

Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry

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Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry: Disruption, Diversity and Sustainable Innovation

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Elaine L. Ritch, Catherine Canning and Julie McColl

Background

I am a weapon of massive consumption; it's not my fault, it's how I'm programmed to function. (Lyrics from *The Fear* by Lily Allen)

The importance of the role that fashion plays within current society is underestimated, and often dismissed as superficial. Yet arguably the fashion industry is important economically, culturally and psychologically, and is relevant in a historical context. In 2021, the global revenue of the fashion industry was 1.55 trillion US dollars with predictions that this will increase to around 2 trillion dollars by 2026 (Smith, 2022). Fashion United (2022) report that in 2021 3.45 billion people were employed within the global fashion industry, out of the global population of 7.84 billion, and that fashion industry commerce offers a GDP per capita of 16,300 US dollars. The importance of the fashion industry to the economic growth of countries, both developed and developing in the Global North and South, for trade and employment is evident in those figures and future projections. Fashion and textile trade has a long history, and although countries producing textiles and fashion have changed, for example the UK had a thriving textile and production industry until buyers began outsourcing to developing countries to reduce pricing (Jones, 2006), this core element of fashion and textiles as a commodity of economic exchange remains pivotal.

Fashion can be observed from two perspectives, firstly, as an object or idea, for example specific products or ideas that change over time because of individuals' collective preferences, and secondly, as a process of change; the stages that a fashion object goes through as it is introduced and collectively accepted/adopted by individuals. Fashion is certainly an expression of the times and is also important culturally, with design, textile and construction innovation and styles, symbolically indicating a place and time historically. For example, when reflecting on prevalent styles that signify a period in time we note the Edwardian, Regent or Victorian era, and this includes styles of attitudes, architecture, interiors, fashion and textiles. More recently in the twentieth century, fashion is aligned to a decade, and this is an illustration of the speeding up of evolving trends, supported by innovation and technological development. Culture

also represents place, unique to how countries develop, for example, Geisha's symbolise Japanese culture (Tennant, 2022), Scotland is renowned for tartan cloth, and the bowler hat is considered as typically English. Those historical cultural contexts still play a role in depicting place and are often fused into new fashion designs; take, for example, Vivienne Westwood who often worked with tartan cloth and John Galiano featured a 'pirate jacket' in his 2001 collection (Audas, 2003); both make reference to historic design and pattern cutting through their contemporary innovative design. Consequently, as will be discussed in Chapter 2, fashion design is a creative endeavour with highly respected designers who have been revered over the last century, including Coco Chanel who made famous sailor style trousers for women in the 1920s, which was vastly different to the corseted dresses that were socially dominant in that era. This notion of fashion as an art form has also been celebrated biannually in the fashion capitals of the world: New York; London; Milan; and, Paris, where fashion designers present their collections and influence the global industry. These cities are deemed as fashion leaders due to the importance of their historical trade which drew people of power and influence who had the wealth to lead stylish couture. More recently other cities also host biannual fashion collections, including Berlin, Tokyo and Shanghai.

Yet, fashion is also criticised for exploiting resources in developing countries, globalised aesthetics that have resulted in cultural erosion, and elitism. However, looking back at the trajectory of fashion – the signalling of change has underpinned a desire for 'new', always looking forward to emerging ideas that evolve to capture the zeitgeist. As Coco Chanel stated: fashion is '*made to be unfashionable*' (cited in Davies, 1994, p. 162), and often it is this ephemerality that attracts followers of fashion. To be seen to be wearing the current mode somehow equates to illustrating topicality and awareness of societal trends (Ritch & Brownlie, 2016).

As expressed above, fashion is evident in ideas and attitudes, both of which have shifted significantly in the last 10 years, particularly on issues of gender (for example the #MeToo movement and debates on transgender), race (#BLM – Black Lives Matter) and the climate crisis. Often referred to as 'woke' (see McColl & Ritch, 2021) these issues are increasing in prominence and creating a division between those who want to hold onto traditional values and those who want to advance to more equality and inclusivity, often reported in tabloid media as 'woke wars'. Within those three issues of gender and race equality and diversity, as well as other inequalities of disability and neurodiversity, and the climate crisis – the fashion industry does not fair well. Entrenched within a wealth and status divide that is represented within a particular aesthetic, the industry encourages *in* and *out* groups (as will be discussed in Chapter 8) where a failure to comply results in exclusion from participating in fashion – for example the body size does not fit into fashion garments or people are unable to afford it. This failure to be inclusive to a diverse population is being challenged through consumer campaigns, for example, to challenge toymakers to stop making toys that depict gender stereotypes (Ritch & Dodd, 2021). Over the last decade, there has been more diversity in marketing, led by the Dove 'Real Beauty' campaign that featured women of different sizes and ethnicity (Bahadur, 2014), and reflected in both branded and social marketing (as illustrated in Ritch & Dodd, 2021). The fashion industry has been highly criticised due to a lack of diversity, however, it was reported that New York Fashion Week Spring 2022 included more shows with greater diversity with regards

to size, race, gender and age. For example, [Cichowski \(2021\)](#) stated that the season involved 55.5 per cent women of colour. Models over 50 years old made up only 0.96 per cent of castings (that equates to 12 appearances). For an industry who has historically championed youth to promote fashion, this is an improvement but there is still a long way to go.

