The Impact Of Fast Fashion On The Fashion Industry

Fast fashion can be described as cheap, trendy clothing, that samples ideas from the catwalk or celebrity culture and turns them into garments in high street stores at rapid speed (Rauturier, 2018). Fast fashion has had a huge impact on the fashion industry. It has competely changed the way we shop and how we think about fashion. It has created this 'throw away culture' were people are more than happy to buy a garment, wear it once or twice and then throw it away. Fast fashion has also hugely impacted the business of fashion and the ways in which fashion is produced and sold. In this essay I am going to look at the different parts of the fashion industry that fast fashion has impacted.

Industry Structure

The fashion industry is made of up three main parts: haute couture(e.g Dior, Chanel), ready-to-wear (e.g Calvin Klein, Donna Karen) and mass production(e.g Zara, H&M).

Haute couture is the highest quality of hand crafted garments. It is exclusive, custom made clothing for individual clients. Its more artistic than the other sectors in the fashion industry. A fashion house can only use the term 'haute couture' if it has made-to-measure dressmaking activity in the Paris area (Tungate, 2008, p.144).

Ready-to-wear garments are made in stock sizes and are not made for individual clients. It is similar to the mass production sector but it is the more high end designer side of the market.

Mass production is basically fast fashion. It is when a high quantity of clothing is made in a factory using machinery or assemby lines.

Impact of Fast Fashion on the Fashion Business Cycle

One of the things that fast fashion has changed are the fashion seasons. Previously there was only two: Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter. Since fast fashion took over the industry there are now up to 12 seasons. Fast fashion is not the only sector in the industry that is affected by the new seasons. Haute couture and ready-to-wear are also impacted. Previously, designers would only have two collections per year for Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter now they have collections for Resort and Pre-Fall.

Fabric trade show

The fashion business cycle begins with the colour companies and then the yarn companies, then the weavers, then the fabric designer and finally the fashion designer. Yarn spinners sell to weavers who sell to fabric companies who sell to fashion buyers. The different needs of the different people involved in the fashion business cycle has resulted in different types of trade shows.

Trade shows are there to sell product and to predict trends. There are lots of international trade

shows so that they are accessible to everyone e.g Premiere Vision and Pitti Filatti. Yarn fairs are mainly for knitwear designers, fabric shows are mainly for designers and buyers, and fashion shows are for buyers, stylists, bloggers and celebrities.

The fashion calendar and the business cycle leaves time before each stage to allow for sampling, development, manufacturing and distribution. The trade fairs are where the orders are made after the buyer has viewed the samples. The lead time is the time between ordering the textiles or garments and actually recieving them. This is why the fabric fairs are held a year in advance. Fast fashion forces the whole cycle to speed up, lead times are shortened and production is quicker.

The fashion cycle. The Design Cycle

The fashion designer's process for designing a collection starts with the concept and researching future trends.They will normally be subscribed to a trend forecasting service and will base their designs on their predictions. Then they attend fabric fairs to order samples, get inspiration and see whats on trend. While they are waiting on their samples they draw up the collection and make toiles. When the samples come in they make the garments in the sample fabric. They sell these samples in a showroom to fashion buyers. After that, they write up the orders and make any changes if nesseccary. Fabrics are ordered for production and the garments are manufactured and sent to retailers. It is nescesarry for designers to keep up with the new fast paced fashion calender. With fast fashion on the rise there is more pressure on the design cycle and each part of the cycle has to move as quick as possible to satisfy the consumers needs. There are more seasons than there used to be so designers have to come up with multiple designs per day to keep up with all the seasons. The fabric companies are under pressure from the designers because the lead time from buying the fabric at a trade fair to delivery is too long to keep up with fast fashion.

Some retailers have to re-stock their stores every two weeks to keep up with fast fashion e.g Zara. Retailers have to buy more frequently and more quickly. They have to keep collections focused on what customers want at particular times of the year as opposed to buying to satisfy two large periods of demand. Fast fashion also enables retailers to freshen up their stores more often, maintaining the perception of 'newness' and this draws the customer in.

The Clothing Supply Chain

There are many parts to the clothing supply chain and it takes a lot of people. The designer starts designing by looking at trends, going to trade shows, creating moodboards, getting sample fabric and creating a collection plan. Then the pattern maker will make the patterns and those patterns are graded so that there is multiple sizes for the same pattern. The patterns are then professionally layed onto the fabric and cut using a mechanical knife. The cut pieces are sent to the factory floor to be assembled. The garment is then finished off, pressed and sent to quality control where the garment is measured and checked for any imperfections. Once it passes quality control it is packaged and sent off for delievery to retailers.

