

Soline L. Gauthier

Mr. Greco

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Changing the World of Fashion

In the world of fashion, luxury brands have traditionally determined what was fashionable and what wasn't. They proclaimed to the world what the trends were. They established the rituals of a world created for an exclusive circle of customers. Yet, as time went by, tastes changed, a fact that some designers refused to face. Teri Agins, author of *The End of Fashion: How Marketing Changed the Clothing Business Forever* describe the refusal to confront changes to the industry, using Christian Lacroix, the French haute-couture designer, as an example:

Unapologetic, the earnest couturier vowed never to surrender to commercial pressures. He wrote in his fashion program in July 1997: 'I believe I have not given in to systems whatever they might be...A Lacroix style has been born and even if it doesn't appeal to everyone, so much the better. The barefooted, jewellery-less woman, skimpily dressed in worn out togs, creates a ghost-like vision that only satisfies the most pessimistic, of which I am not one.' (20)

Ushered by the stock market crash of 1989, luxury brands lost their grip on the rich and powerful by the end of the 1990s. As the influence of major brands waned, their appeal

to the masse diminished and they were replaced with smaller and newer brands for everyday consumers. Meanwhile, new artists emerged, introducing new ideas that were unconventional in the fashion world, as Teri Agins remarks in *The End of Fashion*:

Throughout the 1970s the democratisation of fashion continued at a fast pace. Art schools pumped out rebellious young designers, rock fell in love with avant-garde clothing, the fashion press exploded and the first generation of “stylists” - those benign dictators of dress - told consumers what to wear and how to wear it. (Agins 13)

Today, smaller brands have decided to reach out to far more common and diverse customers, whether by lowering their prices, or by designing for different people such as the disabled. They discovered that fashion applies to all, and new styles can come from many corners, including their customers, and redefined the limits of the fashion world thanks to an expanded audience. In addition, while luxury brands maintained a mystique, new popular brands built a bond of trust with their customers by explaining how they made their products. Hence, smaller more nimble brands have replaced the luxury brands and their set, one might say ritualistic, ways, and brought forth a new view of the fashion world. In this essay, I will closely examine how new, different, brands have become more inclusive and displaced the traditions that were set, in an other era, by luxury brands.

IMPORTANCE

The topic of changes in the fashion industry might seem like a concern for few industry insiders, snobbish couturiers, and a few ultra wealthy customers, with little connection to the real world. As Gerry Dryansky, a Paris-based journalist, who reported on the couture houses for *Women's Wear Daily* in the 1960s, famously stated, in 1997:

They were all snobs [...] Coco vowed she'd never do ready-to-wear because she didn't want to dress everybody. [The couturiers'] ambitions weren't so high. They were rich and lived well, but they never intended to build colossal businesses.

Their snobbism was greater than their greed. (Aginis 23)

Yet, fashion is everywhere, and marks every generation, as one defines one's style everyday, by the very garment one choses to wear to testify to one's identity.

Personally I see appearance used as a language all around me, which is easy to miss unspoken as it is. As Mark Tungate, Mark writes in *Fashion Brands: Branding Style from Armani to Zara*: "It would be foolish of us to underestimate the importance of fashion in society. Clothes and accessories and expression of how we feel, how we see ourselves- and how we wish to be treated by others". Participating to fashion trends is almost inevitable. From magazines to shows on cable TV, from Internet sites to social media postings, many create styles and influence others with them. Today, what was once a closed universe is open. As demonstrated throughout many blogs and video postings and in this democratic universe of fashion, the traditional brands are out of touch. Everyone can chose to be a fashion trendsetter or a critic.

RADICALLY CHANGING RUNWAY SHOWS

Runway shows had always been the same: men and women always had separate shows. That is, up to the 2016 fashion season.

Of the many changes brands are making to the fashion week formula, one approach seems to be sticking: mixed-gender catwalk shows. Starting in September, Burberry and Bottega Veneta will combine their men's and women's collections into one show, held on the women's show schedule. In 2017, Gucci will follow suit and Tommy Hilfiger has announced plans to "eventually" do the same. (Amed and Abnett, "Mixed Gender Shows")

Many brands remain against combining gender shows, ignoring the advantages they can derive from them. For instance, there are cost benefits: mixed-gender collection also open new creative avenues; and, finally they reflect better to how stores are laid out and how customers are buying. According to fashion critics Amed Imran and Kate Abnett, "Some designers also conceive their men's and women's collections from the same ideas and inspirations, so showing them together makes sense from a creative standpoint" ("Mixed Gender Shows"). Availability is also changing. It was always a tradition for brands to sell their collection months after the show, making their customers wait to buy their favorite articles, a sore point for many years. "As early as 1957, Dior wasn't moving fast enough. [...] Retailers waiting for Dior's retail collection shifted into spin control, pleading for women to be patient, advertising that it was better to 'wait for perfection'" (Agins 24).

