to say, his mother. Later inserts appear with examples of some of the most historic women’s rights speeches ever given. We also see Lopez take a trip through pop culture history, appearing in stereotypical female roles from several eras, including a Rosie the Riveter-type factory worker, a beautiful 1950s housewife (various fashion transformations including the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and present day), a Madman-style secretary popular in the 80s and finally a businesswoman and single woman (see Figure 6). The singer wants her man to grow up – and women

everywhere to feel empowered! She stands with a lover to grow up singing “*I ain’t gonna be cooking all day, I ain’t your mama, I ain’t gonna do your laundry, I ain’t your mama!*”. The video is symbolic because it sets a new direction not only in pop music, but also in popular culture globally. The same is indicative of gender roles that are already becoming retro, worn out, de-regime! This is where the era of a new woman begins, emancipated, economically independent, aware of her value and freed from the stereotypes imposed by patriarchal society. It is significant to mention this video, its context and content, because in a short time it is literally reflected on the behavior and image of millions of women and girls around the world (figure 7, 8).

Hence we should mention all the general changes, which are noticed in the society as a whole – not only the fashion trends, but also the pop music is becoming more commercial, the one that glorifies and exalts synthetic visual elements, accessories and economic goods; further, the politicians and businessmen who are becoming more aware of fashion, the number of men entering the metrosexual group, the number of women becoming more emancipated and aware of their role and power in society. At the same time, these changes are observed in all social functions, starting from the employees of the high legislative house, to the doctors, and all the way to the



**Figure 7:** Jennifer Lopez wears her *Dinero* outfit to perform on *Jimmy Kimmel Live* in Los Angeles on June 5, 2018

**Figure 8:** Kim Kardashian celebrated her friend’s billion-dollar business in a cash-covered Jeremy Scott coat and matching boots, along with a \$3,995 Judith Leiber crystal-covered bag at the party on September 27, 2018.

**Figure 9:** Miley Cyrus performs in concert at the O2 Arena, London, on the UK leg of her *Bangerz* tour in 2014

**Figure 10:** Miley Cyrus wearing a jeweled apron and silver belt by Atelier Versace at the 2015 MTV Video Music Awards, [source of all images: Google]

students. Each social unit aims to shape its exterior in order to approach high publicity, popularity and appeal. This is rooted in the fact that today's 25-45 age groups have been brought up in the spirit of Western values and visual forms. Accordingly, they continue this education of their successors, which gives us a society dominated not only by fashion, but also by the aesthetic and cultural values of the Western world. National identity increasingly loses its authenticity and gives preference to the new, the popular, the commercial and the profitable. This includes other social factors – namely, most of today's nouveau riche adults are raised by middle-class people, but raised to higher aesthetic views and values, they become ambitious and prone to radical changes. These changes entail aesthetic, cultural, and to some extent religious modes in the name of individual development, improvement, progress, and global success. Accordingly, this philosophy leads to social changes that are much more flexible and transparent, in contrast to previous generations that created much more conservative understandings and supported much more traditional aesthetic acceptances and social behavior.

It is a question of where this not only contemporary, but also social force will move. In which phase are we and what are the processes for its growth, development and finally descent? The answer is not easy or predictable at all. If we want to even look to the future, we need to look at the technology and new digital changes and the speed at which they are being adopted. It is quite easy to assume that the modern world will accept all social, aesthetic and cultural changes with open arms to a much greater extent, young people will be more and more inclined to radicalization, and the elderly, who have already lost the right to vote, will be mute observers of a world that will be absolutely unknown, new, unreal and I would say abstract-irrational for them. Hence, in the future we could expect more radical, eccentric, bold fashion changes, both in the way of dressing and in the way of behavior. The desire for individualism, self-expression, influence and populism will be further accentu-

ated until the point of saturation is reached, which will create an unreal environment, extremely eclectic and morphing, irrational, nonsensical and deductive. In such a case, a new form of art and fashion will emerge that will be in the service of drawing society towards a better form, similar to the role of Dadaism in art during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The role of the modern in the new century is to be in sync with the new socio-cultural values, but not to forget and completely erase the old traditions, human values and social conglomerates for the better and proper development of a society that will create lasting and valuable cultural-artistic and aesthetic fashion values.

