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THE FASHION ECONOMY

Distributed in
THE TIMES

Published in association with



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DIVERSITY

A turning point for representation?

Under-representation, tokenism and overt racism have been recurring themes in the fashion industry for some time, so how have recent months impacted brands' attitudes to issues of diversity?

Sue Omar

The fashion industry has long been called out for cultural appropriation, racist advertising and its blatant lack of diversity across campaigns, catwalks and behind the lens. But could the recent resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and heightened social awareness of racial discrimination and under-representation, following the US police killing of George Floyd in May, be fashion's final wake-up call for inclusivity? Perhaps.

Over the years, there have been prominent examples of racially insensitive, or sometimes simply outright offensive, themes and imagery in fashion, filtering all the way through to final collections. In 2018, H&M's campaign showcasing a Black boy wearing its Coolest Monkey in the Jungle jumper caused controversy, while Gucci was forced to apologise last year for releasing a balaclava design that resembled blackface.

"There needs to be a want to be educated on why inclusivity works, why inequity is wrong, how it affects business, how it affects employees, how it affects the industry, as well as processes that come with real consequences," says Chloé Pierre, founder of wellness platform thy.self.

For decades, European standards of beauty – think light eyes, fair skin, and straight hair – have heavily influenced the images fashion brands use to promote their products. From magazine spreads to billboards, the face of fashion has a history of being exclusively white with no room for diversity in front of the camera or behind the scenes. As a result, women of colour are rarely represented on the catwalk or in fashion campaigns, often reproducing racist ideologies in plain sight.

"The lack of diversity in fashion, most certainly across my generation, has led to women and young girls perceiving their bodies, their beauty, their features and subsequently their identities as not being worthy. And in some cases, sadly wondering what is 'wrong' with them when as they are constantly being fed images in the media and their everyday lives that promote unrealistic standards of beauty," Pierre explains.

In 2013, models Naomi Campbell and Iman along with fashion activist Bethann Hardison formed the Diversity Coalition to name and shame designers guilty of only casting white models. The iconic trio wrote an open letter to some of



the most esteemed fashion houses, including Chanel, Saint Laurent and Roberto Cavalli, addressing the exclusion of models of colour as "an act of racism", with a demand for change.

While the campaign secured some media attention at the time, it failed to build momentum and was soon forgotten; a prime example of fashion's finest ignoring the need for inclusivity and silencing Black voices.

"The discrimination and unfair treatment of Black models has always existed and in the past Black models were used as a token," says Angel Sinclair, founder of Models of Diversity, a charity that campaigns for inclusivity and diversity in fashion. "If Black models do get through casting stage, they then have to deal with make-up artists and stylists who aren't trained to work with black hair or darker skin tones."

This lack of racial diversity in fashion has real costs too, with many reputable brands taking a hit for missing the mark. From brand boycotts to product recalls, fashion companies can no longer afford to make missteps that offend and alienate audiences during these unprecedented times. Chanel, Gucci and H&M have in recent years introduced corporate initiatives to increase inclusivity and hiring of candidates from Black and ethnic minority groups.

"The fashion industry needs to embrace people that don't fit the 'eurocentric vibe' and understand times have changed, our behaviour as consumers has changed, and that impacts what we put money and effort into," says Dina Basharahil, global talent director at Modest Visions. "There needs to be more opportunities created for

people from BAME backgrounds to enter the industry as designers, photographers, stylists and creative directors."

In November 2019, Burberry's Christmas campaign, by creative director Italian designer Riccardo Tisci, broke barriers with its most racially diverse cast to date, featuring British-Somali hijabi model Ikram Abdi Omar. Praised for embracing inclusivity, this was a moment of redemption for the luxury British brand just months after it was forced to apologise for sending a model down the catwalk wearing a hooded noose, which many thought evoked imagery of racist lynchings, while also being insensitive to the issue of suicide.

With its Christmas campaign, not only did Burberry showcase their commitment to racial diversity, but the brand also acknowledged the need for fashion lines that cater to all, including Muslim women who choose to dress modestly.

But Burberry is not the first fashion brand to tap into the modest market, estimated to be worth \$270 billion in 2018 and \$361 billion by 2023, according to the *Global Islamic Economy* report. Cue the Nike Pro Hijab, the world's first lightweight and breathable sports hijab made for Muslim women in 2017. Meanwhile, Dolce Gabbana, Zara, COS and Mango are among the long list of retailers that have profited from manufacturing modest collections just in time for Ramadan.

"Brands that benefit financially from making modest clothing must use Muslim women in their campaigns to promote their pieces," says Basharahil.

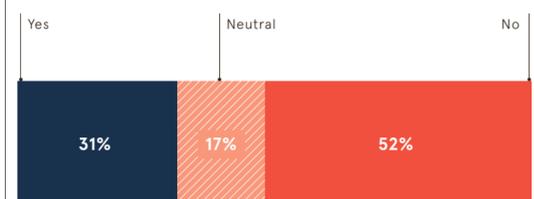
Singer-businesswoman Rihanna's Fenty empire is the ultimate prototype for diversity in fashion. Her history-making partnership with luxury fashion giant LVMH is shaking up the industry and paving the way for the next generation of young Black designers.

"The Black Lives Matter movement has bred a new space for up-and-coming Black designers and has encouraged publications and more prominent brands to be increasingly inclusive," says MaryAnn Msengi, Black British designer and founder of Farai London.

But will this lead to lasting change? "We will need more time to see if real change is coming for Black designers and creatives," says Msengi. Whatever happens next in fashion, one thing is certain: the world will be watching every single move. ●

RACIAL DIVERSITY LACKING

Whether employees within fashion think their current employer's leadership team is racially diverse



Business of Fashion 2019

COLLABORATIONS

Exploring the luxury-streetwear strategy

Collaborations between high-end fashion houses and streetwear brands have taken the industry by storm, but what is the rationale behind these unconventional partnerships? And how do two contrasting creative aesthetics merge to become one?

Simon Brooke

On the face of it, they could hardly be more different. One is the French luxury house with a heritage dating back 150 years and celebrated for its beautifully engineered bags and suitcases bearing a distinctive yet discreet design. The other is a skateboarding label established in New York in 1994 whose bold, provocative designs and great thumping fist of a logo is beloved of “hypebeasts”.

So, when Louis Vuitton announced a creative partnership with Supreme in 2017, the first of a swathe of luxury-streetwear collaborations, luxury market commentators raised an immaculately plucked eyebrow.

What was Louis Vuitton thinking of? Well, a new customer base, for one thing. Despite these understandable misgivings, the pairing, which sent denim jackets, red and white bumbags down the Paris runway and has since spawned leather jackets, trunks and even slippers sporting logos of both brands, has been phenomenally successful.

“It’s a smart way of talking to a consumer who doesn’t yet have a wallet big enough... but might well do in the future”

This summer the archetypal French luxury brand launched a capsule collection with Nigo, the Japanese streetwear pioneer and founder of A Bathing Ape and Human Made. The Louis Vuitton logo appears on grey crewneck sweatshirts and black zip-up hoodies among various pieces.

Other luxury streetwear collaborations include Ermenegildo Zegna, the menswear house that combines innovative fabrics with elegant, understated Italian tailoring and Fear of God, beloved of Kanye West and Justin Bieber for its oversized hooded sweatshirts and belted cargo trousers. In July, hundreds queued from 4am outside the London flagship of Dior to pay £1,800 for a pair of Air Jordan 1 OG Dior trainers. Five million people had registered to try and buy the limited edition trainers, although just 13,000 were manufactured.

In the 12 months to April last year, mentions of luxury and streetwear collaborations on Instagram increased by 25 per cent among influencers’ posts compared to 2016, according to trend forecaster Heuritech.

More widely the trend has inspired exciting new looks, prompted debate within the luxury fashion world about how to address new audiences and boosted sales for many brands. Its disruptive influence can be seen in this year’s autumn-winter shows with a loud, seventies vibe present in collections by Comme des Garçons, Dries Van Noten and Tom Ford among others, featuring daring



cuts and bold colours that explode with the energy of streetwear.

“Luxury streetwear collaborations create newness and a buzz among customers who are always looking for these things,” explains Mario Ortelli, managing director of Ortelli&Co, advisers to the luxury industry. “For luxury brands it’s also an opportunity to innovate with the creation of a capsule collection alongside their main ranges. You reach a new audience, too.”

“It’s a very smart way of talking to and recruiting a younger consumer who doesn’t yet have a wallet big enough for your principal collections, but might well do in the future.”

Contrast is an important factor for success. “It works well when you have two brands that would

not normally be associated with each other, for example Fila and Fendi, which have a very different approach to design and very different audiences,” he says.

These unlikely pairings have a particular resonance for Chinese customers who accounted for 90 per cent of the global luxury market growth in 2019, reaching 35 per cent of the value of luxury goods sold in the world, according to consultancy Bain & Company. This is more than double the figure for 2010.

As the luxury market struggles with the fallout of the pandemic, Bain predicts that Chinese consumers will be responsible for more than half of all luxury goods purchases by 2025 when sales are expected to reach €320-330 billion globally.

01 Customers hanging outside a Louis Vuitton store in Miami to purchase limited edition Supreme and Louis Vuitton collaboration items in June 2017

02 Dior unveiled its collaboration with sports brand Jordan for its Fall 2020 collection featuring the limited-edition Air Jordan 1 High OG sneakers

According to Gartner’s *Luxury China: Streetwear Insight Report*, it was the partnership between high-end luggage manufacturer Rimowa and Virgil Abloh’s Off-White streetwear brand that was responsible for 94 per cent of Rimowa’s engagement on Weibo. The collaboration also delivered the highest daily Baidu Index score for the brand between January 2018 and March 2019.

“Chinese customers prefer extroverted values for luxury, manifested through expressions of extravagance and fun identity statements. This is in stark contrast to the global luxury customer, where traditional values like heritage, craftsmanship and timelessness play a much bigger role,” says Olivier Kuziner, general manager, Asia-Pacific, at Ekimetrics, a data science consultancy.

“Luxury streetwear collaborations are a great way to tap into this desire for extroversion and completely makes sense when you consider the average luxury shopper is much younger in China than in the rest of the world.”

Exclusivity is one of the main drivers of consumer interest in fashion, especially in China, says Christophe Brumby, creative strategy director at Amplify and former global head of marketing at high-end menswear labels including Orlebar Brown.

“As a common denominator between luxury and streetwear, and as both worlds continue to meet and merge, the definition of exclusivity is shifting,” he says. “Although scarcity remains at its heart, luxury traditionally defined exclusivity through price and quality. But streetwear now also defines it through the lens of knowledge and community.”

Has the trend passed its peak? It’s certainly entering a new era, as Abloh recently tweeted: “What we do is called design. It’s not limited to being called ‘streetwear’. Design is design. The moral of the story is beware of whatever box you’re labelled as. Challenge it. Defy it. Do not be defined by it.”

Creating experiences customers expect, deserve and appreciate

With future high street footfall predicted to be 50 per cent lower than before the coronavirus pandemic, fashion brands are shifting focus to where their customers are: online

A gargantuan shift towards online shopping has happened in 2020, with ecommerce seeing a decade of growth in just three months. Data from Salesforce’s Shopping Index shows global revenue from online sales in the second quarter of 2020 grew by a massive 71 per cent year on year.

In addition, the KMPG-BRC UK Retail Sales Monitor reported online non-food purchases accounted for 39.3 per cent of all sales in August 2020 compared to 29 per cent last year. This surge in online orders has been seen across all industries, including fashion, and is set to continue.

Even when the pandemic is finally contained, ecommerce platforms are likely to retain this increased popularity. With customers spending so much more of their lives online, they want to receive the same high-quality service as they do in-store. Satisfying customers’ digital expectations, therefore, is the biggest challenge retailers face.

But how do they do this? Fashion retailers need to revisit their customer personas and adapt them to this new normal. Additionally, reviewing their entire customer journey and investing in cutting-edge technology to fill the gaps is paramount. By revisiting their digital strategy in this way, the fashion brands that are succeeding in this new world have one thing in common: they have made customer experience their top priority.