This leads to the psychological aspects of fashion, where an inability to participate in what is perceived as fashionable can impact on perceptions of self and wellbeing. Again, this is not a new concept: Veblen conceptualised the Theory of the Leisure Class in 1899, where he noted that the acquisition and display of possessions was presented as signalling self, status and belonging to wider society. Veblen refers to this as conspicuous consumption, in which commodities are indicative of class distinction and social identity, that are displayed to communicate a cultural code that depicts membership within peer groups ([Veblen, 1899/1994](#)). For those who gain much pleasure in the historic and current creative aesthetics of the fashion industry, it is demoralising to see the impact that these criticisms have on those who are marginalised and excluded from participating in the fashion realm. It is also depressing to see the huge impact that the fashion industry contributes to the climate crisis (United Nations, 2019). Fashion should be enjoyed as a creative aesthetic, for makers and users, and not just as a cash cow (see Chapters 4 and 20) that induces guilt. Indeed, it appears that the fashion industry has failed to recognise the change in attitude and ideas that are captured within notions of ‘wokeness’. As discussed in Chapter 2, the fashion industry has cannibalised production only to stimulate consumption, and not to represent the zeitgeist that dominates societal discourse. However, just as fashion systems have adapted from a cottage to a global industry and implemented new ways of sourcing and producing, disruptive change that is more sympathetic to environmental, economic, and social resources is possible. This book examines some of those new paradigms of ways in which to think about fashion practice and acquisition.

Exploring the Zeitgeist

This edited collection is contemporary in addressing the most pressing issues within the fashion industry through examining new critical perspectives in the fashion marketplace that have been driven by concern for climate change, inclusivity and diversity. There is a paradox between the need to adopt sustainability into the heart of the fashion industry and maintaining the creative innovation that makes fashion, ‘fashion’ and this book addresses new advances that are responsive in investigating societal concern while maintaining commerciality and innovation. We also explore how consumers navigate newly evolving values and fashion consumption practices, progressing from our first book *New Perspectives in Critical Marketing and Consumer Society* ([Ritch & McColl, 2021](#)) that outlined current economic and business models, the role and impact of marketing and consumer culture.

In our previous book, we presented ideas around disruption to the economy and changes within society that had led to unsustainable economic models and behaviours, aspects that have been driven by globalisation and advancing technology which have culminated in the climate crisis, that we, as humanity, experience. Within this, we created space for new ideas and practices that can advance the sustainability agenda. In *Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry: Disruption, Diversity and Sustainable Innovation*, we focus solely on the fashion industry, examining current

fashion practices, from conceptual thinking, literature reviews and empirical research, to illustrate how new paradigms can infiltrate within wider society. Discourse around sustainability is gaining traction, especially with limited time to halt irreversible damage to the planet. Over the last year this has become more pronounced, with extreme weather conditions and consumers protesting at the lack of action from businesses and governance – an example is Extinction Rebellion holding a funeral to disrupt London Fashion week 2019 by emphasising the fashion industry’s contribution to the death of the planet, and ultimately humanity (see Chapter 7). The themes discussed in the book are highly topical for the fashion industry and they are a reflection of society emerging from post-pandemic ideology, that encompass fairness amid criticisms of neoliberal markets that benefit the few and make life more difficult for many. These ideas will magnify as the global cost of living, water, food shortages and climate change etc. have a greater impact.

The fashion industry has, for decades, experienced allegations of unethical practice, from the use of fur and animal pelts to the endorsement of slender aesthetics, and more recently of exploiting garment and other supply chain workers in developing countries and natural resources such as water, soil health and oil. All of those issues fall within the remit of sustainability, and although other books examine the issues of sustainability, ethics, economy and feminisms within the fashion industry; what makes this book different is that it brings together current research and thinking from seminal academics who are exploring new economic models of fashion practice, marketing implications and emergent consumer behaviours that present new paradigms of fashion practice and provide practical advice on how to disrupt the unsustainability of fashion. The aim of this discourse is to develop mechanisms that can advance inclusivity and equality of fashion practice, from production, exchange, and engagement. We hope that this sharing of ideas will be thought provoking and enable you – our reader – to be inspired to advance this research and/or devise new innovative and disruptive systems of fashion practice. We hope that our work offers thought provoking arguments and solutions to assist students (future leaders in business) and practitioners, to be inspiring change makers and to make a contribution to tackling climate change. The climate crisis and the survival of our civilisation is a matter for everyone.

