

# Reflection essay on fashion

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The changing dynamics of the fashion industry have forced retailers to desire low cost and flexibility in design, quality, and speed to market, key strategies to maintain a profitable position in the increasingly demanding market. This article reviews the literature on changes that have happened in the fashion apparel industry since the sass, highlighting the emergence of a concept of throwaway or fast fashion. It describes fast fashion from a supplier as well as a consumer's perspective, and draws attention to several potential research issues.

Keywords: fast fashion; supplier; consumer; quick response; fashion season

The fashion apparel industry has significantly evolved, particularly over the last 20 years, when the boundaries of the industry started to expand (Decline and Minima 999). The changing dynamics of the fashion industry since then, such as the fading of mass production, increase in number of fashion seasons, and modified structural characteristics in the supply chain have forced retailers to desire low cost and flexibility in design, quality, delivery and speed to market (Doyle, Moore, and Morgan 2006).

In addition to speed to market and design, marketing and capital investment have also been identified as the driving forces of competitiveness in the fashion apparel industry (Sinai 2006). Franks (2000) suggested 'sense and respond' as the key tracery to maintain a profitable position in the increasingly dynamic and demanding market. A key defining characteristic of rapid responsiveness and greater flexibility, in this context, is to maintain closer relationships between suppliers and buyers (Wheelwright and Clark 1992).

Looking at the basic structure of the fashion industry until the late sass, traditionally fashion apparel retailers used their capability of forecasting consumer demand and fashion trends (known as ready-to-wear) long before the actual time of consumption in order to compete in the market (Coercing 2001). However, recent years have seen fashion retailers compete with others by ensuring speed to market with their ability to provide rapidly the fashion trends revealed by fashion shows and runways.

According to Tapping (1999), such retailers could be credited with the adoption of 'quick fashion' that is an outcome of an unplanned process on the reduced time gap between designing and consumption on a seasonal basis.

Today's fashion market is highly competitive and the constant need to 'refresh' product ranges meaner that there is an inevitable move by many retailers to extend the number of 'seasons', that is, the frequency with which the entire merchandise within a store is changed. With the emergence of small collections of merchandise, fashion retailers are encouraging consumers to visit their stores more frequently with the idea of 'Here Today, Gone Tomorrow'. This indicates a shorter life cycle and higher profit margins from the sale of fast selling merchandise, skipping the markdown process altogether (Sydney 2008).

In addition, desire to have variety and instant gratification with price mavens is motivating consumers to prefer retailers such as Ezra and H (National Post 2009). Several studies have examined various aspects of the buyer-supplier relationship with quick or fast fashion, such as the apparel design process

relative to quick response (Formal and Venial 1996), the role of the supplier in fast moving fashion (Doyle, Moore, and Morgan 2006), buyer behavior (Bruce and Daly 2006), and financial performance (Hayes and Jones 2006).

However, there appears to be a gap in the literature focusing on the overall concept of 'fast fashion' that has emerged in the fashion industry from a consumer perspective. Among numerous studies on fast fashion, only a few studies have focused on the consumer aspects that drive the changes in the fashion industry (for example, Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006). The purpose of this paper is to explore the changes that have occurred in the fashion apparel industry in the past two decades and attempt to understand how fast fashion emerged to the extent that it is today.

Specifically, the study examines the changes in the fashion apparel industry leading to the evolution of 'throwaway or fast fashion'. A brief review of the literature serves to systematize and appraise the existing work. This study further attempts to align the research capabilities with market growth potential for fast fashion and proposes different venues for conducting research to acquire a better understanding of fast fashion as a consumer-driven approach, not only supplier-driven.

## **Overview of the fashion apparel industry**

In the course of the last two decades, the fashion apparel industry across the globe has undergone profound transformation due to various changes in the business environment. To understand the areas for research in fast fashion for the future, it is important to consider how it has evolved. The following

sections discuss the changes that have occurred in the fashion industry since the sass.

## **Fading of mass production**

Until the mid sass, success in the fashion industry was based on low cost mass production of standardized styles that did not change frequently due to the design restrictions of the factories, such as Levis 501 Scares and a man's white shirt, although there were exceptional cases of rapid changing haute couture (Brooks 1979). Apparently, consumers during that time ere less sensitive toward style and fashion, and preferred basic apparel. Bailey and Etcher (1992) reported a sudden increase in the import of fashion oriented apparel for women as compared to the standardized apparel in the sass.

