

An Exploratory Study of Other Industries' Sustainable Business

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An Exploratory Study of Other Industries' Sustainable Business

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### **Abstract**

The fashion industry keeps changing in the world, and the profitability and sustainability of the fashion-designing firms across the world largely depend on their prowess to embrace and work with change to enhance their competitive advantages. To that end, most of the fashion-based firms in the mainland China have not entirely stepped up their fashion production and marketing trends to match those of the other countries both in the Far East and towards the western parts of the world. Most of the mid-market made-to-measure designers targeting women and based in China have been characterized by the lack of social media presence, which curtails their ability to connect with the modern customer. To address the lack of social media presence, more and more Chinese based designers are embracing social media as a necessary tool to the processes of marketing and developing the customer service operations of the firms. The firms are also lacking in sustainability both in the environment and in their supply chain management. More non-synthetic fibers are being embraced in other parts of the world, which the firms can also embrace in their design, and manufacture of garments. The issue has been approached from the perspective following analysis and discussion of the various interviews conducted on the managers and customers of the multiple fashion players in Shanghai.

## **AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF OTHER INDUSTRIES' SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS**

### **Introduction**

In 1858, Charles Frederick Worth had the first designer label in the world sewn into the garments that he created. Charles' pioneering move marked the beginning of fashion designing and the ultimate birth of the fashion industry that spreads its reach across the globe (Montagné and Hardill 2010). Clothing existed a long way before the 19th century but the designers were not actively involved in the fashion industry as a lucrative source of money. Soon, the other fashion designers introduced their tags in the market for the increasing number of customers and enhanced the monetization of fashion (Merlo and Perugino 2015). Most of the earliest fashion designers came from France and especially around Paris with their designs and fashion ideas spreading to the other parts of Europe such as Spain and Italy before crossing the Atlantic towards the Americas and traveling the Far East towards China and Japan. The fashion designs in both the 19th century and the early 20th century were mostly inspired by the printed designs on the clothes that came from Paris (Amerian 2016). The print-inspired clothes widely circulated Europe, it did not take too long before designers outside France picked up the idea, and soon, there was significant competition among fashion designers with the increasing number of customers in the market. By the year 1900, Amerian (2016) reports that most people from Western Europe were dressing alike due to the print-inspired designs from Paris-based designers.

Back in the mid and late nineteenth century, and the early twentieth century, there was an already visible difference between the ready-to-wear and the haute couture fashion designs. In the fashion industry, the haute couture refers to the type of clothing that is handmade from the start to finish, and there is no use of machines in sewing the garments (Belfanti 2015). On the



other hand, ready-to-wear clothes represent the factory-designed and manufactured clothes, which come in different sizes for the various customers in the fashion industry. The made-to-measure pieces of clothing and especially for the female customers were common with the dressmakers of the time concentrating on the custom-made women outfits, which were designed and manufactured in the same way as the haute couture fashion (Whelan 2014). The made-to-measure fashion in the nineteenth century inspired the modern ready-to-wear outfits, which are specifically designed to fit the individual client's sizes and shapes. Typically, the haute couture was expensive since the customers would make their customization choices regarding shapes, materials, and sizes of their pieces of clothing. At the time, the hats and the gloves were made as ready-to-wear and displayed in the major fashion shops across Europe (Whelan 2014). The made-to-measure clothes majorly targeted women and those targeting the male clients came much later (Belfanti 2015). The transition from the haute couture provided both male and female clients with the wide variety of pieces of clothing to select from with more and more designers adopting the made-to-measure standards of designing to attract more clients in the major fashion markets such as Milan and Paris.

As the fashion trends spread towards the Far East, Chinese designers adopted them and began coming up with the made-to-measure pieces of garment mostly for women. Not long after the spread of fashion trends, the Chinese made-to-measure fashion trends transformed the country and the rest of the world with their essential abilities to satisfy the demands of the clients who are increasing even in the modern world (Belfanti 2015). The Chinese modern haute couture has influenced fashion centers across the globe with more quality pieces of clothing being exported from China to the other countries worldwide. Apart from the made-to-measure garments for the women, legendary designers and companies such as the Savile Row in London

and related brands such as H. Huntsman & Sons and Henry Poole & Co., which made bases for the renowned fashion designers in the world such as Alexander McQueen began transforming the looks of the western gentlemen. They designed made-to-measure suits and later on casual outfits (Whelan 2014). With time, the Chinese fashion designers began to create exquisite artisan suits and other outfits which were made to fit the specific clients in the market. The move created more opportunities for the development of the made-to-measure garments in China to target the vast customer base in and out of the country. As they began, the made-to-measure fashion designers in China took the measurements of the customer's body and devised the desired design by each of the clients to fulfill their taste in fashion. The clothes had Chinese prints on them and as an added feature, the clients were allowed to select their preferred materials, which further grew the made-to-measure subsector of the fashion market.