Following from our last text, the fashion industry continues to be entrenched in a dominant social paradigm (DSP) of accelerated production, consumption and disposal that exacerbates climate change and sustainability. This approach focusses on profit generation, but at what cost? Although increasingly businesses acknowledge sustainability in their marketing activities, the fashion industry has been slow to meaningfully address concerns and has been criticised for superficial responses that focus on the DSP; for example, some retailers encourage consumers to return unwanted garments to the store for recycling – in return for a voucher to purchase more fashion! This does not address the issue of accelerated production and consumption; we cannot buy a more sustainable future – rather, new environmental paradigms (NEPs) are required to disrupt the DSP. If the fashion industry does not support consumers concerned for sustainability, consumers could be diverted from the commercial sector to assume responsibility on their own terms, as we see in consumer-to-consumer markets and practices. Moving beyond post COVID-19 (the ultimate disruption of business as usual!) presents opportunities to construct a more sustainable future, we critically explore new perspectives of fashion production and consumption, usage and disposal, which are relevant to the

future of the fashion industry. This will not only benefit the formation of new business structures that are responsive to the sustainability agenda, but provide an understanding of consumer society to enable the development of sustainable marketing activities.

The book is structured into four sections: In the first section, '**Disruption**' calls for systems change. It is questionable who the fashion industry currently benefits, when planetary resources are exploited for minimal use and for example, slavery and colonisation continue. Following on from this introductory chapter, **Chapter 2** questions whether this ethos of fashion as a creative endeavour has been cannibalised by capitalist markets. Fashion that is devoid of the current zeitgeist, seems incongruent with the origins of trend change of emerging from creative inspiration that captures current ideologues, such as culture, technological innovation, societal movements. As Coco Chanel also stated '*I don't do fashion. I am fashion*' (Cerini, 2021), the rebellious silhouettes that she created to challenge dominant ideas have been replaced by mass production of indistinguishable garments. **Chapter 3** introduces the concept of fashion as a system and questions the underlying motivation for current models. Through examining free-market principles, which are incongruent with sustainability, Gabriel considers how the fashion industry can be repositioned. **Chapter 4** further examines fashion systems and Lowe calls for new business modules that respond to a NEP and represent consumer led market disruption. This is an important issue to address, given the pertinence of sustainability within societal discourse, and without acknowledging new models, the fashion industry could fall behind this current trend. **Chapter 5** argues that although sustainability emerged as an industry priority, with commentators suggesting initiatives may be accelerated through the COVID-19 pandemic, the authors suggest that meaningful change towards a more sustainable future remains elusive. **Chapter 6** examines craftivism which has become an increasingly popular social movement, which expresses itself in production and distribution of hand-crafted projects as a means of social and political expression. **Chapter 7** considers how climate change activism encourages consumers to challenge the fashion industry to instigate disruption that is responsive to diversity and sustainability. This first section calls for system change and perhaps offers some hope, in light of the variety of challenges that exist. At the heart of this material are transformational solutions rooted in communities. Individuals cannot solve the severity of problems facing the world today, it will take communities and collective action to mobilise for collective good. The next section of the book focusses on the issues around inclusivity.

The second section '**Diversity**' calls for the fashion industry to be more inclusive. **Chapter 8** explores the exclusionary practices that support fashion's existing business models within the competitive marketplace. **Chapter 9** examines the extended and deep-rooted nature of inequality, from a historical perspective and how this has filtered into current business, self-perception, gender and race contexts within a fashion lens. **Chapter 10** applies theories of retail Servicescape and Customer experience in relation to retail atmospheric and sensory cues for consumers diagnosed within the Autism Spectrum Disorder. This cohort has been neglected within retailing literature, and the chapter concludes with strategies to ensure the retail environment is more inclusive. **Chapter 11** explores the growing interest of modest fashion and how this is represented within mainstream fashion brands in the UK, calling for further research to better understand how consumers engage with modest fashion. **Chapter 12** also

applies a historical lens to investigate the design process of childrenswear from after WW2 and how this reflects societal discourse and gendered expectations. This chapter offers reflections on how the fashion industry constructs elements of conformity, rather than adopting a fluid approach that better suits idiographic consumer styles and diversity. **Chapter 13** assesses the potential for growing the African fashion industry as a means to address inclusivity and diversity that improves the economic conditions of the population. As noted in Obonyilo's research, the opportunities to move beyond the exploitation of labour and the environment continue to be neglected for the convenience of global north markets and consumers. The good news about the material in this section is that commentators, leaders, the media and citizens around the world are taking action to call for change in organisations and within society, for those that are marginalised, and we hope, the innovation of the fashion industry will hear this call for inclusive change. Things are moving but not fast enough.