The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research 167 This reduced the demand for classic though simple apparel as consumers started becoming more fashion-conscious (Bailey 2001). For instance, the women's legwarmer industry introduced colors and textures to basic hosiery to coordinate with every outfit (Donnelley 1996). Unfortunately, this change in fashion oriented apparel undistributed to an increase in mark-downs in the market, which became necessary due to the failure to sell fashion apparel during the forecasted season (TOT 1987).

This argument was further supported by Malone (1998, 1999) who provided evidence that mass production of fashion products was not a solution to gain profits in the fashion business. Fashion seasons As fashion is considered to be a temporary cyclical phenomena adopted by consumers for a particular

time (Spoolers 1979), it becomes evident that the life cycle for fashion is quite small. Since the sass, a typical life cycle for fashion apparel had four stages: introduction and adoption by fashion leaders; growth and increase in public acceptance; mass conformity (maturation); and finally the decline and obsolescence of fashion.

Also, the fashion calendar during this time was primarily based on the fabric exhibitions, fashion shows and trade fairs, that consisted of the basic pattern of Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter ranges which typically resulted in developing a seasonal range in one full year. However, towards the beginning of the sass, retailers started focusing on expanding their product range with updated products and faster responsiveness to the 'newness' of the fashion trends; and providing 'refreshing' products instead of only cost efficiencies for manufacturing (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006; Hines 2001; Hoffman 2007).

In order to increase the variety of fashion apparel in the market, the concept of adding more phases to the existing seasons (that is, the period of time during which fashion products are sold) in a fashion calendar came into existence. The addition of 3 to 5 mid-seasons forced immense pressure on suppliers to deliver fashion apparel in smaller batches with reduced lead time (Tyler, Heeled, and Bahamas 2006).

For instance, Liz Collarbone developed six seasons instead of just two (Bailey 2001). These changes to the number of mid-seasons arose partly from the changes in consumers' lifestyles and partly from the need to satisfy consumers' demand for fashion clothing for specific occasions. Structural

characteristics Towards the late sass, the fashion apparel industry was dominated by several large retailers which increased the competition levels in the market (Barnes and Legendary 2006).

In order to survive the competition, other fashion apparel retailers switched from product-driven to buyer-driven chains, developed alliances with suppliers in efferent markets, and promoted their distinctive brands (Tyler, Heeled, and Bahamas 2006). This resulted in an increase of profits from unique combinations of high-value research, design, sales and marketing that would allow them and the manufacturers to act strategically by linking with overseas factories (Grief 1999, 43).

Tyler, Heeled, and Bahamas (2006) illustrated that the fashion apparel industry developed an infrastructure around the late sass with an emphasis on promoting responsiveness (quick response) through reduced lead times, along 168 with maintaining low costs. Hereafter, the phenomena of sourcing manufacturing ND processes in fashion apparel industry to offshore places with low labor costs became a trend, thereby resulting in a substantial cost advantage.

Despite the merits of outsourcing, it led to significantly longer lead times, complicated supply chains due to geographic distances, inconsistency and variability in processes at both ends of the chain, and complex import/export procedures (Bristle, Squished, and Frito 2003; Bruce and Daly 2006). In fact, the idea of cost savings through outsourcing manufacturing to low wage nations became deceptive as the savings sometimes were significantly low

compared with the cost of obsolescence, forced mark-downs, and inventory carrying costs (Christopher, Lawson, and Peck 2004).

Tyler, Heeled, and Bahamas (2006) highlighted product development as the weakness for the longer lead times to deliver fashion apparel to point-of-sale to consumers. As further explained, they illustrated that all the key players in a supply chain (that is, fashion and textile designer, retail buyer and manufacturers) worked in sequence in order to contribute their role, resulting in excessive costs, lack of effective communication and reworks due to inaccurate product developments.

Furthermore, instead of translating the trends into the market quickly, fashion retailers failed to sell the merchandise during the appropriate season, adversely impacting the profits (Frito, May, and Straighten 1995).

Not surprisingly, the situation became worse due to the rapid changing lifestyles and consumers' choices for fashion and clothing in the market. All these shortcomings forced the industry toward restructuring in order to improve their operational performance (Tapping 2006).

Some of the examples of restructuring that emerged around the sass include Just-in-time techniques and quick a response tit shorter lead times. For example, the number of fashion apparel retailers in the USA that started implementing a quick response (CRY) strategy grew from 60% to 72% from 1994 to 1995 Cones 1995). In recent years, these changes in the fashion apparel industry in the USA in terms of outsourcing manufacturing to low wage countries and demand-driven flexible supply chains have shown that



quick responsiveness is possible even in the presence of long physical distances.