Meeting customer expectations

So, what do these brands know about customer expectations that their rivals don’t? A survey by market research company Forrester found 70 per cent of customers said they would not shop with an e-retailer again if it failed to inform them of a delay.

But it is what parcelLab discovered about the current post-sales strategies of e-retailers that is most compelling. The *parcelLab UK Shipping Study 2020: Fashion Edition* found 93 per cent of fashion retailers ignore their customers after dispatch. In addition, 99 per cent do not tailor shipping messages to the customer. This lack of post-purchase care is a big problem for fashion retailers that rely so heavily on customer loyalty.

How should fashion brands adapt to a changing world?

The question many executives are asking is how do online fashion brands not just improve customer satisfaction, but exceed expectations? Trailblazers in the industry are achieving their goals by regaining full control of the end-to-end customer

journey. Secondly, they are creating a fully branded customer experience, rethinking customer values and priorities and using omnichannel marketing to reach more and more customers.

They are also investing heavily in the customer journey after checkout by hosting order status pages in their own ecosystems. These provide greater visibility, generate fewer customer inquiries and, if used correctly, turn post-sales communication into future repeat purchases.

How parcelLab is making a difference

By using real-time data, from the brand, the carrier and the customer, and targeted communication, parcelLab helps forward-thinking brands revolutionise the customer journey by closing the post-sales experience gap. That’s why many fashion retailers, including Farfetch, s.Oliver, Gerry Weber and Shoe Zone, are choosing to partner with parcelLab.

A leading operations experience platform, parcelLab gives businesses control of their post-sales customer journey. They are helping brands to create bespoke post-purchase communications that are clear, reassuring and, most importantly, manage customer expectations. Research by parcelLab reveals that when fashion companies get these comms right, customer inquiries are 25 per cent lower.

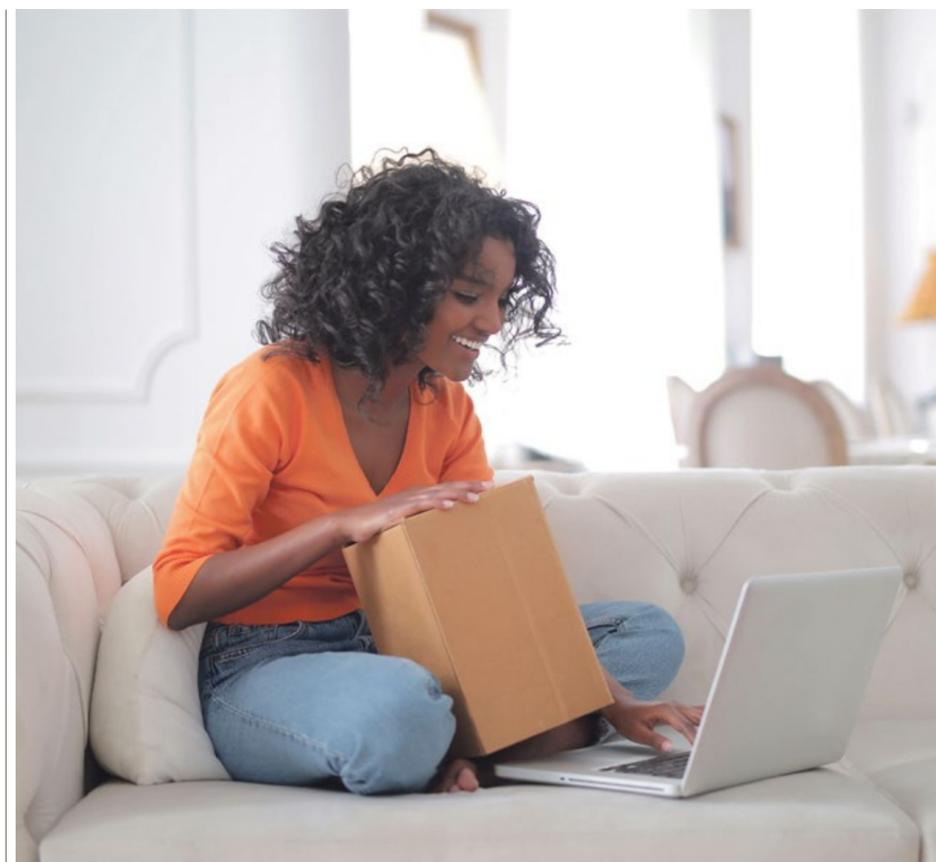
Tobias Buxhoidt, founder and chief executive of parcelLab, says: “Composing post-purchase communications may seem a simple task, but it is amazing how many companies get them wrong. That’s infuriating for the customer. All they want to know is, ‘When will my parcel arrive?’, ‘Where is it?’, ‘Is it on time?’ and ‘Are there any issues?’ We help them to create and send the right messaging notifications to the customer at the right time.”

Helping customers to engage better with consumers

With its smart data engine and targeted communication, parcelLab also helps companies to increase repurchase rates dramatically.

Buxhoidt explains: “In fashion retail, there is one universal constant for brands; that is to always return happy customers. The 500-plus global brands we work with recognise the value of investing in operations experience. In fact, they experience a 90 per cent increase in repurchasing rates from our communications. That’s pretty significant.”

“Sending personalised and proactive post-purchase notifications to customers is an integral part



of the customer journey. Not only does it build trust, but it unlocks the door to increased customer engagement. When customers feel engaged, they are much more open to reading emails.”

Take parcelLab’s research data, for example. It shows transactional emails have click rates three times higher than marketing emails and generate four times more revenue.

Therefore, the evidence seems to show fashion brands that go the extra mile to produce thoughtful transactional communications will also generate more sales.

So, what should these transactional emails look like? Buxhoidt says the pandemic has created what he calls “the next new customer”. This is somebody who not only expects the post-purchase experience to run like clockwork, but also wants content that adds value.

Buxhoidt says: “It might be a message, which also includes a video tutorial on how to build the bike they’ve just bought or user-generated content showing styling ideas for their new garment. Whatever the value-add, it presents the brand with a unique opportunity to reinforce the notion that the customer made a great choice buying from them. It is this kind of personal interaction that binds the customer to the brand and increases customer lifetime value.”

“We help create and send the right messaging notifications to the customer at the right time”

The future: the power of post-purchase communication in a pandemic

Buoyed by its success, parcelLab launched a brand-new returns experience hub within its platform this year. The interactive tool will enable brands already working with parcelLab to communicate across the entire customer journey, adding the final piece to their operations experience puzzle.

You really do sense that Buxhoidt, who likes to surf in his spare time, and the team at parcelLab will make even bigger waves as more fashion brands begin to realise the largely untapped value of operations experience.

For more information please visit www.parcellab.com/fashioneconomy



LFW: catwalks go virtual as brands adapt

The pandemic has tested brands' creativity and innovation by giving the industry the perfect opportunity to change its traditional fashion show format. But what was it like to attend these events virtually and will live streamed shows become the norm?

Sophie Benson

Often the most innovative moments come from chaos. So says Rebecca Morter, founder and chief executive of retail marketplace and community Lone Design Club. And it doesn't get much more chaotic than a pandemic. Coronavirus restrictions meant brands and designers had no choice but to do things differently for London Fashion Week. The result? The event, often criticised for being outdated, was revitalised with renewed purpose, creativity and accessibility.

Whereas catwalk shows are usually the main event, this time around the front row was almost entirely replaced by the armchair as brands either live streamed their remote catwalk shows or released conceptual films to showcase their collections. "I'm all for the creative videos," says Georgie Hyatt, co-founder and chief executive of Rotaro fashion rental service, who attended London Fashion Week both virtually and in person. "I think they engulf you in the world of that brand even more so, and what I really liked was the innovation and creativity I saw from brands that were challenged to think outside the confines of the traditional fashion show."

While film was a welcome focus for some, others found it couldn't compete with the theatre of a live London Fashion Week show. Fashion student and blogger Ruth MacGilp watched Burberry's livestream, which kicked off proceedings, via Twitch. The digital show was available for all to watch, sidestepping the usual exclusivity of such high-fashion shows, but she found it was "hard to get lost in the mood of the collection".



Burberry

“The contrast of the luxury clothes and models versus my very unglamorous lockdown reality just widened the void

show invite were offered a select number of other physical events. Luxury brand L. Saha had planned to host a catwalk show as usual this season, but in response to restrictions, models were swapped for a mannequin and creative director Laboni Saha settled into an event space in Somerset House, allowing visitors, as well as viewers tuning in via Instagram Live, to watch as she deftly crafted a dress from scratch over a nine-day period.

"I thought if we're not going to do a show, we can at least share something that we've never shared before and show the transition of taking a bundle of yarn and turning it into a finished dress. I love the thrill of the show and the kind of content we get from it," says Saha, acknowledging that catwalks will continue to be part of their future once restrictions are lifted.

But the experience this London Fashion Week provided has been a catalyst for experimenting with other formats too. "We definitely want to carry on in new, different and more innovative ways," she says.

While L. Saha used technology as a way to broadcast their physical event, for Lone Design Club (LDC), it was central to the experience itself. Visitors to their pop-up London Fashion Week event were treated to a series of virtual and augmented reality experiences, including an activation created by Wenkly Studio which allowed visitors, both in person and remotely, to explore and interact with a virtual LDC store.

"It was about asking 'how can we really start to merge the physical and digital even more to keep that idea of a global community alive?'" says Morter of the newly globalised fashion week format.

By combining the physical with the digital, she aims to "approach fashion week on a totally different scale", a sentiment echoed by many brands and attendees as they've had a taste of a more sustainable, innovative future for London Fashion Week.

For some, the catwalk will always be the ultimate manifestation of fashion, but it's clear London Fashion Week, under COVID-19, represents an opportunity for change that many are eager to embrace. "It's about time fashion had a kick in the pants," Morter concludes. ●

Burberry's 23-minute virtual catwalk was filmed at an undisclosed, sun-lit forest near London. Created in collaboration with artist Anne Imhof, models rambled among the woodland wearing the latest In Bloom collection in a dramatic, dream-like performance as artist-musician Eliza Douglas performed live.

"I felt an increased sense of separation, like the contrast of the luxury clothes and models versus my very unglamorous lockdown reality just widened the void," says MacGilp. What both MacGilp and Hyatt can agree on, however, is that a virtual show is necessary in putting a stop to people flying around the world for the sake of a ten-minute show. MacGilp says: "There's no way we can return to that kind of frivolous pollution."

The designers behind sustainable brand 1x1 Studio, who chose to film their spring-summer 2021 catwalk, know that capturing the essence of a live show on film isn't easy. But they're eager to press ahead with the format. "Traditional shows bring the real temperature to the audience," they say, "and we are still looking for ways to make audiences feel as touched as they do by a physical show. It's challenging, but we'd love to try."

01 The runway finale at Burberry's Spring/Summer 2021 show during London Fashion Week in September

02 Visitors to the Lone Design Club (LDC) pop-up LFW event could experience a virtual reality activation created by Wenkly Studio to explore and interact with a virtual LDC store



LDC

As the usual pack of editors, influencers and attendant street-style photographers stayed home rather than jumping on planes and hopping between sponsored chauffeured cars, the carbon footprint associated with London Fashion Week shrunk dramatically. So too did the crowds and the few who did attend the reduced number of COV-

ID-19-safe shows found it was an altogether calmer affair.

For Hyatt it was a change for the better. "There was no queueing up for hours to get into a show," she says of the Bora Aksu catwalk she attended. "There wasn't any jostling. We just arrived, walked in and sat at our bench. I preferred that." Those who didn't get an exclusive

‘We are an industry that is resilient and creative in reshaping itself and now is the time to act’

The Institute of Positive Fashion (IPF) was launched earlier this year by the British Fashion Council (BFC) with the goal to be more sustainable, diverse and responsible. This year has shown the importance of coming together to look at the future and the opportunity to change, collaborate, innovate and rethink the fashion industry and its impact. The fashion industry has an immense cultural power and we want to ensure that the UK continues to lead globally.