Now technology is more present in everyone's daily lives, accelerating the speed at which consumers hear about new products and styles, and offering new ways to buy them on-line. Imran Amed, the Editor in Chief of Business in Fashion, and Kate Abnett, a senior editorial associate at the Business of Fashion, recently reported on this new trend:

In recent years, the rise of digital media has put tremendous pressure on this model, as runway shows — now instantly shareable on the internet — have morphed into powerful consumer marketing events, leaving brands ill-equipped to convert buzz into sales for collections that have yet to be produced. (Amed and Abnett, “Burberry Aligns Runway”)

Recognizing and bowing to the trend, Burberry also announced they would dramatically change the availability of their new collections.

Immediately after the shows, the full collection of men's and women's looks will be available to buy both online and in-store. [...] Burberry has been taking steps to close the gap between runway and retail for some time, sharing its shows online and allowing shoppers to buy select items straight from the runway. (Amed and Abnett, “Burberry Aligns Runway”)

Fashion was once localized to western countries. But globalization is also forcing changes. Global consumers who live in non-Western markets with different climatic patterns” (Amed and Abnett, “Burberry Aligns Runway”). This is leading brands, in a departure from the tradition, to consider the idea of seasonless fashion shows, dropping

the notion of Fall/Winter, and Spring/Summer runway collections to take advantage of the new ways of merchandising to customers around the world.

We have been living with a fashion calendar and system that is from another era.” There is growing agreement with Tom Ford’s statement, which he made Friday as he added his name to the list of designers rushing to present consumer-friendly shows and seasonless fashion. (“The Consumer Shift”)

To the layperson, the timing of collections would seem trivial. But it is a radical transformation that will force brands to change many of the ways they do business.

Doctor Pascal Courty, Professor of Economics at the University of Victoria, commented on the impact of seasonality: “Timing of sales is an important strategic issue for seasonal goods markets because stores face a deadline to sell the capacity they ordered at the beginning of the season, and they suffer great losses when they are forced to carry their goods to the next season”. In the world of the likes of Zara and H&M, speed and agility have become imperatives, a major change from the practices of traditional fashion houses.

STREET TRENDS

In the past luxury brands held the power to define and shape styles. They proclaimed to the world what the new fashion trend was. But as time went by, the democratization of fashion meant they lost their grip of the fashion world. Already in 1997, Newsweek reported on the rise of a new generation of entrepreneurs reshaping the way fashion was identified: “Less than a decade ago it was the couture houses, or at least the major

retailers, who dictated stylishness. Now the street sets the pace for much of fashion.” (“The Kids Know Cool”).

Customers were slaves to fashion brands, buying every product that bore their logos, wearing what the Kings and Queens of fashion stated was stylish. Today, consumers define the trends as much as the brands themselves. Labels used to identify your wealth and status. Prada for bag, Gucci for heels, Christian Dior, Alexander McQueen, Coco Chanel, or Paul Gaultier for clothes were marks of your ability to buy high priced products. “Where owning a handbag for just the brand name has become less desirable for many and companies ethos are cherished” (Björn). Today, customers are buying their clothing based on comfort, social statements such as being eco-friendly, and the appearances of reality TV celebrities, leading to a multiplication of brands as consumer identify with a broader range of social groups. These behavior changes are important enough to be subject of research. Cindy Chan, a Marketing PhD candidate wrote in her dissertation about the link between social identity and consumer purchases:

Consumers can satisfy desires for assimilation and differentiation within a single choice context by satisfying different motives on different choice dimensions. They may select a product that allows them to communicate a desired social identity (e.g., a brand preferred by an in-group), while also differentiating within the group (e.g., a less popular product from that brand).

In a world where social groups appear and disappear at the speed of Internet memes, fashion trends will emerge in many places, as a means for these groups to develop an identity. This dynamic creates new opportunities and challenges for brand marketers.

EXPANDING THE AUDIENCE

Driven by commercial needs, brands have been expanding their catalogues to reach new customer segments. Some are lowering their prices, to serve customers looking for affordability. Others are creating clothing for people who are different, from the norm of physical beauty. It is now acceptable for clothing brands to display plus size models on the runway, such as the Elle lingerie fashion show at the New York Fashion Week 2016. Other brands, such as J.Crew, are breaking away from using traditional super-models, choosing instead to ask everyday people found on the streets, to walk down the runway in their collection. After more than 150 years of professional modeling, shifting to everyday consumers got the attention of the industry, as exemplified by the comments of Elle Magazine:

This Fashion Week, using "real people" instead of runway models is officially A Thing, thanks to labels like Eckhaus Latta, Tracy Reese, and Rachel Comey, all of whom mixed friends and family with catwalk regulars in their collections.

