



Will Steampunk Really Be the Next Big Fashion Trend?

No offense to IBM, but a tech company — even one so highly regarded — wouldn't be the first place we'd turn for fashion forecasting. Yet on Monday, the company released the findings of a "social sentiment index" that predicted that steampunk would be the next big trend to take hold of the retail industry.

What is steampunk exactly? According to Forbes, it's a "science fiction/fantasy sub-genre that's a style mash-up of 19th century industrialized looks and Victorian flourishes." Sounds fancy. We're more apt to explain it in reference to pop culture: it's Sherlock Holmes meets Wild Wild West, with a dash of Inspector Gadget. Get the picture?

Before we all not-so-quietly snicker about the improbability of this prediction, it's important to note that IBM does have science behind its claim — or at least online metrics. The company analyzed more than a half-million posts from news sources and on message boards, blogs and social-media sites, and found that steampunk has quite a following. According to its study, the amount of online discussion about steampunk increased 11 times from 2009 to 2012. It also notes that, since 2010, more than two dozen U.S. department stores and retailers have become "steampunk savvy." Whatever that means.

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Furthermore, IBM predicts that during the next two years, "steampunk will shift from low-production, high-cost 'craft' manufacturing to mass production," meaning you'll be able to pick up your go-go-gadget spectacles in department stores and not just local thrift shops.

But just because something has gained traction online, does that mean a trend is on the horizon? Traditionally, new fashion styles tend to trickle down, from the couture shows in Paris and Milan to the ready-to-wear shows at New York Fashion Week to high-end retailers and then — finally — to the watered-down versions that arrive for us commoners in the mainstream.

For steampunk, the high-end influence is already out there. For his spring 2010 couture show, John Galliano designed a parade of looks for Christian Dior with nods to early 20th century influences — including corsets, top hats, flowing fabrics, layers of lace and Frankenstein-esque hair and makeup — that are often referenced by steampunk fashionistas.

More recently, Sarah Burton incorporated an updated version of classical Victorian looks into Alexander McQueen's spring-summer 2013 runway show at Paris Fashion Week in October, with voluminous, Scarlett