In 2019 the UK fashion industry was worth £35 billion to the UK economy and employed 890,000 people. A report by Oxford Economics, commissioned by the BFC, predicts that the COVID-19 recession could be twice as hard on the fashion sector compared to the UK overall, effectively wiping out the above-average growth achieved by the industry in the past ten years.

The fashion industry's GDP contribution is predicted to drop to £26.2 billion with 240,000 direct job losses; this number increases to 350,000 if you include indirect job losses. The data shows that, alongside the economic impact, an entire generation of creative talent could disappear, putting in danger the UK's position as the creative crucible of global fashion.

The fashion industry is a giant ecosystem and the UK provides game-changing creative talent. We are an industry that is resilient and creative in reshaping itself and now is the time to act. There are urgent changes needed to production schedules, product drops and seasonality, as well as fashion weeks and buying schedules. There are innovation opportunities to develop technology, reduce waste and our carbon footprint, and support our industry and the planet, as a built-in part of growth.

The next step for the BFC as a part of the work of the IPF is to ensure that both people and planet have an equal footing in terms of industry priorities for change. Our world is home to so many different cultures and people, and different perspectives and backgrounds are what make it vibrant, creative and relevant. While diversity in the industry has improved, there are still many systemic barriers that need to be broken down to ensure the industry is truly open to everyone.

Pre-pandemic the BFC Executive Board talked about the need to address environmental change. Now, through this period of extreme challenges and change, we will refocus the BFC's resources and purpose to influence and engage with more designer-businesses and the broader industry to enable change.

We will strengthen British fashion in the global economy as a leader in responsible, creative businesses through championing diversity, building and inviting the industry to actively participate in a network to accelerate a successful circular fashion economy. We will focus on supporting excellence in fashion design, from education through to London Fashion Week and The Fashion Awards, empowering growth with shared resources to form a more resilient, fair and circular industry. Lastly we will activate positive change through communication to government and engaging the broader industry.

There are many practices that have been accepted that should no longer be tolerated. If the BFC is to truly play a significant role in strengthening British fashion in the global fashion economy it must hold itself and businesses accountable to a higher standard than ever before and address the need for change now from the catwalk to the factory floor.

Through the IPF, the BFC aims to bring together global expertise to help brands in the industry navigate an often confusing topic and kick-start a much-needed comprehensive step-change. Great work is already being done, but there is much more to do. Visit the IPF website here to view the Global Resources Map of programmes, initiatives and NGOs. ●



Caroline Rush
Chief executive
British Fashion Council

How testing and personalisation tools improve online sales

Testing and personalisation solutions powered by artificial intelligence can help fashion retailers to optimise their websites and target prospective customers with ease, says **Thomas Lawson**, head of new business UK at AB Tasty

A fashion retailer's website or app can serve as a digital window to meet their customers' wants and needs, and offers an opportunity to deliver a personalised customer experience.

AB Tasty's solutions are designed to help marketing teams achieve this goal and without needing any coding expertise. For example, the drag-and-drop visual editor makes it easy to run A/B, split, multi-page or multi-variate tests that can help to turn casual browsers into customers. It enables you to make modifications to your site one element at a time and quickly test these changes to see if they could increase your conversion rate.

A common challenge for marketing and development teams is a lack of resources. A low-code or no-code client-side testing model means the marketing team can alter images, colours and text in just a few clicks, and test the results with a controlled proportion of site traffic to minimise any risks. This avoids the need to approach busy development teams with these tasks and also delivers faster results.

For instance, you might want to change the image on your homepage to one that's more likely to attract a certain type of customer. Or perhaps you want to trial a new site layout, or introduce a checkout button that follows the user as they scroll. AB Tasty allows you to do all this and more. In fact, the more you test, the more likely you are to discover new ways of improving the customer experience.

We work with leading global brands such as LVMH, L'Oréal, ALDO and Klarna. Fenty (LVMH group), for example, used our platform to optimise the call to action, or CTA, on their homepage and generate a 42 per cent increase in clicks. And even if you're already carrying out



Sincerely Media/Unplash

limited testing on your site, our platform can help you to scale your efforts rapidly and deliver measurable results.

Our artificial intelligence (AI)-powered automation can direct traffic to the best-performing test variations, maximising the potential of each experiment you run. Sale countdown clocks, limited-time offers aimed at certain subset of your customers, or even social proof elements that use urgency messaging can be easily implemented based on your objectives.

When NYX Professional Makeup implemented social proof messaging on their site, for example, it generated a 43 per cent increase in their click-through rate and doubled the number of transactions.

AB Tasty's AI-powered Image Matchmaker widget can also automatically identify the image that puts your apparel in the best possible light. You simply select a group of images for a particular product and, as people visit that product's page, the Image Matchmaker widget will cycle through and test them. This quickly allows you to see which image most encourages people to add the product to their basket.

Finally, the library of prebuilt audience segments ensures the right messages reach the right people at the right times. These segments can be

used to address loyal customers or new ones, or those who gravitate towards either high-end or low-cost apparel products, with the most engaging and relevant message. What's more, you can easily build your own segments to deliver highly targeted experiences that convert to sales.

Working with over 900 global brands, AB Tasty has an extensive partner network, including Customer Data Platforms and UK agencies. In addition, our locally based customer success teams are always on hand to provide local support and expertise, such as assisting with campaign setup, analysis and the development of tailored experimentation roadmaps.

This approach allows brands to accelerate the learning curve and start implementing tests, gathering insights and personalising user experiences right away. It's a trend that more fashion retailers are sure to want to follow.

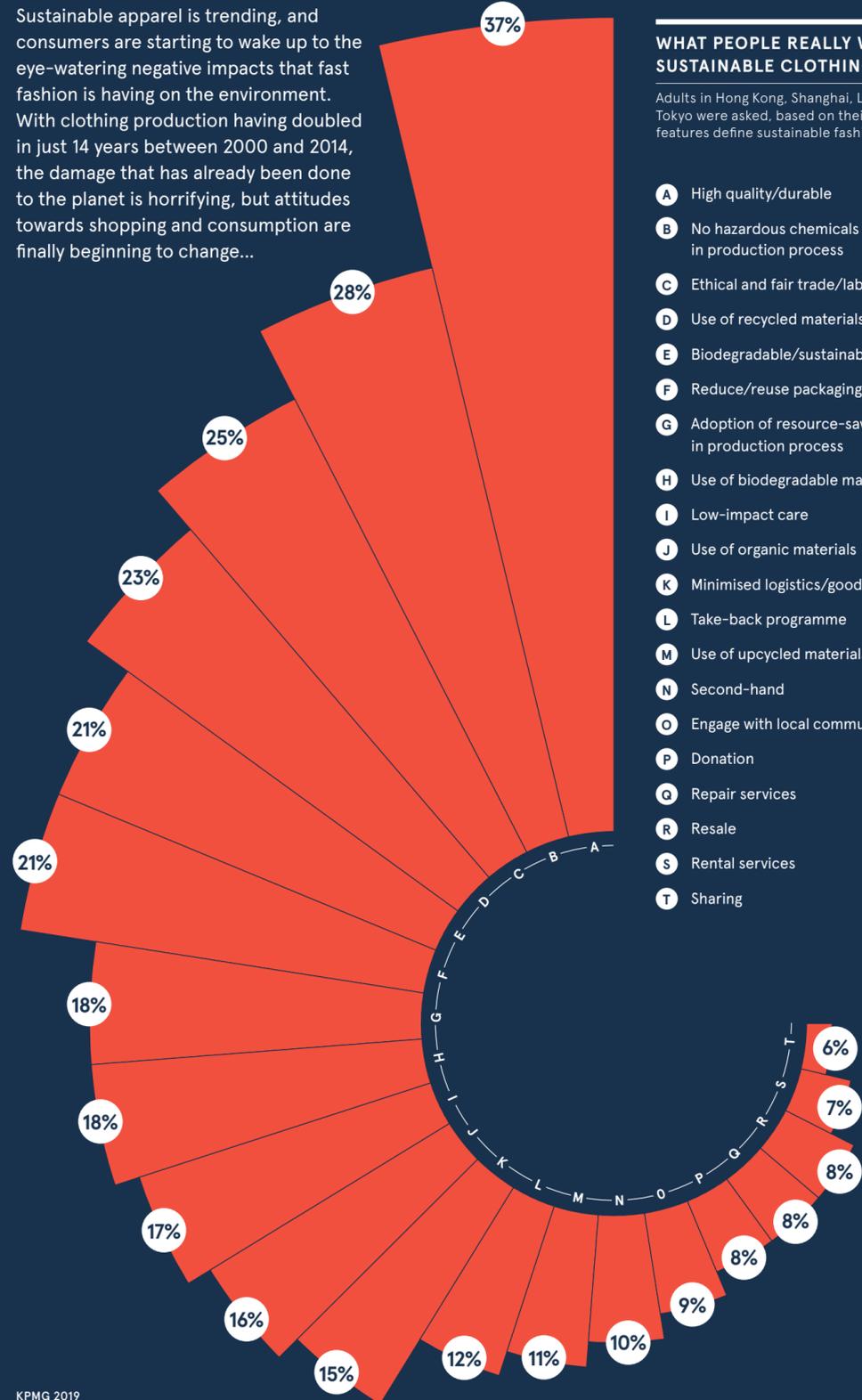
For more information please visit www.abtasty.com

AB Tasty

43%
rise in click-through rate, doubling the number of transactions, when NYX Professional Makeup implemented social proof messaging on their site

FASHION FORWARD

Sustainable apparel is trending, and consumers are starting to wake up to the eye-watering negative impacts that fast fashion is having on the environment. With clothing production having doubled in just 14 years between 2000 and 2014, the damage that has already been done to the planet is horrifying, but attitudes towards shopping and consumption are finally beginning to change...



KPMG 2019

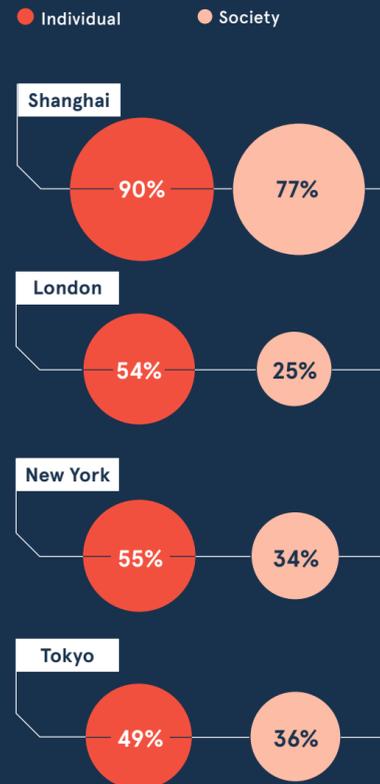
WHAT PEOPLE REALLY WANT FROM SUSTAINABLE CLOTHING

Adults in Hong Kong, Shanghai, London, New York and Tokyo were asked, based on their understanding, what features define sustainable fashion

- A High quality/durable
- B No hazardous chemicals used/pollution-free in production process
- C Ethical and fair trade/labour practice
- D Use of recycled materials
- E Biodegradable/sustainable packaging
- F Reduce/reuse packaging
- G Adoption of resource-saving technique/technology in production process
- H Use of biodegradable materials
- I Low-impact care
- J Use of organic materials
- K Minimised logistics/good supply chain practice
- L Take-back programme
- M Use of upcycled materials
- N Second-hand
- O Engage with local communities
- P Donation
- Q Repair services
- R Resale
- S Rental services
- T Sharing