Today, J.Crew took it a step further, casting their *entire* show with people who don't pose for a living.

Whereas haute couture houses designed for the social elites, new brands are catering to different populations. For instance, Cubacub, specializes on creating clothing for the disabled and queers.

Cubacub, whose gender does not conform to the male-female binary, is a genderqueer garment-maker and performance artist whose sculptural chainmaille garments are an integral part of a new clothing collection, Rebirth Garments. The clothing is designed specifically for people who are queer and/or transgender and have disabilities. (Frumkin)

They create clothing with fun patterns, and wild colors. They want their customers to feel that despite their disability, they can still be stylish. Above all, they want to create clothing that is useful and easy for them to wear in spite of their disability making it the ultimate democratic of fashion. “Rebirth pieces for trans people include binders designed to flatten the chest and “packers” that mimic a phallic shape. Pieces for people with disabilities include catheter covers and drool cloths for those whose motor function impedes swallowing saliva” (Frumkin). Our communities are changing, becoming older and more diverse. It is only fitting, as demonstrated recently by Athleta in their blog on the power of positivity (Athleta) that fashion would adapt to that reality.

TECHNOLOGY AND CHANGING BUSINESS PRACTICES

Luxury brands have struggled to adapt to new business practices that responded to the expectations of broader audiences. Transparency, social consciousness are ways to

connect with their customers, especially younger ones. Brian Hughes, CEO of Integrity Marketing and Consulting and occasional Huffington Post contributor, puts it clearly:

We live in a customer-centric and highly connected world where consumers not only want to feel good about their purchase but also want to make use of social media to share the story behind the purchase. Consumer sentiment can make or break a business. Having a positive social purpose and a core message that resonates with your audience can be the key business differentiator.

In response to the consumer expectation of a social purpose, many of today's upcoming brands share how they make their products, deciding to open up their factory doors and describe the materials they use, to create a bond of trust with their clients. Southwest Airlines magazine editor and online blogger Austin Morton remarks how, "Various e-tailers and brands are flinging open the doors of their factories and offering consumers an inside look at how their products are made—and, in some cases, priced". Today, people are very conscious of the material producers use in their products. It matters if it is environmentally safe and if no animals were injured through the process of creating this product. "Consumers can read about (and see pictures of) the history of the factory it was made in and how that establishment was chosen, the specific materials used and the exact production process" (Morton). In our hyper-connected world, brands now have to take advantage of the Internet, whether it be having websites that make it easier of their customers to shop online, or leveraging social networks, such as Tumblr, Pinterest and Facebook, to promote styles or engage in conversations

with their customers. Imran Amed from the business of fashion sees signs of this happening:

Armani and Karl Lagerfeld have brought their fashion show videos to the Internet, iPods and mobile phones, showing that being a pioneer has nothing to do with age, it has to do with attitude. Dior has also experimented with the launch of a jewelry collection on secondlife.com." (Amed, "Some Companies Are Reluctant")

Still, brands being about emotion, technology can be challenging to embrace.

Some brands want to stick to tradition and have the press run after them. Luxury brands have a notion of being afraid of the Internet, finding it to be too risky. Amed Imran also remarks, "I have to say, it felt like being in a time warp. There was a notion that luxury "customers aren't on the Internet" and that the Internet "is too risky" for luxury brands" (Amed, "Some Companies Are Reluctant").

Yet, as a common millennial, I believe the brands that do not take advantage of this age of technology will damage their influence, as they will lose their influence with a segment of the population with growing influence and ability to buy their goods.

CONCLUSION

The very nature of Fashion calls it to feed on change, as what was new yesterday is passé today. This industry has thrived on the power of time to create on-going demand for its products. Yet technology and new consumer habits has dramatically increased the pace. New collections can flash before your eyes in a matter of seconds. "The Inditex brands exist in a dizzying fashion time frame, where the latest trend seems to be

wilting on a woman a few hours after she buys into it” (Hansen). Everyday in the press, as chains once in demand close their doors, we see how tough it is for fashion to get to the top and stay there. Yet style and fashion will never lose their appeal, no matter the changes on how they are delivered. Mark Tungate, author of multiple books on the Fashion industry, knows that fashion is not like most consumer products:

Traditional marketing is based on need. You take a product that corresponds to an existing demand, and attempt to prove that your product is the best in its category: But fashion is based on creating a need where, in reality there is none.