#### **4. PSYCHOLOGICAL TRIGGER AND ASPECTS OF FASHION IN THE NEW CENTURY – MODERN FASHION OR TENDENCY TOWARDS HIGH STATUS AND DRESSING FOR SUCCESS**

Why is fashion used to achieve career (and even personal) influence and success? Nowadays we can more often spot a girl or boy in their 20s or 30s, from a middle-class background, wearing a certain brand (usually an accessory) like Louis Vuitton, Chanel, Dior, Roberto Cavalli, Michael Kors, Karl Lagerfeld, Hugo Boss, Tommy Hilfiger, Polo Ralph Lauren, Guess, Steve Madden, Replay, Calvin Klein, Diesel, Desigual, Levi's etc. Why more and more young and mature people are resorting to commercialized aesthetics and pseudo-rich and popular looks (see Figure 12). Clothing has serious power and impact. Hence, every individual (especially the members of Generation Z as well as Millennials), aware of this, boldly resorts to its possession.

Fashion accessories (much more affordable, unlike clothes) are worn by youths of the rising middle class (nouveau riche) – according to sociologists, consumers of visible brands and logos are members of the class of the nouveau riche, and according to psychologists, it is about people with an undefined identity and personal style, immersed in world fashion trends, with a weak manifestation of individualism and char-



**Figure 11:** Fake vs. Authentic Louis Vuitton Bags – an absolute near-identical statement [source: Google]



acter, sometimes it is a question of people with lower personal self-esteem, who protect themselves from others through pretentious and domineering logos and imitate self-confidence and supremacy over the masses. Hence, many youngsters, with a lack of finances, but with a strong desire to be fashionable and on trend, resort to wearing successful copies of original fashion accessories and clothing. The only difference between the original and the copy consists in the quality of the material, the manufacturing method and the logo, which in its original appearance has a specific secret according to which it is produced (see Figure 11). Members of the middle class reach for counterfeits, while the rich buy only original products.



**Figure 12:** Instagram model Olivia Attwood wearing exclusive Louis Vuitton bags [source: Instagram]

In contrast to the traditional capitalist fashion system, in which the elite (wealthy class) corresponded directly to the current fashion trends and consciously imposed them on the lower social classes, today's fashion can be identified as the individual's striving to assert his "self" and to be distinguished by its exterior, by the choice of clothes, through which he demonstrates a certain social position. At the same time, through it he expresses his individuality, one that defies the conformism of the upper classes, eager for rivalry imposed by the strong competition, which grows into a struggle for social superiority and continuous metamorphoses. From a psychological point of view, it hints at a person with increased aspirations and a strong desire for social acceptability in a certain social circle, gaining affection, friends, a desire for professional success and achieving established non-verbal communication and a strong (and above all verified) impression on others [11].

With the choice of clothes, we can read the socio-cultural thought process of the fashion consumer, predict his attitudes and personal identities. Through

them, the consumer gives information about his lifestyle, philosophical views, cultural preferences, and even spiritual experiences. In any case, they are derived and adapted from the social values that prevail and their emotional expectations. It is obvious that today's fashion trends are more and more based on psychological parameters based on age, race, gender, sexuality, hobbies, sub-cultural attitudes, metaphysical processes, etc., that is, they are absolutely different from the paradigm in which fashion is dictated exclusively by the upper class and is transferred vertically. In today's postmodern era, the construction of personal identity represents an absolute obsession in the existence of the person - this applies above all to the young population of teenagers and adolescents, where the tendencies are put in the service of satisfying the emotional preferences of the consumer. With the passage of age, living conditions, environment, engagement and work processes and careers, attitudes and tastes of individuals themselves change. Hence the fashion designers, analysts, sociologists, culturologists, fashion specialists etc. they work in absolute synergy with all the previously mentioned parameters, when building fashion tendencies, lines and styles, that is, visual attitudes [12].

It is an interesting question, should the masses blindly obey the fashion trends? Absolutely not, especially the young population group, which is in continuous search for its identity, has emphasized special personal experiences and expects them to be properly presented in fashion [13]. Youth fashion is a special phenomenon in today's global world, because it is not dictated by the catwalk, but by the young people who have enough potential, energy and courage (insolence) to be special, different and distinctly individual. Thanks to social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube millions of young people experiment with their appearance every day and manage to present it on their social platforms in an expressive and unusual way. Hence, the selfie photo becomes an absolute "in" for every young person and phenomenon in the modern world. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a "selfie" means a photograph taken of oneself with a smartphone. This word was rightfully chosen as the "International Word of 2013". The Internet revolution, especially social platforms allow any young individual to identify with a particular popular star, favorite character, model, etc. and create an image of its own, without manifesting a desire to be identical and to copy, the idea is to follow their course, but to be different, innovative, fresh and unique. According to this, many anonymous boys and girls have become famous, recognizable and even popular,

thanks to their image which they proudly advertise every day and hence they get their followers, supporters and fans [14].