SUPPORT FOR SUSTAINABLE FASHION

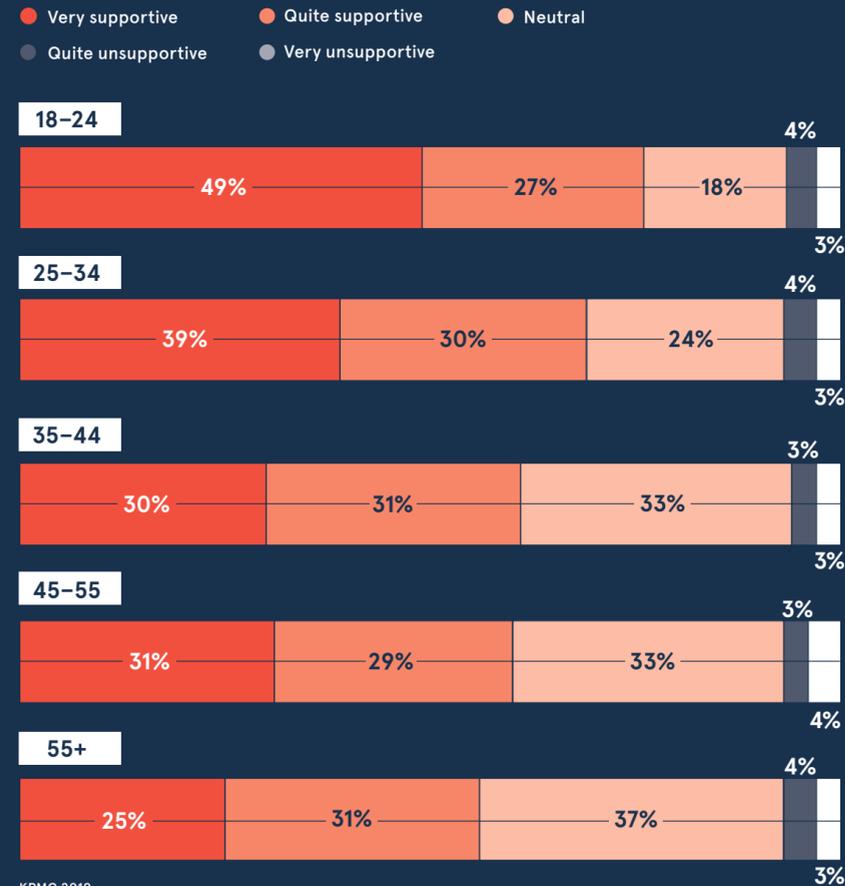
Share of adults from the following regions who are personally quite/very supportive of sustainable fashion and the percentage who believe their societies are supportive



KPMG 2019

YOUNGER BUYERS MORE SUPPORTIVE OF SUSTAINABILITY

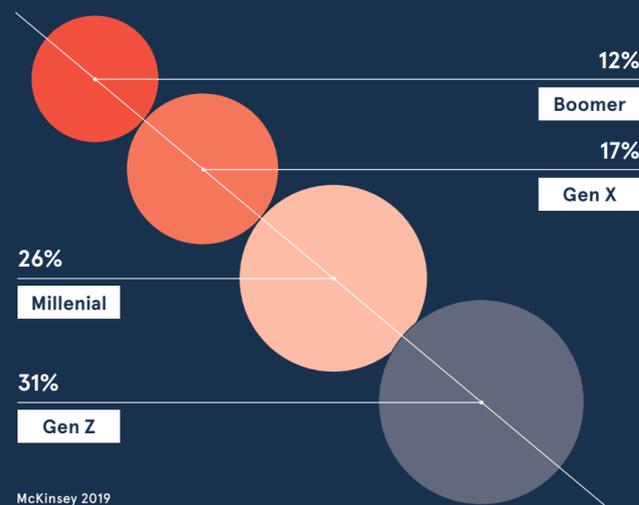
How supportive different ages are of sustainable fashion



KPMG 2019

YOUNGER GENERATIONS WILLING TO PAY MORE

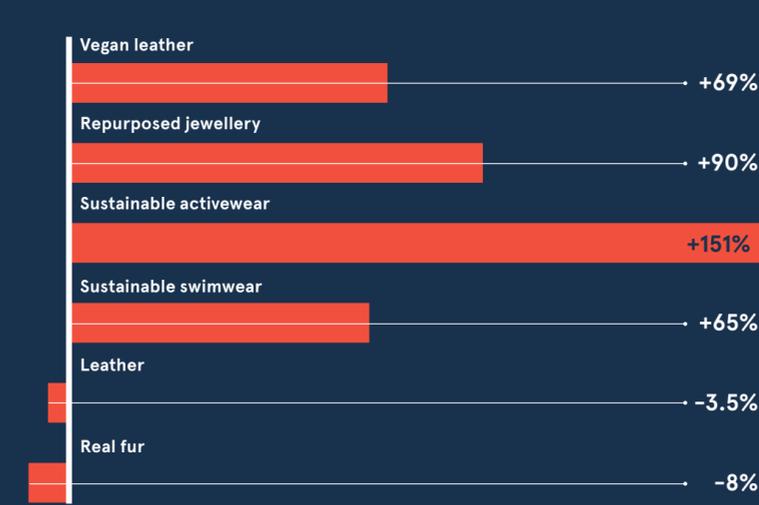
Share of different age groups in the US who say they would pay more for products that have the least negative impact on the environment



McKinsey 2019

SEARCHES SURGE

Increase in search terms over a 12-month period on the Lyst online platform; 20 million products and 100 million shoppers analysed



Lyst 2020

FRIGHTENING FOOTPRINTS

2,000 gallons of water is needed to make one pair of jeans

93bn cubic metres of water is used by the fashion industry every year

20% of global wastewater is produced by the fashion industry

8% of global greenhouse gas emissions are generated by clothing and footwear production

53m tonnes of fibre is produced by the global fashion industry each year

70% of which ends up in landfills or on bonfires

<1% is reused to make new clothes

UN Conference on Trade and Development 2019

Ellen MacArthur Foundation 2017

COMPANY PROFILE

Making clothes that breathe

Fashion needs creative thinking to tackle the climate crisis and London-based biotech startup **Post Carbon Lab** has some disruptive ideas that might just help

Clare Press

Imagine clothes that could reduce your personal carbon footprint as you wear them. Usher in the intriguing world of Post Carbon Lab where fashion photosynthesises.

This biotech startup is piloting microbial pigmentation and photosynthesis coating for textiles. From their facility in East London, they treat existing fabrics with naturally occurring micro-organisms, such as algae, which then “live” on the finished product, extracting CO₂ from the air while emitting oxygen, thus rendering the wearer climate positive.

Founders Dian-Jen Lin, a graduate of London College of Fashion’s MA fashion futures programme, and Hannes Hulstaert, who studied architecture in Antwerp, describe their organisation as “a transdisciplinary design research studio with a focus on sustainability”. Their ambition is to become the world’s first climate-positive dye house. Just don’t ask them to sell you a t-shirt.

“The obvious thing is to make a sustainable product and sell it,” says Lin. “I’ve had this conversation with many people from serious business backgrounds who think we need a product-based model to thrive in the economy. However, we resist that.”

For Lin and Hulstaert it comes down to purpose. “Why are we doing this? The reason is not to chase huge profits,” says Lin. “You can easily imagine us chugging out t-shirts treated with our process, we have the facilities to do so, but that is not disruptive.”

On the surface, Post Carbon Lab is in the business of carbon sequestration, but there’s deeper stuff at play. The duo started out with a design provocation: what if fashion could have a positive ecological role?

“We want to get people thinking about their responsibilities,” says Lin. “To embed a ripple effect through the notion that if you don’t take care of [our treated fabric], it could possibly die. It makes people’s heads spin because it’s a different way of looking at sustainability.”

In January, Lin spoke at the 9th Future Fabrics Expo about the

challenges of embedding innovation in the fashion supply chain. For starters, Post Carbon Lab’s results are not standardised, at least not yet.

“It’s not like [ordering] a Pantone colour,” she says. “It will be within a range, but maybe light purple to a lighter purple.” And while their bacterial pigment dyes are fixed, the photosynthesised coatings can change colour according to conditions. “We have to put a lot of effort into communicating,” says Lin, but that’s a positive when your approach is collaborative.

“We want to open the door to research and the lab,” Lin told the Expo. By employing the service provider model, they’ve side-stepped the barriers to entry – risk, investors, non-disclosure agreements – that mean many prototypes take years to reach market. “Send us a message by Instagram; we can have a chat. Tell us what kind of garment you want to coat,” she said.

Last year, emerging designer Olivia Rubens did just that. The result was a series of “living knits” that debuted at Helsinki Fashion Week in July. “I love that you literally have to take care of it like a plant,” says Rubens. “You can actually see it dying if you neglect it.”

There are three elements to keeping the treated fabric healthy, explains Lin. First, light, “which can be moderate; they are not very light intensive”. The second is ventilation. “You can’t put it in a very dark enclosed environment for long, which is good, because that would defeat the object. You want to be interacting with it, so it can capture your carbon emissions and emit fresh oxygen.” Third is air moisture. “You can do that through spritzing,” she suggests or by hanging the garment in the bathroom after a shower.

Lin is excited by the possibilities of multiple hands forming a chain of custodians for the living fabric. According to Fashion Revolution, a hundred pairs of hands touch a garment before it reaches the customer.

“As a bio-dye house, we come in with our photosynthetic coating



Photosynthetic coated fabric from Post Carbon Lab

Post Carbon Lab

quite early on, say, after the farm or after the fibres have been extracted. Then afterwards? Let’s make a guess: there could still be 50 or 60 people involved in bringing this garment to you and those people all have to rise to the challenge of taking care of the treated piece.”

It sounds like a logistical nightmare though? “Maybe we’re too idealistic,” she laughs. “But piling up products before they’re ready to be sold is an old business model. Brands are looking to reduce inventory as much as possible, adopting pre-ordering and resale models, which are challenging the idea that you have to collate stock in one centralised area. Potentially the supply chain becomes much more distributed and localised.”

Lin and Hulstaert are still trying to figure out how best to scale Post Carbon Lab. “At the moment, our target market is Europe-based small and medium-sized enterprises,” says Lin. “We are still small. If you want to amplify carbon sequestration, it’s really good to scale up. But

“**We want to get people thinking about their responsibilities... if you don’t take care of [our treated fabric], it could possibly die**”

do we want to export to Australia, America, Asia? How does that add up from a carbon perspective? We can’t forget why we are doing this.”

Fashion’s climate impacts are in the spotlight. In August, Global Fashion Agenda and McKinsey & Company published the *Fashion on Climate* report that revealed the sector was responsible for 2.1 billion metric tonnes of greenhouse gas in 2018, roughly equivalent to the entire economies of France, Germany and the UK combined. Emissions from fashion account for around 4 per cent of the global total and are way off track for meeting Paris Agreement targets.

Brands’ carbon neutrality goals tend to focus on offsetting emissions, rather than reducing them. Few are willing to discuss degrowth or completely new business models.

“Mitigation and offsetting aren’t enough,” says Lin. “We need a paradigm shift, regenerative practices, to stop thinking someone else will fix this stuff for us. We need to take care of our own carbon emissions. But also, and this doesn’t get discussed enough in the sustainable fashion conversation, it’s much more sustainable to take care of what you have right now than to buy new clothes. Maybe it’s not about selling brand new products?”

“We’re still gathering data on how Post Carbon Lab’s users feel from an emotional point of view. We are asking them, ‘Does having to participate in this care practice make you feel more connected to your garment?’” So maybe it’s not about money either. How might the industry grapple with that? ●



Post Carbon Lab founders Dian-Jen Lin and Hannes Hulstaert

Post Carbon Lab

Q&A Making buy now, pay later easy

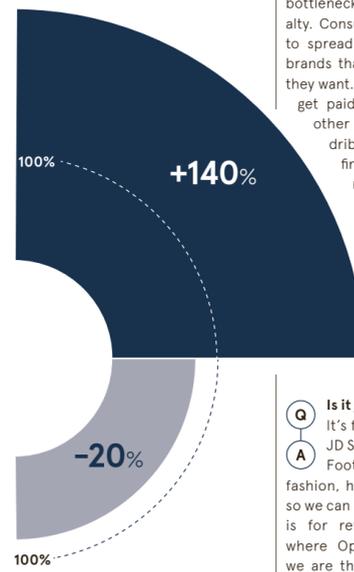
Openpay is a buy-now, pay-later service on a mission to change the way people pay for the better. UK managing director **Andy Harding** explains why the model makes sense



Q What is Openpay?
A We are a payment service which enables customers to buy the things they want and need now and pay later. Repayments are made in equal installments each month, normally from three to seven months. Let’s say you want to buy a new £200 coat. With Openpay this can be split into four equal payments of £50. Following an initial upfront payment, each payment is then debited automatically every month. At the end you’ve paid exactly £200, no more than before.

