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Management of contemporary fashion industry: characteristics and challenges

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Abstract

Fashion is one of the most visible media of change. The fashion industry forms part of a larger social and cultural phenomenon known as the “fashion system,” a concept that embraces not only the business of fashion but also the art of fashion, and not only production but also consumption.

The peculiar nature of fashion industry can be characterized in terms of its volatility, velocity, variety, complexity and dynamism. The paper aims to identify the main characteristics of modern fashion industry and to develop a time efficient supply chain model.

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1. Introduction

Fashion is a way for an individual to affirm him or herself (Steele, 2005; Godart, 2012). It is a broad term which typically encompasses any product or market where there is an element of style which is likely to be short-lived (Christopher et al. 2004). Fashion is best defined simply as the style or styles of clothing and accessories worn at any given time by groups of people. There may appear to be differences between the expensive designer fashions shown on the runways of Paris or New York and the mass-produced sportswear and street styles sold in malls and markets around the world. However, the fashion industry encompasses the design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing,

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retailing, advertising, and promotion of all types of apparel from the most rarefied and expensive haute couture and designer fashions to ordinary everyday clothing.

Fashion reflects the change in aesthetic, economic, political, cultural, and social life. Individuals and society use fashion to communicate their taste and lifestyle. The common tastes and lifestyle of society collectively form and represent the taste and lifestyle of that society. Those new emerging lifestyles are interpreted by fashion designers into fashion concepts and then translated into fashion commodities (Cholachatpinyo et al., 2002). Although the fashion industry developed first in Europe and America, today it is an international and highly globalized industry, with clothing often designed in one country, manufactured in another, and sold in a third (Burns et al., 2011). The fashion industry has long been one of the largest employers and it remains so in the 21st century and accounts for a significant share of world economic output.

The fundamental problem in fashion industries is that the time it takes to source materials, convert them into products and move them into the market place is invariably longer than the time the customer is prepared to wait.

Contemporary fashion industry is very global and dynamic. The importance of time as a competitive weapon has been recognised for some time. The ability to be able to meet the demands of customers for ever-shorter delivery times and to ensure that supply can be synchronised to meet the peaks and troughs of demand was analyzed by Christopher et al. (2004); Barnes and Lea-Greenwood (2006); Doeringer and Crean (2006); Stone (2008), Sull and Turconi (2008); Nagurney and Yu (2011); Runfola and Guercini (2013).

The purpose of this paper is to identify the main characteristics of fashion industry and to develop a time efficient supply chain model.

2. Method

The paper is based on theory survey that included general interdisciplinary research methods: systematic, comparative and logical – critical scientific literature analysis through findings' summarization and logical conclusions' generalization and analysis of best practice.

The conducted analysis of scientific literature disclosed the essence and complexity of fashion industry. Synthesis of research works allowed finding out the core characteristics and trends of modern fashion industry. As a result of extensive literature review the model illustrating time efficient supply chain management was presented.

The results of this research can be useful for scientists analyzing this topic from theoretical and empirical perspective, and for practicians working in fashion business.

3. Results

The fashion system involves all the factors that are involved in the entire process of fashion change. Some factors are intrinsic to fashion, which involves variation for the sake of novelty. Other factors are external. Individual trendsetters also play a role, as do changes in lifestyle (Carter, 2013). Fashion is a complex social phenomenon, involving sometimes conflicting motives, such as creating an individual identity and being part of a group, emulating fashion leaders and rebelling against conformity.

The fashion industry thrives by being diverse and flexible enough to gratify any consumer's desire to embrace or even to reject fashionability, however that term might be defined. Summarizing research works of Christopher et al. (2004); Doeringer and Crean (2006); Sull and Turconi (2008); Christopher and Towill (2001); Burns et al. (2011) authors of this paper identify the following characteristics of modern fashion industry (see Figure 1).

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