Garment production. Effect of Fast Fashion on Brands

Zara is one of the biggest fast fashion brands. Zara continues to make big changes to retailing

through its rapid supply chain. They have 1,923 stores in 88 countries and in 2014 they had sales of $12.6 billion (Leob, 2015). To be successful in the fast fashion industry you have to have the ability to generate quick turnover of merchandise in stores(Leob, 2015). That is exactly what Zara does; new designs are developed daily and shipped at a rapid rate. Zara prides itself on delivering product in three weeks from its own factories (Leob, 2015). Other more expensive retailers are trying to shorten their development cycle to keep up with the new faster and more competitive retail environment. Fast fashion has forced brands to make clothes quickly which therefore means the clothes must be made cheaper and at a lower quality. The designers have to design one or more garments per day to keep up with the ever changing trends. High street fast fashion brands such as Zara and H&M have put fashion within the reach of everyone (Tungate, 2008, n.p).

Trends

A trend is a period of time during which fashion exists, moving through the stages of the fashion cycle. A few examples of current trends would be; animal print, oversized chunky runners, puffer jackets etc. I believe that social media as well as the rise of fast fashion has shortened the lifespan of trends. Consumers constantly wnat something new and different like what they see on their social media feeds. There are 5 stages of a trend; Introduction – consumers adopt the trend, the prices are high and the market is limited. Growth – competition increases as the trend gains popularity and prices start to drop. Maturity – the trend has mass appeal, there is intense competition and wide distribution. Decline – the trend is going out of fashion and sales fall. Obsolescence – there is a strong dislike for the style and it can no longer be sold at any price.

Oversized chunky runners

There are many things that influence trends. Trendsetters like celebrities and well known public figures will start wearing new styles. Fashion followers will then follow the trendsetters and it becomes acceptable to the majority. Some adhere to the view that fashion follows a 'trickle down process' whereby ideas are transmitted from the elite top layer of the social pyramid to the bottom (White and Griffiths, 2000, p.93). The trickle up theory is when a trend starts among the lower class and is adopted by the elite. Companies can predict trends by buying a forecasting service. These services can predict colour, fabric and print design up to two years in advance. They can predict these trends by looking at economic and cultural influences, monitoring global markets and looking at past trends. Fashion operates not according to fancy, but following a determinate code (Vinken, 2005, p.52). This code is the trend cycle. Although it may seem like fashion is spontaneous and unpredictable, it follows certain trends in a certain way that is predictable and it draws the consumers in. Changes in fashion correspond to macrochanges in culture and society, they require human action. (White and Griffiths, 2000, p.94). Trends can be political and related to changes in society. For example, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks there was a huge 'military-esque' fashion trend that could be seen everywhere. This was like societie's response to the terrorists saying “we will fight back”.

Military Style from 2000's

Effects of Copying

Fast fashion has only led to an increase in copied designs. Retailers like Zara and H&M are

known for taking inspiration from the catwalk, but theres a fine line between being inspired by someone and copying someones design. In many fast fashion stores you will see exact copys of a designer garment. Retailers can get away with this because the copyright laws are outdated. Some retailers will copy smaller brands that have a large following online. The government do not want to stop copying in the fashion industry because its what makes them the most money. Brands like Zara and H&M wouldnt be half as popular if they didnt copy from high end brands.

In the haute couture and ready-to-wear sectors there is just as much copying and counterfeiting. Big designers will copy smaller designers hoping no one will notice. There is also a lot of fake designer merchandise being sold in markets and certain shopping centres for low prices. This has been a massive problem for some designer brands like Burberry and Louis Vuitton. There was so much counterfeit Burberry merchandise that it caused the brand to collapse and lose business. It was only recently that the brand was revived and is now back at the top of the market.

Fake vs Real Burberry

Technology

The introduction of new technology like CAD (computer aided design) has massively aided the production of garments and has significantly descreased production time.Virtual garments are created with the software to show different designs and colours. The design can then be converted into a pattern by the software system and pattern pieces are developed for a real sample garment. Instead of drawing everything out designers and technicans can easily and quickly make the same drawings on a computer. It also makes it easier to communicate designs to people in different countries all over the world.

Conclusion

The fashion industry has clearly had a massive change in recent years due to the introduction and impact of fast fashion. I think fast fashion has had some positive effects and some negative effects. It has made the industry more fresh and exciting, but it has also made it more competitive with the new fast paced environment. I think in the next few years fast fashion will start to slow down because consumers are becoming more aware of what they buy and how it's made. However, I believe that there will always be a market for fast fashion due to the low costs.

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