The third section '**Sustainability and Circular Fashion**' responds to how fashion aesthetic can be found in sustainable markets, focussing on circular fashion models. Fashion and apparel excite, entertain and meet many consumer needs (e.g. practical physical needs, fun, social, identity-seeking, status). Human beings have always sought to make things beautiful and adorn themselves with body decoration. Today, affluent societies continue to consume at harmful rates. The global pandemic has transformed the consumer experience and as shoppers continue to navigate the ever-changing world, they will continue to have emotional attachment to clothes that have meaning. The forced restrictions that came with COVID-19, demonstrated that for some people, it is possible to live simpler and less materialistic lives. In other cases, the need to belong in the ever-changing fast fashion throwaway culture is simply too powerful to make a major shift in consumption. Our recent research exploring fashion consumption over lockdown in the UK found that Generation-Z females consumed just as much or more fashion due to boredom and as a form of entertainment (Siddiqui, Ritch, & Canning, 2023), continuing to share purchases via social media in order to find connection during isolation. The fashion world will be driven by design and digital innovation, slow and circular business models, and fashion brands that excite and innovate. Consumers will continue to demand transparency, inclusivity/diversity and sustainability from organisations; however, whether consumers will reduce the level of consumption necessary to combat climate change, remains to be seen. **Chapter 14** explores the potential for progressing the fashion circular economy from consumer-to-consumer engagement into commercial markets. Consumer-to-consumer activities are examined, including redistribution markets and collaborative consumption to better understand how consumers engage with the used clothing market. **Chapter 15** continues this focus, specifically examining fashion rental through the lens of the strategic brand partnerships developed by ACS and the benefits for their partners. **Chapter 16** strives to capture a deeper contextual understanding of the thrifting culture in India where sustainable fashion practices have taken on new meaning for Indian consumers. **Chapter 17** examines the continuing trend of vintage fashion consumption. This research focuses on consumer motivations to purchase vintage items through vintage bricks and mortar stores and online retailers and platforms. Vintage 'treasured' belongings are seen as 'cool and stylish' but are also valued as a more sustainable fashion choice. **Chapter 18** considers the toll of wearable fashion. Often technology is heralded as an innovation that can solve the problem of sustainability. Yet, as Morozova

critiques, technology also has sustainability implications, and the use of technology has to be carefully considered.

The fourth section ‘**Sustainability, Retail and Marketing**’ presents ways in which retailers, brands and marketers can implement sustainability, diversity and inclusivity. **Chapter 19** considers how market structures are misrepresented in campaigns, concluding with suggestion on how marketing can educate consumers. **Chapter 20** explores technological advances that replace the in store experience and will enable further growth for online retailing providing lessons for enhancing and synergising with the physical retailing experience. This is an important issue, as a poor experience can lead to consumer dissatisfaction, where clothing purchased is returned to the retailer; returns have financial and sustainability implications, therefore the consumer journey begins from those initial interactions. Boardman and Chrimes explore how user generated data can provide a better experience, including the fit of garments to minimise consumer returns. **Chapter 21** offers an international retailing perspective, examining luxury fashion retailers’ multiple channel distribution strategies in China. Using case studies of internationalising luxury fashion retailers, this article addresses brand experience in the biggest fashion market in the world. Adopting a multi-cultural comparison of retailing markets can illustrate where there is the potential for development. Moreover, the chapter illuminates upon the importance of synergising omni-channel strategy to ensure a seamless consumer experience. **Chapter 22** continues examining the online experiences, through the lens of influencers who are challenging the creative and financial power of fashion brands. **Chapter 23** examines the buyer–supplier–customer relationship to better understand how progressive consumer values can be implemented into supply chain management. Historically, supply chain agility responded to the DSP and profit generation, however, post COVID-19, new social values are increasingly required from businesses and Hodson examines the advancement flexibility and agility of business as being responsive to sustainability.

At the time of writing the UK is experiencing soaring food and energy prices, strikes, political unrest and war is still raging in Ukraine. People have more on their mind than the environment. The cost of living crisis will force fashion consumers to prioritise. The world in which Lily Allen was singing about in 2009 has changed, however it could be argued that the consumerism influenced by a ‘social media society’ has skyrocketed, like the price of our essential commodities, food and fuel, which means citizens will have to make some tough choices. [Mintel \(2022\)](#) predicts consumers will look to save money by rewearing, buying secondhand and reselling clothing. Legislation in Europe and the United States will create pressure for fashion brands to be more accountable for environmental impact and supply chain transparency, and so as these dramatic changes ensue we hope this text offers some suggestions and solutions and will inspire further research and positive action.

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