Fast fashion Fashion is defined as an expression that is widely accepted by a group of people over time and as been characterized by several marketing factors such as low predictability, high impulse purchase, shorter life cycle, and high volatility of market demand (Fernier and Sparks 1998). Thus, in order to be profitable in the industry, fashion apparel retailers need to take the 'speed to market' approach to capitalize on fashion that is not in the stores of their competitors.

It has been further emphasized that market responsiveness and agility through rapid incorporation of consumer preferences into the design process in product development increases the profit margins for retailers (Christopher, Lawson, and Peck 2004). Looking at history, fashion runways and fashion shows were the biggest inspiration for the fashion industry. Along with this, these trend shows were primarily restricted to designers, buyers and other fashion managers.

However from 1999 onwards, fashion shows and catwalks became a public phenomenon, where photographs of the recent fashion shows could be seen in magazines and on the web leading to demystification of the fashion process (Sydney 2008). As a result, fashion-conscious consumers were exposed to exclusive designs and styles inspired from runways. Retailers such as H&M, Mango, New Look, and Top Shop were adopting such designs rapidly to attract consumers and introduce interpretations of the

runway designs to the stores in a minimum of three to five weeks (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006).

Drawing on the foundations of quick responsiveness, the fashion apparel industry shifted from forecasting future trends to using real-time data to understand the needs and desires of the consumers (Jackson 2001). The inability to accurately forecast or predict future trends (Christopher, Lawson, and Peck 2004) or failure to quickly imitate and produce fashion apparel as seen on runways (Richardson 1996) can lead to risk associated with longer lead times and once failure to attract facetiousness's consumers.

Using real-time data can eliminate this possible risk. United Kingdom retailers The UK fashion industry has been widely acknowledged to have initiated this unique strategy in the fashion industry (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006). Since its beginning, the fashion apparel industry has been characterized by high levels of dominance by large retailers in the I-J with inflexible supply chains (Hines and Bruce 2001). Around the sass, apparel manufacturers and retailers, primarily from the I-J witnessed price pressure from the strong players in the market.

In order to stay in competition, I-J retailers such as New Look and George shifted sourcing of merchandise to the Far East for a low cost advantage. In doing so, supply chains became more complex due to extensive geographical distance, thereby forcing these retailers to introduce practices such as just-in-time TIT), computer integrated manufacturing (COM), total quality management (TTS) in manufacturing along with emphasis on shorter

supply lines and quick response in the market (Bruce, Daly, and Towers 2004).

As an outcome, retailers in the I-J started providing increased variety and fashionably to their customers, peeping in mind the low cost of the merchandise. In addition, they also added mid- season purchasing to their previous two-season calendars, resulting in providing high fashion at a low price throwaway market'. Since then the throwaway market' (now called fast fashion) has become a trend or norm (Tokomak, Wrigley, and Guzzling 2008). In sum, the concentrated UK fashion " market resulted in street fashion as an attempt to gain a competitive edge along with market share through speed to market (Bristle and Breather 1998).

The following sections provide supplier and consumer perspectives in regard to fast fashion. Fast fashion from the supplier perspective Apparel markets have become more varied and faster-changing in the present retail environment. The development of new, quick fashion appears symptomatic of the transition from a production-driven to a market-driven approach in the fashion apparel industry. Retailers have started realizing that flexibility and rapid responsiveness to the market are the areas that are most important in today's market.

During the past two decades, the fashion apparel industry has received increased attention in the context of buyer-supplier relationships, and quick espouse and 170 supply chain management to gain a competitive edge in the market (Crew and Davenport 1991; Frito, May, and Straighten 1995; Shoal, Perry, and Pratt 1998; Perry and Shoal 2000). Inacademicstudy, fast

fashion has been researched from the perspective of a business model with a quick response strategy to reduce production times (Bailey 2001).

Literature on fast fashion reflects association with pressure on lead-time reduction in an organization and coordination with various players in the supply chain (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006; Weenies 1999). The obsolete long-eying cycles for many fashion retailers has forced them to improve responsiveness in reduced time, resulting in an introduction of several practices in the fashion industry that describe shorter, more flexible supply chains such as quick response (Fernier and Gamma 2004), Just-in-time (Bruce, Daly, and Towers 2004) and agile supply chains (Bruce, Daly, and Towers 2004; Christopher, Lawson, and Peck 2004).

In order to improve efficiency in the demand-driven market, these practices have often been related to vertical integration focusing on collaboration, information sharing and trust between entities in a supply chain (Bristle, Squished, and Frito 2003). In addition, improvements in communication between retailers and producers through technologies such as computer-designing (CAD) and electronic data interchange (DEED') have contributed to shortening lead times (Bruce, Daly, and Towers 2004).