On the other hand, the mature social group of 30-45 years, subconsciously, is not that different from the youth, at least as far as the psychology of dressing and the reasons for it are concerned. In today's corporate world, we can often witness young ladies and fashionable men imitating certain fashion subjects who are accepted as successful - not only in their looks and fashion, but also in their verbal language, behavior, manners and life attitudes (Fig. 13-15). The idea is to project an image that visually and intellectually resembles the already accepted as successful. By doing so, each mature individual is served a proven recipe of a person who is socially accepted and applauded as beautiful, elegant, successful, happy, etc. [15]. Those persons are usually popular persons, those who are known globally, and very often they can be recognized as persons in a certain social and ethnographic circle. It is important to be like them, so that everyone can be successful and feel the benefits of living and living fully. Thus, a visual expression of the power and prestige couple, expressed through a metrosexual man with a sophisticated look, a rich car and luxury accessories, and a woman with branded clothes and a noticeably accentuated appearance is an absolute

trend today. By imitating their fashion idols in the way they dress, fashionistas subconsciously imagine that they too are living their lives. The characteristics have proven to be very current and successful, but the negatives that have been traced and that are increasingly emphasized are the lack of personal statement, character and individuality. (Figure 16-18).

An interesting fact that follows and is inevitable, and is a result of this phenomenon of imitation of the self-proclaimed elite, is the imbalance in the performance on a visual and economic level. In addition to this context, we will mention examples of young girls and boys, who set aside a large part of their several months' savings to buy a bag or shoes from a famous brand, and very often know how to devote themselves to taking a loan or entering a deficit in the bank. The same is true when choosing a wardrobe or extensions that will complement the external appearance. The irony of this way of life consists in the following – consumers, despite their pseudo-rich appearance, still lead a lifestyle that is far from rich. Most of the time they live in an average apartment, sometimes with their parents, or they pay it off, they eat poorly and so on because they don't have the financial power to be superior in every field – from here they imitate the stars or nearby fashion models, they join forces to become social leaders or social stars, but their cultur-



**Figure 13:** Gigi Hadid wearing a Tommy Hilfiger model (so often replicated and imitated by mainstream youth) during the Spring 2017 fashion show [Source: Google]

**Figure 14:** Popular Instagram and supermodel Gigi Hadid wearing Tommy Hilfiger on the streets of New York during Fall 2017 Fashion Week, reflecting what is "in" among today's youth - popularity, famous brand, emphasized sexuality [Source: Google]

**Figure 15:** Tommy Hilfiger street style, casual fashionistas at New York Fashion Week, Fall 2017 [Source: Google]



**Figure 16:** World popular football star David Beckham with his \$407,000 customized Rolls-Royce Phantom luxury car for his family (his luxury car fleet ranges from \$30,000 to over \$500,000 per car) [source: Google]

**Image 17:** A nouveau riche man who imitates ultra-rich men and fashion icons like David Beckham in the way of dressing, fashion accessories, choice of cars, and even the taste in women [source: Pinterest]

**Figure 18:** A fashionable woman wearing D&G accessories imitating the famous ladies of the jet set (like David Beckham's wife) [source: Pinterest]

al-educational and social background imposes and betrays a person with poor coordination of measure, taste, style, individuality and actual presence [16].

In today's modern world, popularity is not so exciting because everyone can see what the western stars are up to. The challenge of the modern man is to become part of the modern mass, to be accepted and relevant. However, the real challenge is to break away from that mass and manifest his own individuality, underpinned by a strong attitude and character, inventiveness, innovation - traits that seem to be missing more and more in the modern world [17]. Hence, the shifted cultural-social values and aesthetic paradigms should not be surprising, because they arise from the preferences and emphasis of the modern world, which is increasingly sinking into consumerism, artificiality, materialism, spiritual disorientation, lack of true individuality and progressive rebellion as well as populism.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Previously, the aristocracy had the privilege of wearing expensive brands, while today the developed cult of nouveau riche fashion is becoming an absolute in. At that time, ladies like Jacqueline Kennedy, Grace Kelly, Audrey Hepburn, Princess Diana and many others with their refined and sophisticated look were role models for millions of girls and women, while today they are displaced by showgirls, pop stars and media influencers who have lack of knowledge and true fashion sense and education, so with

their amateurism (although not always), but above all an emphasized desire for dominance, cause the birth of a completely new style that defines the modern girl and woman with a pronounced sexuality (sometimes reaching an absurd nonsense and vulgarity; see figure 9, 10), self-centeredness, apparent individualism and populism – all this is the generalized image of the mainstream today. Fortunately, the exceptions are specialized circles of fashion connoisseurs, designers, stylists, certain models, photographers, fashion editors, and other culturally advanced people with sufficient fashionable and educational background to know that joining such a group is absurd and that making a statement about something that is called aesthetic, beautiful, and valuable is a topic of a completely different dimension [18].

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