

Philosophy and History of Leisure

La philosophic et l'histoire des loisirs

The Fad in Canadian Culture: A Century of Ephemeral Leisure Pursuits

Ronald C. A. Johnson, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 3G1

INTRODUCTION

Canada's leisure has undergone profound changes as urbanization and technology have created an atmosphere conducive to the introduction of new leisure products and activities. In some cases, these new opportunities have resulted in the introduction of new forms of recreation that have become entrenched as part of our leisure culture. However, new leisure pursuits are oftentimes shortlived, making a rapid increase in the marketplace, but soon to either vanish or have their popularity reduced to a much lower level. This type of product cycle, commonly referred to as *fads*, is particularly apparent in recreation where the adaptation or disposal of products are often reflected not in economic decisions, but rather cultural fluctuations.

There are times when fads seem to defy logic; that is, when there is no apparent social, physical, or economic need that seems to be filled by the adaptation of a particular product. However, an examination of fads often show a response to contemporary situations. This is usually indicated by the overtone of the fad (e.g. a recreation activity or product is introduced that is related to the physical fitness concerns of modern society).

This paper examines the rapid increase in the number of fads that have become part of the leisure scene in Canada. It is hypothesized that the increased succession of fads have been related to increased urbanization and technological developments as well as to specific marketing campaigns that have purposefully generated a "demand" for a particular product. In addition, Canada, by virtue of its geographic relationship to the United States, has by either choice or necessity, adopted many American fads.

METHOD

Data for the paper were gathered primarily from two sources. First, Canadian newspapers and magazines over the period 1890 to 1989 were examined to identify what Canadian commentators perceived to be fads (within a recreational context), and second, where available, product sales data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Numerous fads that have been part of the Canadian social scene were identified. The fads tended to follow specific life cycles ranging from very rapid introduction followed by almost total demise to the introduction of products that have had recurring times of popularity. Frequently, fads were found to be related to prevailing social values. The impact of fads transported across the border from the United States is particularly noticeable in the latter part of the period studied. The findings help answer a variety of questions regarding Canadian culture, particularly in regard to the choice of leisure pursuits and the potential life cycle of new leisure products.

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