THE OPENPAY DIFFERENCE

▲ Increase ATV by up to...



▲ Reduce returns by up to...

Q Why do consumers prefer it?
A It’s a great way to manage cash flow. Even medium and high earners may prefer to spread payments to avoid getting into debt or running out of funds before pay day. Openpay is a hassle-free alternative to credit cards and overdrafts. Our model is so clean and simple. There’s no interest and no fees, if you repay on schedule. No complex paperwork. Consumers buy now and spread the payments over time.

Q Why do businesses offer Openpay?
A First, Openpay can significantly improve basket size by allowing consumers to overcome cash-flow bottlenecks. Second, it drives loyalty. Consumers value being allowed to spread payments and shop with brands that offer them the services they want. Third, is speed. Businesses get paid in full right away, unlike other finance products which dribble cash over time. And finally, is our impact on returns. We ask consumers to make the first payment up front. This cuts buyer’s remorse. In fact, returns can be cut up to 20 per cent this way. This is proving a game-changer for companies that offer Openpay.

Q Is it just for online retailers?
A It’s for everyone. We work with JD Sports, Watch Shop, Fulham Football Club and others across fashion, home, beauty and lifestyle, so we can see how powerful Openpay is for retail brands. In Australia, where Openpay is headquartered, we are there for consumers across all areas of their lives. As well as retail we are also strong in automotive for

Commercial feature

MOTs, accessories and tyre changes, home improvement, and healthcare for dental services. Pet stores and vets offer Openpay too, and we have recently entered the education and membership verticals. Openpay is for all sizes, all sectors.

Q You charge consumers no fees or interest, so how do you make money?
A It’s true, we charge consumers no interest or fees if they pay on time, the final sum will be the same number they see at the check-out. Naturally, there are charges for late payment, but this is more about incentivising good behaviour and only issued as a last resort. We work with consumers to ensure they don’t get into trouble. Our revenue comes from a small percentage of the transaction from the merchant. It’s slightly more than a credit card transaction. The real value to the merchant is that we drive their key performance indicators higher, such as conversion and loyalty, but with average transaction value, or ATV, increases being the main one. Offering Openpay typically increases transaction value by 80 to 140 per cent.

Q How straightforward is Openpay to implement?
A It’s not a complicated product and we have a lot of great technology to accelerate implementation. Our systems are cloud based and connect via an application programming interface, or API, to the retailer’s platform. We have been fully integrated into many of the leading ecommerce platforms in the UK, such as The Hut Group’s Ingenuity platform, Retail & Sports Systems and Venditan. We’ve also built software development kits for a number of other ecommerce platforms, such as Salesforce Commerce Cloud, SAP Hybris, Magento and others. We’ve had merchants integrate in days. Realistically, I would say it’s a week to ten days for a development team to plug in and solve backend reconciliation. And a bit of time to test and run analysis. So start to finish is probably up to a month.

Q What makes you different to other providers?
A Our model is unique. Other providers tend to offer shorter repayment times of two months or

less. We offer up to six months, which means each monthly payment is lower and the ATV increases are much higher. Repayments are monthly, whereas other buy-now, pay-later providers typically offer weekly or fortnightly payments. Frankly, I can’t see the point of weekly or fortnightly payments, when pay days in the UK tend to be monthly. We are also incredibly customer centric. If consumers struggle to repay on time we talk to them, support them and respond to their needs. Our Trustpilot score is 4.8 out of 5; that’s better than anyone else in our space.

Q If a company wants to offer Openpay, what are the next steps?
A Visit our website and get in touch. One of our sales team will contact you and talk about your needs, about what you are trying to achieve and how your business can adopt Openpay. Our website answers a lot of questions in detail. Our mission is to change the way people pay for the better. We want to help consumers gain control over their finances. We believe that together we can improve the entire shopping experience.

Q Who are Openpay?
A We are an Australian company, listed on the Australian stock exchange (ASX:OPY). We were founded seven years ago, by a team who wanted to improve on the concept of a “lay away”, the old-fashioned notion of asking a store to hold a product for you and each week or month paying an instalment until you’ve paid in full. They

“**We want to help consumers gain control over their finances. We believe that together we can improve the entire shopping experience**”

asked why you couldn’t get the product straightaway and pay later. We were one of the first to launch buy now, pay later in Australia. Today we have merchants in Australia and New Zealand are fast expanding in the UK.

To find out more please visit openpay.co.uk or get in touch by contacting the team via sales@openpay.co.uk

openpay
 Buy now. Pay smarter.

“**We lend responsibly and we’re proud of it. We return merchant fees on any refunded items. That’s our point of difference**”

RENTAL

Rental revolution: a question of economics

They can be a great way of mitigating fashion's environmental impact and obtaining pricey clothes previously out of reach. But what impact will new rental business models have on the luxury sector?



Courtesy of By Rotation

Ana Santi

For anyone who works in the fashion industry, this is a familiar statistic: £140-million worth of used clothing is sent to landfill every year. We have known for a long time that overconsumption is causing irreversible damage to people and the planet. But a more recent and thus far less ubiquitous figure is now doing the rounds: the UK clothing rental market is predicted to be worth £2.3 billion by 2029, according to GlobalData. Welcome to the fashion rental revolution.

In the United States, fashion rental is far more established; last year, Rent the Runway closed a whopping \$125 million in funding. In the UK, the pot is bubbling. From consignment and subscription-based to peer-to-peer services, these fashion rental models are proving varied and popular, and a key part of the solution to fashion's sustainability problem.

"I came from the car industry, where for every one car shared, eleven are taken off the road, so sustainability was a driving force – excuse the pun – for My Wardrobe HQ," says Sacha Newall, co-founder alongside Tina Lake, of the designer rental platform, which holds stock

on consignment for individual lenders and brands.

"If we could apply this metric to the fashion industry, we could start to make a dent in the horrific waste that is blighting the planet. We all have a mountain of clothes sitting in our wardrobes that we don't wear and most brands are sitting on top of huge warehouses of stock. Our plan was to get all these items back into circulation and stop excessive amounts being produced."

Much of the initial attraction to fashion rental models was the ability to rent designer clothes for a fraction of the cost to buy which, as the market grows, begs the question: how will fashion rental affect luxury brands in the long term?

"Gone are the days when renting was seen to cannibalise sales," says Victoria Prew, co-founder and chief executive of HURR, a hybrid model where an individual lender can upload their own wardrobe peer to peer or opt to consign items so rentals are managed on their behalf.

"In fact, it does the opposite. It's an additional revenue stream for brands and HURR also opens up a millennial audience, highly engaged in sustainability. HURR introduces luxury brands to future

By Rotation is a peer-to-peer fashion rental app where users can both lend and hire clothes with an online community

shoppers who will go on to have the purchasing power to buy."

Indeed, this summer up-market department store Selfridges began a collaboration with HURR by bringing the platform's technology to a rental, pop-up store with more than 40 brands.

"As a data-driven tech platform, data informs every part of our decision-making process, from the brands we choose to work with through to the products we feature," says Prew. "Rather than building a highly complex platform, fashion brands should utilise existing rental technologies to access the sharing economy."

HURR uses artificial intelligence-powered attribution and item tagging, real-time ID verification and a carbon calculator in partnership with CoGo.

Yet for all the focus on fashion rental's relationship with the luxury industry, its impact on fast fashion is arguably more pertinent to conversations about sustainability. Dubbed by *Forbes* as the "clothing rental app that wants to end fast fashion", By Rotation's mission is to transform how people consume fashion, according to founder Eshita Kabra-Davies.

"Fast fashion is the space we are disrupting with our affordable price points so people of all socio-economic backgrounds can share higher-quality items," she explains. "We want people to buy less, buy better and share more."

Rotaro, the cult label rental platform, has introduced a more affordable range of rental garments, starting from £15 for a four-day rental period. "We want to offer a viable alternative to purchasing fast fashion," says co-founder Georgie Hyatt. "We also ensure we are stocking items of high quality. The initial challenge of customer acquisition is to get consumers comfortable with the idea of renting. We [then] have an overwhelmingly positive response and a deep desire to rent rather than buy disposable fashion."

But be it a side-hustle or full-time revenue stream for lenders, what is stopping individuals from regularly buying new items to upload and lend, thus adding to the excessive production of fast fashion?

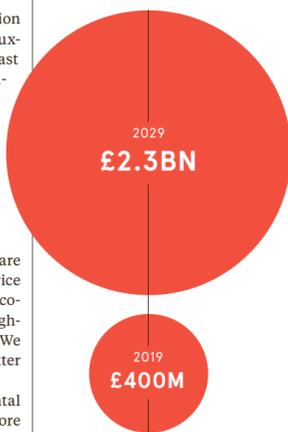
"As we only allow mid to luxury brands on the app, the expectation is that you can only list pieces of high quality. Since such items are usually priced higher, we believe people are preferring to save up for an investment piece and then share it with others on the app," says Kabra-Davies.

"This is far better than buying knock-off, low-quality pieces from high street retailers that provide such a shortcut at the expense of workers in nations like Bangladesh, Vietnam, India."

Other criticisms of the rental model include the impact of regular dry cleaning and transport on the environment. "Our logistics facility is using an advanced cleaning technology called Ozone, which is a naturally occurring gas offering medical-grade cleaning with little

RENTAL RALLY

Estimated size of the UK fashion rental market



GlobalData 2020

to no environmental effect," says Hyatt. "We have also partnered with a premium carbon-neutral delivery service."

HURR, meanwhile, has just announced a partnership with Oxwash, a dry cleaning company with a cold-wash process. "All HURR managed rentals will be dry cleaned through Oxwash, whose water consumption is 60 per cent less than any other laundry in the world, filtering out 99 per cent of the polyester – plastic – microfibre normally released into the environment," adds Prew.

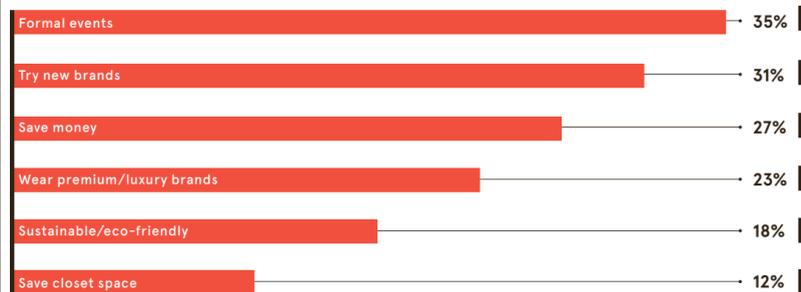
By not resting on their laurels, these fashion rental businesses are reaping rewards. HURR has seen an 850 per cent growth year on year of registered members while By Rotation's users have rocketed by 5000 per cent in the same period. Since lockdown, Rotaro's rentals have increased by almost 25 per cent.

At My Wardrobe HQ, stock holding has increased by 50 per cent, with a 60 per cent increase in traffic to the website. "We offer customers the chance to keep the items they love so that now 70 per cent of our sales come from resale rather than rental," says Newall. "Many people are using the rental opportunity as a 'try before you buy'. It's a fully circular economy." ●

WHY PEOPLE RENT

Survey of consumers who have used or would consider a fashion rental service

CGS 2019



OPINION

'Consumers are calling for it, retailers are fighting for it, now government must support it'

This was set to be the year for global action on climate change, with the UK at the heart of the movement as it prepared to host the United Nations Climate Change Conference. Yet, as with everything else, the pandemic has created many unexpected challenges and thrown the country into turmoil.