Fashion is a factory that manufactures desire. (Tungate 6)

Fashion remains a growth business, with more customer segments to serve, as proven by brands who now make clothing for the disabled, or queers, and for different body shapes. Smart brands are breaking through sexism with mixed gendered fashion runway shows. Traditional brands have lost some of their appeal and the relationships and expectations that consumers have of different brands are changing. Today’s fashionista connects with multiple brands and styles based on different situations and activities, as we have seen with new brands such as Lululemon. Today’s customer also have expectations that go beyond products and styles and include the ethics of the company and whether they act with integrity. As with any businesses, brands who are not afraid to adapt will thrive. Those who remain stuck in the past world of luxury will disappear. I, for one, am excited about the possibilities.

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	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
Focus	There is little or no sense of argument, and the paper wanders as a result. Generalizations and inconsistencies disorient the reader.	Central question(s) and thesis statement are present but fairly obvious. Argumentative focus is not consistently maintained or suffers from generalizations. The purpose and relevance of the discussion are not consistently clear for the audience.	Writer establishes central question(s) about the topic and a clear thesis (although it could be more complex). Writer typically maintains this argumentative focus throughout the paper. The audience gets a sense of purpose and relevance, although the argumentative structure could be better defined.	Writer establishes compelling central question(s) about the topic and a clear, argumentative thesis; this argumentative focus is honed throughout the paper. Writer communicates a clear purpose, making the relevance of the argument distinct for the audience.
Content / Organization	Introduction neither hooks the reader nor establishes appropriate context for the thesis. Body paragraphs are underdeveloped or lacking. Conclusion is missing or does not clearly bring closure to the paper. Transitions are incorrect or missing. Quotations are missing or are dropped into the text. Sentence structure and vocabulary are in need of serious improvement.	A hook is attempted, but ineffective. Context for the thesis is either thin or overdone. Body paragraphs might show some of the writer's original thinking about the topic, but they are underdeveloped or inconsistent. Conclusion basically restates the main argument but does not bring a meaningful sense of closure to the discussion or leave a lasting impression. Transitions are effective sometimes, but in other places they are incorrect or missing.	Introduction hooks the reader and establishes context for the thesis, although these elements could work more effectively. Body paragraphs develop the writer's thinking about the topic, but more varied patterns of development would improve the breadth and depth of the discussion. Conclusion makes clear how the central question(s) have been resolved, but could do more to add closure to the discussion and leave a lasting impression. Transitions are used effectively	Introduction hooks the reader powerfully and efficiently establishes context for the thesis. Body paragraphs demonstrate breadth and depth of thought about the research topic through varied patterns of development. Conclusion is memorable, leaving the reader with a distinct sense of how the central question(s) have been resolved. Transitions link sentences and paragraphs smoothly and quotations are smoothly integrated into the

		<p>Quotations are mostly dropped into the text or are not integrated smoothly. Sentence structure and vocabulary clearly need more development.</p>	<p>most of the time and most quotations are integrated smoothly into the text. Sentences tend to demonstrate sophistication in a couple of the following areas: variation, flow, creativity, mature vocabulary.</p>	<p>text. Sentences are consistently sophisticated (varied, smooth, creative, mature vocabulary).</p>
<p>Use of Sources / MLA Citation</p>	<p>Research sources are lacking or off-topic.</p> <p>Writer may string together quotations without taking time to paraphrase, comment, or analyze.</p> <p>Works Cited page is missing or shows no attention to MLA format.</p>	<p>Research sources are fairly one-dimensional, focusing on a single perspective.</p> <p>Writer's own words are not consistently balanced with quoted material.</p> <p>Works Cited does not include all required sources and/or it has multiple errors in MLA format.</p>	<p>Research sources establish a couple of perspectives on the topic, but could be more thorough/varied.</p> <p>Writer does a good job of maintaining a balance of own words and quoted material.</p> <p>Works Cited page includes all required sources and is close to meeting MLA standards, with only a few errors.</p>	<p>Research sources are thorough and varied, establishing different perspectives on the topic.</p> <p>Writer balances own words (paraphrasing, commentary, analysis) and quoted material compellingly.</p> <p>Works Cited page includes all required sources and is perfect by MLA standards.</p>
<p>Mechanics</p>	<p>Writing is seriously obscured by spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.</p>	<p>Writing contains many errors. Errors affect reader's understanding.</p>	<p>Writing contains some errors, but not at the expense of understanding.</p>	<p>Writing is polished, free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.</p>

See draft for comments

Grade: A