### **Fast fashion from a consumer perspective**

Consumers are becoming more demanding and fashion savvy which is forcing fashion retailers to provide the right product at the right time in the market - in other words, provide quick (fast) fashion (The Economist 2005). As the consumer market is fragmented in terms of consumption patterns, fast fashion is gaining in importance among consumers. With such

developments, researchers should identify the full spectrum of consumer behavior towards fast fashion.

The literature on fast fashion highlights various aspects of supply chain management, supported by supply chain theory to improve the business model of fashion retailers. It is worth noting that not many studies have addressed fast fashion as a consumer-driven approach, leaving this an under-researched area. Information and trends are moving around the globe at erroneous speeds, resulting in consumers' ability to have more options and thus shop more often (Hoffman 2007).

Changes in lifestyle due to coloratura factors and a need for uniqueness forces fashion retailers to renew merchandise constantly to deal with the growing competition in the market (Spoolers and Burns 1994). The constant, varying demands by consumers has impacted the process of forecasting and product planning shifting; towards replicating famous designs and styles from fashion magazines and fashion shows in small quantities more frequently (Christopher, Lawson, and Peck 2004). The perception of throwaway fashion varies among different generations.

For example, young people of the population that constitute Generation Y would prefer a higher number of low-quality, cheap and fashionable clothes as compared to baby boomers, who would prefer to purchase fewer number of higher quality clothes (Crew and Davenport 1992). From conservative consumers' perspective, fast fashion is viewed as a 'Waste' because rather than buying one high quality item to satisfy a wardrobe need, consumers

buy multiples that are lower quality and then throw old merchandise away as quickly as they bring in new ones (Sydney 2008).

In 171 agreement with Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006) and based on different perspectives of consumers toward fast fashion mentioned in this study, it is apparent that fast fashion is a consumer-driven approach, in addition to a supplier-driven approach. Future research related to fast fashion Review of existing research on different aspects of fast fashion indicates that the past 20 years have seen substantial progress in knowledge generation about the topic, as evidenced by the increasing number of Journal publications over time and the variety of topics addressed, though these are mostly restricted to the supply chain domain.

Literature n fast fashion implies that rapid responsiveness techniques such as Just-in time, quick response, and agile supply chains can be valuable to the fashion industry because such techniques can create a competitive edge in the market (see, for example, Bruce, Daly, and Towers 2004; Christopher, Lawson, and Peck 2004; Frito, May, and Straighten 1995; Shoal, Perry, and Pratt 1998).

However, minimal evidence addresses consumer behavior towards fashion that is quickly changing (see, for example, Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2006). By knowing how and to what extent rapid changing fashion affects consumers' purchase behavior and satisfaction levels, tillers can develop strategies that can lead to improved profitability. The phenomenon of fast fashion has been extensively discussed in the fashion press.

However, the existing academic literature on fast fashion is somewhat limited and calls for additional research on aspects such as factors that motivate consumers' purchase intention such as exclusivity, price-consciousness, hoarding merchandise for future use, consumers' perceived risk due to trade-off between quality and price, consumer expectation and satisfaction after the consumption process, and consumers' efficiency in terms of cost-benefit analysis.

The dramatic change in the fashion apparel industry, coupled with environmental concerns giving rise to conscious consumers in terms of fair trade, the green market and organic clothing, implies that researchers will need to broaden, redesign and align their research to match the fashion markets in the twenty-first century. Further research can also examine the pricing strategy used for fast fashion apparel along with analysis of consumers' willingness to pay more for environmentally friendly and sustainable fast fashion apparel (for example, organic and green cotton apparel used by Ezra and H&M) (see Ethical Style 2009).

Currently, little is reported in the literature regarding the segmentation of consumers based on the acceptance of fast fashion. Therefore, it is important to conduct research to analyse the acceptance of fast fashion across different consumer segments. Another area of research interest could be to see whether consumers perceive fast fashion brands as counterfeit due to lower price and quality offered by the retailers. Also, it will be worth understanding how consumers differentiate value retailing and fast fashion retailing as both aim to offer lower prices.

## **Conclusion**

Fast fashion is a concept that will continue to affect the apparel industry over the next decade and will have a direct effect on the way consumers purchase and react to trends. Although continued research relative to the supply-side of fast fashion is important, emphasis should be placed on examining consumers' perception of fast fashion. Empirical understanding of consumer characteristics and their motivation to make purchase decisions for throwaway fashion can help retailers in developing effective marketing strategies to perform more effectively in the market.

References Bailey