It's clear when talking with government officials that tackling climate change remains high on the political agenda, but thanks to coronavirus, economic recovery is now the priority. These two elements can be brought together to create a win-win for the environment and for the economy: focusing on building up green industries will stimulate investment, generate business and help offset job losses. So, what does this mean for retail?

Retailers are leading the charge and making great progress towards a 45 per cent absolute carbon emission reduction, according to the British Retail Consortium's (BRC) latest data. Through the BRC, more than 20 leading retailers signed a declaration to reach net-zero carbon emissions, right across the supply chain, ahead of the government's 2050 target and BRC will publish a roadmap for the industry later this year.

To get to net zero will require the industry to pull out all the stops. For fashion and textiles, this means adopting circular economy principles such as take-back schemes to shift consumer behaviour away from the take-make-dispose business model, a significant driver of carbon emissions. As the focus turns to recovering from the pandemic, UK retailers have an opportunity to create an even more sustainable fashion industry that can boost the economy at a time when it is needed most.

What many people do not realise is that almost 100 per cent of textiles and clothing can be recycled. Yet, according to WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme), only 3 per cent was recycled in 2017. Why? Because the UK lacks the infrastructure necessary to facilitate recycling of these textiles. In Germany, 75 per cent of clothing is collected and recycled. This could be the case in the UK too, but we need government to work with businesses to develop a world-leading recycling system

for our textiles. In turn, this would reduce the amount of clothing going into landfill and create jobs in recycling and upcycling.

It's hard to imagine the UK as a mass producer of textiles and clothing, but we only have to look back to the 1970s when fashion manufacturing in the UK was booming. Back then, British retailers used British manufacturers, which made the most of local skills across the country, and then exported those products all around the world.

The UK could once again become a world leader in high-tech, ethical and sustainable fashion, which would create thousands of new jobs, tackle climate change and level up many parts of the country.

To do this, the government must fund innovation and invest in technology and infrastructure. That includes building a bigger network of charging points, which will mean electric vehicles can be used for deliveries and carbon emissions will fall. It means tackling labour exploitation wherever it may occur through tougher enforcement or licensing measures, so onshoring of manufacturing can happen. It means investment in technology and infrastructure that will effectively capture and sort materials and lead to a world-leading recycling system for our clothes and textiles.

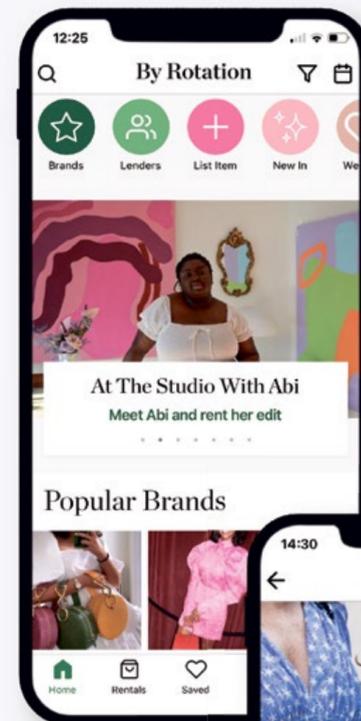
So, as we emerge from the coronavirus crisis and decide our future, we should look to the past for inspiration. Britain can once again be a hub for clothing, manufacturing and distribution, while leading the way towards a green recovery. Consumers are calling for it, retailers are fighting for it, now government must support it. ●



Helen Dickinson
Chief executive
British Retail Consortium

BY ROTATION

The UK's largest fashion rental platform



Join the fast-growing community of 30,000+ Rotators

DOWNLOAD THE FREE APP NOW



MATERIALS

Fighting fast fashion with textile innovation

From fungal handbags to algae t-shirts, the makers of these leather and cotton alternatives are on a mission to reduce fast fashion's environmental impact

Sam Haddad



Imperial College London

Fungal 'leather'

Demand for leather alternatives is growing as consumers increasingly question the ethical and environmental impact of wearing chemically treated animal hides. Yet synthetic substitutes for leather are no panacea as they're derived from fossil fuels, require the use of hazardous chemicals in their production and are not biodegradable.

Fungal biomass, extracted from mycelium, offers a new and exciting way forward, according to a recent paper from the University of Vienna, Imperial College London and RMIT University in Australia, published in *Nature Sustainability*.

Producing fungal mycelium is typically low cost. It can be grown on sawdust or other forestry or agricultural waste, then

treated to produce a leather-like textile, which can be as durable and flexible as leather, though is of course vegan and animal free. The growth of fungi is carbon neutral and, if it isn't combined with other synthetic materials, biodegradable at end of life.

In the last five years, the use of mycelium as a sustainable textile has generated much academic and commercial interest. And companies in Italy, the United States and Indonesia have already produced prototypes. Mycotech from Indonesia have made handbags, trainers and wallets, while Bolt Threads in America collaborated on handbags and totes with Stella McCartney and Chester Wallace.

The low raw material costs and relatively simple production process also suggest fungal leather may be an attractive sustainable material for smaller businesses and designers to work with.

Pineapple 'leather'

Since its launch in December 2014, Piñatex has gone from an innovative natural textile to a prolific leather alternative. Made from waste pineapple leaf fibres, it's now used by more than 1,000 brands worldwide, including Paul Smith, Hugo Boss and H&M, for clothing and footwear, and by Hilton Hotels for soft furnishings.

Piñatex was invented by Dr Carmen Hijosa, who had the idea while consulting in the Philippines during the 1990s. There, she witnessed the environmental impact of mass leather production and chemical tanning, but also noticed the use of woven plant fibres in traditional garments and the abundance of discarded pineapple leaves left after the fruit was harvested.

Hijosa quit her job and did a PhD to develop a sustainable textile and scalable supply chain from that wastage. Of that decision, she says: "Design is not just about product. Design is about responsibility."

After the pineapple harvest, the long fibres from the fruit's leaves are extracted, then washed and dried by the sun, or in drying ovens during the rainy season, to produce a fluffy material. This is mixed with a corn-based polylactic acid to create rolls of non-woven mesh which are shipped to Spain and Italy for finishing.

Piñatex has proven to be a versatile natural fibre with good strength and flexibility. It's available in a range of colours and finishes, including a water-proof version. On the downside, the product isn't yet 100 per cent biodegradable as it's made from two different materials, 80 per cent pineapple leaf fibre, 20 per cent polylactic acid.

According to Orange Fiber, Italy produces 700,000 tonnes of citrus by-products a year, which proves difficult to dispose of. By upcycling these natural fibres, the company helps alleviate this waste burden, while catering to consumers who are increasingly looking at the environmental impact of the

Lab-grown 'leather'

Dr Chetna Prajapati, lecturer in textiles within the creative arts at Loughborough University, was awarded a PhD for her work on biotechnology in textile design. One of the emerging sustainable fibres she's most excited about is Zoa, a bio-based fabric made by US company Modern Meadow.

Zoa is created in a lab by using the DNA of yeast to make collagen, in a similar method to beer production. This collagen is then purified and shaped to create a leather-like material. "It's a liquid," says Prajapati. "So that allows you to be much more creative in the process, in terms of moulding it. And you're not creating metres of fabric; it's fabric without waste."

Algae 'cotton'

The Deep Green Biotech Hub at the University of Technology Sydney has the highest concentration of algae bio-scientists in the world. Their vision is to use algae, which absorbs carbon dioxide and produces more than 50 per cent of the oxygen we breathe, to replace fossil fuels.

Dr Mark Liu is a fashion designer collaborating with the hub to develop sustainable textiles made from micro-algae. "Algae is full of cellulose [cotton is 99 per cent cellulose] and it's under our noses," he says. "Micro-algae double in bio-

mass in 24 hours, compared to cotton plants which take 100 days. We could be growing it in the sea instead of on arable land."

Orange 'silk'

At the luxury end of the spectrum, Orange Fiber channels Italy's high-fashion heritage and Sicily's historic orange industry by spinning citrus waste into a silk-like sustainable textile. The business was founded in 2014 by Adriana Santanocito, who studied fashion design at AFOL Moda in Milan, and later patented a method for extracting cellulose from orange pulp and turning it into a silk-like yarn.

According to Orange Fiber, Italy produces 700,000 tonnes of citrus by-products a year, which proves difficult to dispose of. By upcycling these natural fibres, the company helps alleviate this waste burden, while catering to consumers who are increasingly looking at the environmental impact of the

"Twenty years ago, people were saying this is the future; now we're there. It's just a case of scaling it up and trying to make it cost effective and accessible."

What excites Prajapati the most is the change she believes emerging materials such as Zoa will have on the mindset of fashion designers, including her students.

"I think this is a great opportunity for them to re-evaluate what they're doing, to stop and think about the impact of the fibres they're using," she says. "There is definitely an increase in awareness, and the ones who are really passionate will embed these principles into their projects and use it as opportunity to make conscious changes."

3

Unlike algae which actually purifies water as it grows, cotton production is linked to water contamination and it requires huge amounts of water to grow.

The use of algae in the fashion industry is still in its infancy. It's being used as a cotton substitute in a biodegradable t-shirt by Vollebak, combined with pulped eucalyptus and beech.

AlgiKnit has received seed funding to weave kelp fibres for use in footwear and fashion designer Charlotte McCurdy has made a water-resistant raincoat from algae.

"It's still the very early stage," says Liu, but he sees algae's potential as vast. "You can have cotton replacements, but you can also replace polyester by growing algae as a lipid. Everyone is trying to find the algae that does the best job for the thing we've used before," he says.

clothes they wear. The company also hopes its textile will spark new conversations around sustainability in the fashion industry.

Orange "silk" has a soft, lightweight feel and is biodegradable, though the fabric can also be blended with other materials. Salvatore Ferragamo was the first fashion house to use Orange Fiber fabrics throughout their collection in 2017 and in 2019 Orange Fiber produced a collection with H&M Conscious, the Swedish brand's sustainable fashion line.

5



Backend digitalisation is a must for fashion to embrace the digital age

Challenges facing retailers without an omnichannel presence have been amplified by the coronavirus pandemic, JOOR helps to accelerate much needed digitalisation at the wholesale back end

The fashion industry has been through a turbulent journey as retailers and brands have sought to respond to changing consumer expectations, while trying to identify a business model that works for the digital age. Bricks-and-mortar companies have sought an online presence to survive and online-only players have realised customer acquisition costs are much higher without the scale of a high street store. Omnichannel is the winning combination, but it needs a savvy approach to digitalisation.

While consumer-facing innovation has enabled brands and retailers to embrace digitalisation at the front end of their business, they have largely overlooked it at the backend, with basic tools like Excel spreadsheets predominantly used by business-to-business (B2B) wholesale teams. By focusing almost entirely on consumer-facing digital transformation, the irony is that the end-customer experience has in fact suffered. When the backend is not

efficient, customers can't buy the right products because information isn't where it needs to be.

The selling floor is decided much earlier, and much more upstream, when buyers and sellers meet at market weeks, fashion events and trade shows. As the biggest impetus for change since Amazon popularised online shopping, coronavirus is now forcing the B2B wholesale side to recognise they too must innovate and digitalise, led by tech platforms such as JOOR.

"The fashion commerce industry has evolved pretty slowly," says Kristin Savilia, chief executive of JOOR, a leading advanced digital retail platform. "It took the rise of Amazon for retailers to realise they needed to make things simpler and that has really consumed the industry ever since. Fashion responded with ecommerce sites and by digitalising the frontend, with great consumer-facing innovations like magic mirrors, personalisation and drop shipping. Now, it has taken

a pandemic for them to realise they can't keep running the backend with spreadsheets."

JOOR provides virtual showrooms that run independent of the buying calendar and facilitate 24/7 wholesale shopping from anywhere in the world. The platform enables brands and retailers to manage their entire wholesale business online so they can view linesheets, place and manage orders, schedule virtual appointments,

“
We firmly believe virtual showrooms will live on because of the additional content they provide

and optimise performance and growth through data insights.

The company works with more than 8,600 brands in 55 categories and over 200,000 curated retailers in 144 countries. Three quarters of global luxury brands use JOOR to conduct their wholesale business, with the platform currently facilitating an average monthly gross merchandise volume, or GMV, of more than \$1.5 billion.

Launched earlier this year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, JOOR Passport centralises the trade-show and fashion-week experience by digitalising interactions between brands and retailers. This enables a year-round marketplace where retailers can discover new styles and designers, and brands generate more connections. JOOR is the first platform to have hosted virtual fashion events, attracting more than 100,000 visitors so far and buyers from retailers including Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Net-a-Porter, Printemps, Galeries Lafayette, Shopbop and thousands of boutiques globally.

The virtual events extend the traditional four-day length of a fashion show to a multi-week experience attracting visitors from around the world at any time of the day or night. Brands can see who has attended their virtual booths, favoured them and easily connect, follow up and facilitate orders on the platform. Virtual events supported by JOOR include London Fashion Week, New York Fashion Week, Ontimeshow in China, Splash Paris, as well as Bogota and Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Istanbul.

"We have democratised fashion shows and allowed buyers with a single login to shop the events of the industry," says Savilia. "It has been transformative. We're changing the

industry for the good and it's permanent. Physical events will for sure come back, but they will come back different, the way consumers found the winning combination to be, omnichannel with digital there every step of the way to support the physical events.

"The initial push was business continuity. Brands simply needed to digitalise to survive, creating a mad rush. Our demo requests were up 400 per cent. Even though stores were closed and people furloughed, brands were still requesting JOOR, which to me was a positive because it said the industry was not rolling over. They realised they needed to digitalise and JOOR was positioned to deliver."

Within weeks of the coronavirus pandemic, recognising buyers required more than flat photography to inform their decision-making, JOOR launched 360-degree imaging. Brands quickly adopted it and were soon requesting even further advancements to display the full flow of a garment. A few weeks later, JOOR launched the ability to upload and view style videos, whether a runway video or simply a model moving in the garment. Buyers can now enter an enriched virtual showroom with rich imagery, video and content.

"That all came out of this pandemic," says Savilia. "When physical showrooms reopen, buyers will undoubtedly return, but we firmly believe virtual showrooms will live on because of the additional content they provide. They extend the reach of a brand, so if buyers can't fly to a trade show, event or showroom, particularly small and medium-sized businesses or independents with more limited resources, they can still get the full experience. We have 200,000 retailers using JOOR. For them, the ability to log on to a beautiful virtual showroom has been transformative."

"We are breaking records in fashion brand sign-ups. However, more importantly, JOOR as a platform is now beginning to transcend fashion, with brands in other spaces starting to join, including Crestview, a global home decor and furniture brand based out of China, and Hollander, a home textiles brand. This is driving us into other categories because the concept of digitalisation in the backend absolutely needs to happen across the retail landscape. Brands and retailers just can't continue living on spreadsheets."

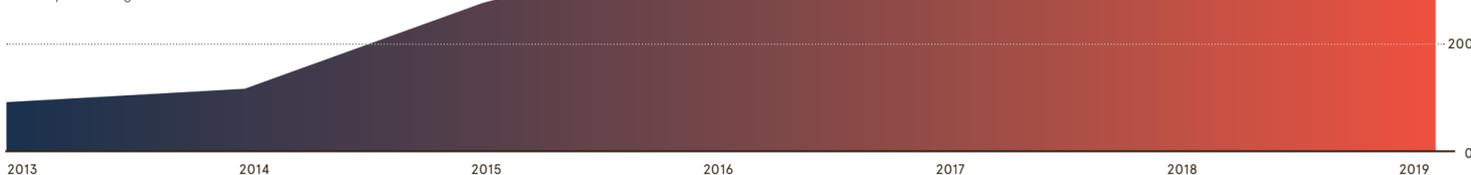
Even when the pandemic is finally over, it's clear fashion brands, events and retailers will not succeed without a strong digital component at both their front and backend. Whether it's taking an iPad to a showroom or event, or a complete replacement via the JOOR Passport platform, they need to digitalise to keep up with the pace at which fashion is now moving. Meanwhile, brands and retailers are sure to struggle if they continue to rely on spreadsheets while their competitors are utilising beautiful virtual showrooms.

For more information please visit Joor.com



MATERIAL INNOVATION

Annual patent filings in textile innovation



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RESPONSIBLE CONSUMERISM

Buying smarter, not more

Recent shifts in buying behaviour mean brands are having to adapt to a new world of conscious consumerism, where customers demand sustainability and supply chain transparency with each transaction

Chris Stokel-Walker

We love clothes and the clothing industry loves us. Our predilection for fashion and the purchases we make keep half a million people in jobs in the UK. It's a £26-billion industry, according to the British Council. But the sands are shifting in the fashion industry and there's a growing awareness of responsibility on both sides.

Consumers are cautious about the way the industry works and the wastage and poor conditions under which workers toil to bring them the latest catwalk fashions on the high street. Retailers are also worried that, lured by cheap prices and abundant designs, we're shopping ourselves into unsustainable debt, particularly at a time when coronavirus is crashing the economy. Responsibility is the watchword for all parties, whether they're buyers or sellers.

The changes brought about in consumer behaviour by the pandemic have given retailers the ability to understand better their customers' needs and habits. It has also given the industry time to pause and reflect on how it can help promote a sustainable future for all.

Fashion-conscious consumers can quickly rack up big bills buying the latest items, all while churning through their wardrobe at a worrying rate. Retailers are cottoning on to the risks and helping consumers become smart shoppers. As well as simplifying and reducing lines to put out whole-year collections, rather than regular new releases with the change of seasons, retailers are offering shoppers new services.

Many have partnered with payment provider Klarna to offer buy-now, pay-later services, allowing people to try items without accumulating interest for a short time before either returning the garment or paying for it by text message. Laybuy, a similar scheme, works with other retailers to reduce impulse purchasing and improve sustainability.

Other businesses forgo garment ownership entirely. Companies such as Hire Street encourage people to try rather than buy items, renting luxury fashion for a short time before returning it, instead of buying a dress to sit unworn at the back of the wardrobe for 11 months of the year. Yet business-led initiatives are

only part of the solution as consumers need to change, too.

Between 1963 and 2009, the number of deliveries a day remained steady at around one for every ten people. By 2017, it shot up to 2.5 for every ten people as a result of more of us shopping online. More choice, lower prices and the lure of free returns meant ecommerce ballooned. It was a buyer's world and we knew it.

But untrammelled growth and a fast fashion economy couldn't continue forever. Every online delivery of new clothes to offices and homes sent carbon emissions rising. The miles travelled in the delivery chain compounded the issue and that's before we even thought about sending back the four sizes of the same item we also ordered to ensure the right fit.

Ecommerce has changed attitudes to how we buy as one in ten purchases made in stores are returned at most, compared to one in four online. DPD, one of Europe's biggest delivery companies, saw the number of returned items it handled double between 2017 and 2018.

Online shopping continues to rise: internet sales as a percentage of everything we buy have increased 50 per cent in a year, according to the Office for National Statistics. Yet consumer attitudes are changing.

"We're in a transition where I think COVID-19 has made people stop and re-evaluate everything," explains Rachel Kan, fashion sustainability specialist at Circular Earth, a consultancy. This could have a major impact on the way the fashion industry responds, says Luke Smitham of Kumi Consulting. "What has worked is pressure from civil society on issues," he says.

We're growing increasingly aware of the impact our shopping habits have on the planet and the people who live on it, and consumers are determined to make a change. There are moves up and down the process and across the fashion industry to adapt to responsible consumerism, and to suit consumer demand for more ethically sourced and environmentally friendly processes.

One of the ways brands are trying to make clearer the impact of their clothing on the planet is by increasing transparency of the supply chain. Since the 2012 fire in a garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh, which killed 117 people, consumers have signalled their unhappiness at cheap clothes produced in unsafe conditions.

Headlines about the plight of Uighur Muslims in China's Xinjiang province, who help supply much of the world's clothing brands with cotton and other textiles, have also given consumers pause for thought. And stories about garment workers in Leicester, paid less than the minimum wage producing clothes for Boohoo, have thrown a light on the human impact of fast fashion.

"On the luxury fashion side, you can have shorter supply chains with more control because you're making fewer pieces," says Smitham. "You can go back to traceability."

But it's easy to complete the paper trail while still bending the rules and maintaining a clean audit. What's needed is the adoption of cutting-edge technology like blockchain, which can track a cotton fibre from source through to manufacture of a garment.

"The consumer now wouldn't know by looking at a garment where it has come from, where the yarn is from, where the cotton is grown," says Kan. "With blockchain you'd be able to know what sheep the fleece in your jumper is from."

Companies make some concessions to traceability and transparency, but they are often piecemeal. "As a consumer, it's really hard without a consistent amount of information across companies to make that decision as to who you should or shouldn't go to," says Smitham.

Likewise, technology can help head off issues with endless returns and the iteration of designs before they're even manufactured. There's also waste when retailers order samples of clothing in different sizes before making purchases. 3D technology, which

“ COVID-19 has made people stop and re-evaluate everything... What has worked is pressure from civil society on issues

maps clothes onto different sized bodies, can prevent that happening. Shorter supply chains and tech-enabled insights can take the guesswork out of ordering garments.

"A good season is generally 60 to 80 per cent sell-through and the rest is incinerated or sat at the back of the shop as dead stock," says Kan. "Going towards something more virtual, and some of the catwalk stuff recently becoming virtual, is a [business] model."

Perhaps the most responsible action is making the fashion sector a more circular economy by reusing and recycling clothes. Rapanui, a fashion brand that set out to tackle waste in the 100 billion items of clothing bought worldwide, has expanded to become Teemill, an on-demand, sustainable fashion business making new products from recycled ones.

It's a business model Kan would like to see others follow. "Each company has to evaluate their own brand's way of being," she says. "Bigger brands will have to go to circularity in the first instance." ●



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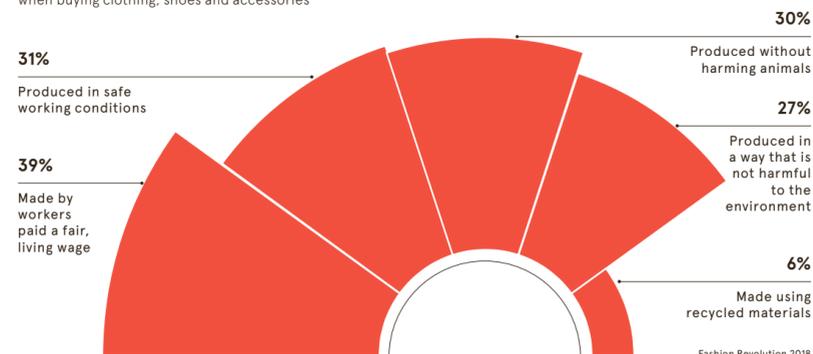
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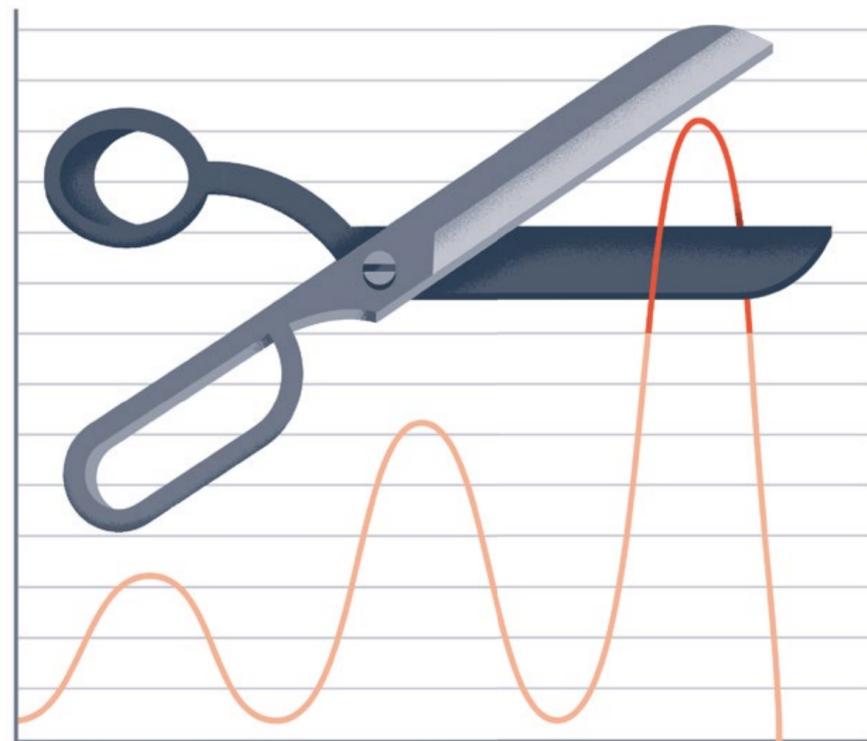
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CONSCIOUS CONSUMERS

Share of consumers across five European countries who said it is important to consider the following when buying clothing, shoes and accessories





INVENTORY

Tackling unsold inventory for good

From customer data analytics to rethinking over-production, retailers are coming up with innovative solutions to one of the biggest pain points for the industry

MaryLou Costa

Unsold inventory has been declared one of the biggest problems for fashion retailers this year, with mounting levels of excess stock and the question of what to do about it prompting calls for an industrywide reset.

Commentators are unanimous that legacy avenues, from discounting to the more controversial disposal and the highly criticised practice of destruction, are not fit for purpose, proposing a more widespread adoption of data and technology, as well as a stronger connection to supply chains.

"The number of online arrivals in the UK is 16 per cent lower than last year. This indicates the urgency to pump the breaks on flooding inventories while retailers still work to move unsold clothes stock, on top of protecting margins," says Kayla

Marci, market analyst at retail intelligence company EDITED.

"Traditionally, aggressive discounting is deployed to help shift unsold clothes stock. However, even pre-COVID, it was a tactic that was failing to engage consumers as it used to. Retailers managed to dilute the excitement surrounding sale periods with constant product drops, resulting in greater markdowns, removing the urgency for consumers to buy full price.

"The pandemic has encouraged a reset to the traditional trade calendar to help break fashion's addiction to discounting. This should result in collections dropping closer to the season to realign with the current customer's 'buy-now, wear-now preference' and maximise selling times, resulting in lower inventory levels."

Marci commends brands, including Christopher Raeburn, Marques

Almeida, Frankie Collective and Christy Dawn, for exploring new business models, such as upcycling deadstock (unused materials from previous collections), and Marks & Spencer for "hibernating" stock for later release.

Yet perhaps one of the most innovative is Inditex, owner of high street brand Zara. In its 2020 half-year results, it posted a 19 per cent drop in

“The pandemic has encouraged a reset to the traditional trade calendar to help break fashion’s addiction to discounting

unsold inventory against an online sales growth of 74 per cent. Known for its small, but frequent, approach to new releases, it also credits this performance to its €10-billion investment in digital and sustainable transformation over the past seven years, fuelled by a further €2.7 billion over the next three years.

This will enable the development of its proprietary Inditex Open Platform, which uses machine learning to determine optimal stock levels. Combined with its RFID (radio-frequency identification) clothing tagging and integrated stock management systems, their digital transformation is driving towards a broader target of optimising business operations.

"This is a cornerstone of our unique business model, with three key pillars of flexibility, digital integration and sustainability," says Inditex group executive chairman Pablo Isla.

Such digital integration is core to the business model of high-end fashion brand Another Tomorrow, launched in January 2020 by Vanessa Barboni Hallik, a former managing director at Morgan Stanley, who left finance to redefine how luxury brands approach business.

Materials such as wool and cotton are sourced directly from farms, with consumer data informing what Another Tomorrow should design with those materials.

"There aren't that many brands buying raw wool from the farm, but it's instructive in that it makes sure you have enough to produce what there's ultimately demand for. This creates a lot of flexibility in what you bring to market. The final product is based on data," says Barboni Hallik.

"We've started to release products based on when we think the customer will need them, continuously putting things out throughout the year. And because we maintain about 80 per cent of our collection as 'core', there's always something there for the customer."

This season-agnostic approach, which is becoming more widely adopted, means unsold clothes stock isn't an issue for Another Tomorrow, as unused raw materials can be tapped into at any time.

"If we had just put out a whole autumn collection, because that's what we're supposed to do, then we wouldn't be sitting here with a bunch of wool that we can use for various things that can stay connected to the customer's needs," Barboni Hallik explains.

"We'd be sitting here with a backlog of tailored overcoats and suiting that will probably sit around for the next six months. So it's building in flexibility and optionality for your business by being as responsive to data, and the customer's needs, as possible."

The creation and use of data at a product level, coupled with digitalisation of apparel, Barboni Hallik believes, "is going to be increasingly important in solving this problem."

It's an argument echoed by Flora Davidson, co-founder and chief commercial officer of fashion brand development platform SupplyCompass, who advises retailers need to be investing more in "understanding their own consumers."

INVENTORIES IN FOCUS AS SALES SLUMP

Comparing monthly clothing and footwear sales volumes in the UK with pre-pandemic figures in February

-34.9%

JUNE

-25.7%

JULY

-15.9%

AUGUST

Office for National Statistics 2020

The coronavirus pandemic has forced fashion retailers to move from "how do we get rid of unsold inventory?" to "how do we stop producing so much?", says Davidson. More brands that otherwise may never have changed their way of working are now open to experimenting in what she hopes is a much-needed "tech leap" about to hit the industry.

"Unsold inventory is a huge issue that has been around for decades, but this is on another scale," says Davidson. "Our approach to it is helping through technology. Our agile, on-demand digital supply chain network is helping more retailers produce much closer to the season and be more reactive to the consumer. We can reduce lead times by up to 75 per cent.

"The challenge for a lot of big retailers is they are designing collections that are often not sold until nine months down the line. That's just too risky because no one knows what the current climate is going to be then. So a lot is down to reducing the time from idea to delivery. The only way we can do that with any significant improvement is by having cloud-based software at the heart of the process."

Another Tomorrow's Barboni Hallik warns: "This unsold inventory problem is going to have to stop, given the industry's track record of dramatically overproducing relative to demand for the past two decades. People will just stop funding businesses that continue to have this problem."

Yet Davidson at SupplyCompass is hopeful of "a shift towards designing smarter: more core styles, more seasonless pieces". But will the industry get it right and learn to produce the right amount, as COVID-19 restrictions continue to influence shopping behaviour? "There's a lot of work to be done in this space," she concludes. ●

Textiles must innovate with transparency

It would seem fashion and sustainability are not always cut from the same cloth

Fashion feeds off celebrity, turning names into brands. Sustainability, in contrast, is effectively a team sport where everyone has skin in the game, says Ebru Ozkucuk Guler, head of sustainability and corporate social responsibility at ISKO™. "As global citizens we all carry a responsibility to consume less, but better, and as consumers we are waking up to the impact of our choices. There is also, though, a clear call for leadership at the design phase, to signal intent and inform demand," she says. Heeding the call, as the largest denim manufacturer under one roof in the world, ISKO™ is acutely aware of its responsibilities to both the planet and its people, and the company can prove it.

Verification: the label behind the label

Third-party certification is a cornerstone of the company's eco credentials and the approach to validation at ISKO™ is rigorous and comprehensive. This is the substance behind the style.

With the modern textile industry better equipped than ever to leverage data in support of standards and accountability, independent third-party audits play a pivotal role in helping to build trust and boost transparency.

"It is important to speak a common language when it comes to sustainability, by providing reliable, verifiable information throughout the value chain and ultimately to the end-consumer," says Guler. "The industry as it stands is too opaque. Fashion must find that common language and learn to collaborate."

Transparency and traceability are the supply chain attributes that together give brands and consumers the visibility they crave. For sustainability, they are the label behind the label.

Underpinning every end-product is the associated production facility, where a certified environmental management system, or EMS, ensures robust measurement and monitoring of impacts, including energy, water, waste, chemicals and emissions.

This all-in attitude is the stuff of world firsts. Having obtained life-cycle assessments (LCAs) for every one

of its 25,000 products, ISKO™ became the only denim manufacturer ever to obtain pre-certified environmental product declarations (EPDs).

These EPDs verify data on the water usage and carbon footprint per square metre of fabric, providing buyers and customers with proof, plus confidence in the choices they make.

R-TWO™: reused and recycled

At ISKO™, the epitome of the sustainable evolution in denim is the R-TWO™ programme. With R-TWO™, ISKO™ applies the classic waste hierarchy to production processes and resource consumption to reduce, reuse, recycle and recover, in order of priority.

This is no mere efficiency drive, however. In the spirit of the commitment to responsible innovation at ISKO™, R-TWO™ fully embraces circular-economy principles to cut loss and waste, by blending reused cotton and recycled polyester. Working with reused cotton sees ISKO™ pioneering significant impact reduction.

The reason this is important is that when raw cotton is processed into yarn, some 10 per cent is typically expected to be lost as waste. With R-TWO™, however, ISKO™ differentiates its offering by working continually to trace, track and monitor this loss and reuse the cotton by adding it back into the spinning process. Validated by a third party, all this reused cotton is content claim standard (CCS) certified.

ISKO™ then blends certified recycled materials with the reused cotton to create R-TWO™. This is a

“As global citizens we all carry a responsibility to consume less, but better, and as consumers we are waking up to the impact of our choices

Commercial feature



veritable win-win for sustainability, as producing recycled polyester uses less energy than making virgin material and lessens the dependence on petroleum. Both factors reduce the overall carbon footprint and, depending on the percentage of certified recycled polyester, the R-TWO™ fabric can either be global recycle standard (GRS) or recycled claim standard (RCS) certified.

Material reuse is key for ISKO™, especially cotton. Guler says: "Our main aim here is to factor the 'loss' back into production in a traceable way via third-party audits. Our end-goal, however, is ultimately zero waste, both in raw-material supply and in our post-production results."

Organic cotton: facing COVID-19

For fashion, ISKO™ and the world at large, of course, 2020 has proved a year like no other. The coronavirus pandemic has brought many challenges, but also sparked innovation and fostered collaboration in response to societal emergency.

ISKO™ was inspired to act by evidence of a rapidly emerging need for high-quality face covers for the general public. These were required to be manufactured on a large scale, so as not to disrupt the supply of medical masks reserved for frontline clinical staff.

10%

of material is typically lost as waste when raw cotton is processed into yarn

To meet this demand, ISKO™ created the ISKO Vital™+ business, leveraging the firm's global reputation as an innovator in the manufacture of specialist high-grade sustainable cotton fabrics.

The result is the Supreme face cover for day-to-day use, made with a patented four-fold design from ISKO Vital™+. A groundbreaking fabric, created in-house by research and development (R&D) experts, ISKO Vital™+ is both fluid repellent and highly effective at filtering bacteria. Its integrated sanitised technology gives an additional level of protection against COVID-19.

Furthermore, these attributes are all achieved via a single layer of organic cotton, dermatologically tested and OEKO-TEX Standard 100 certified, making this pioneering face cover perform well for both breathability and wearability.

In a major gain for sustainability, the Supreme face covers are also reusable. They can be hand or machine washed up to 30 times, which helps combat waste generated by single-use disposable masks.

This commitment to creating face covers is no temporary fix. Establishment of a separate arm to the business, along with significant investment in a dedicated R&D lab, production and infrastructure, as well as global public relations and marketing, shows the long-term commitment made by ISKO™ to helping society find sustainable solutions to new and ongoing global health risks.

This is sustainability in fashion and in action. Guler concludes: "Sustainability is paramount to business as we see it today, not just as an essential management system for the textile industry, but for livelihoods globally. It is, in essence, a long-lasting and harmonious relationship with the natural resources we utilise responsibly and the social impact of our actions."

For more information please visit ISKODenim.com

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