One of the companies renowned for the development of the made-to-measure garments in China is Makaif Bespoke. Makaif collects the unique measurements of every client and records them on a pattern drafted on paper. In addition to the pattern drafted on paper, the information on the customer regarding their required fashion garments is collected and reserved for generating their desired garments. Under Makaif Bespoke are various brands that include Bonum. Bonum is based on the pattern design system of Makaif Bespoke and is majorly combined with the made-to-measure designs to manufacture the stylish customized suits that are mostly made for the wedding couples and the tuxedos for the various clients in the fashion industry. Another brand is R-mutt, which is created by talented designers originating from New York in the United States of America and Seoul in South Korea. The designers of the R-mutt brand mostly position it in the casual business style, and develops classic and simple fashion designs, which are perfectly matched with the formal wear. Sometimes, men in various business capacities prefer to wear

something more relaxed than formal suits. Reverse Engineering concentrates on the designer brand for the fashion involved in the business world. Reverse Engineering, therefore, takes into consideration of the executives whose preference falls under wearing formal but more comfortable clothes compared to the suits. Therefore, the sustainability of the mid-market made-to-measure garment designers targeting customers in china is an aspect that requires more work from the Chinese designers to achieve.

### **Literature Review**

Chinese fashion retailers perceive their foreign brand apparel suppliers with a particular referent power. Dickson and Zhang (2004) further explore the use of the power model in the explanation of the stated connections. A survey was performed focusing on 150 apparel retailers based in Beijing, China. The researchers found out that referent power from the business managers positively affected the attitudes of the retailers towards the non-economic satisfaction with their suppliers. Great referent power was also associated with decreased channel conflict and an increase in economic satisfaction with corporate performance. The referent power can be used to facilitate the entrance to the Chinese fashion market by the foreigners from the various parts of the world, which promotes the channels of distribution and enhances the link that the suppliers have with their retailers (Dickson and Zhang 2004). Therefore, the distribution channels for the various suppliers and retailers in the made-to-measure fashion designing industry of China are largely dependent on the referent power in the enterprises.

A consumer survey was performed to facilitate the study with a sample of 1628 married adult consumers living in the Chinese cities of Guangzhou and Shanghai being involved (Dickson et al. 2004). The consumer survey was used to obtain the fundamental knowledge on



the market segments of the Chinese consumers in the fashion industry with the potential to purchase foreign apparel. The researchers made use of the conjoint evaluation to identify the attributes of the products in connection with the intentions of purchase among the clients of the fashion industry. The findings of the research indicated that six market segments are described using their geographic and demographic characteristics in conjunction with the expenditure made in apparel and the perceptions that the US made pants are held within comparison to the Chinese made ones. Therefore, the sustainability of the mid-market fashion brands is largely dependent on the affordability of the garments in the Chinese fashion industry.

The evaluation of the relationship between the buyer and the seller in the case of the Handicrafts and Handlooms Export Corporation (HHEC) is necessary to provide more light to the Chinese fashion brands. Exporting may be a topic of concern among the managers of the various industries in the world of commerce, fashion included. The managers in the fashion industry may practice some of the export management strategies that may increase the profitability of the made-to-measure garments for the mid-market levels and especially for the women in the Chinese as well as the international market. Sharma, Dey, and Karwa (2012) emphasize the significant point in developing a strong connection between the buyer and the seller to ease the setbacks of trade that reduce the volume of the made-to-measure garments for the ladies and especially those that are designed and manufactured in China. That is the strategy used by HHEC to ensure that the volume of the exports in its industry are optimized and the target customers are satisfied. The optimization of the volume of exports is a strategy that Chinese manufacturers make use of to attain their sustainability.

China is one of the most expansive countries across the globe and is home to not less than 20% of the world's population (Chan 2011). The Chinese economy is performing well despite the

economic crises affecting it. One of the industries that make a difference in the Chinese economy is the fashion retailing which keeps having slight developments that improve it and expand the target markets in the country as well as in the entire world (Chan 2011). The author has a more in-depth insight into the development of the apparel industry in both mainland China and Hong Kong. Across the mainland China, the dominant fashion retailing brands are located in Shanghai and Beijing (Chan 2011). The marketing of the luxurious fashion brands in Hong Kong is often revisited and is often regarded as a strategic entry and development in the mid-market for the made-to-measure garments for the Chinese women.

The business environment and the supply chain management of the mid-market made-to-measure Chinese women garments have been evaluated against those of the other countries across the globe. Uluskan and Godfrey (2018) compare the Chinese manufacturers' supply chain management activities and business environments to those of Haitian designers. The authors begin by evaluating both the macro and micro business environments as they go ahead to look into supply chain management. Uluskan and Godfrey (2018) also look into the sourcing partners from the two countries and how they play the role of ensuring that the business environments favor the fashion industry. Interviews were performed on the apparel companies based in the US and source from Haiti and China. The study findings indicated that the macro and micro business environments are responsible for Haitian and Chinese fashion companies. The strengths of Haiti were the proximity to the US which China did not have. Strategically though, the managers of the fashion industry in China may come up with ways of ensuring that there is cost affordable supply chain management that links their made-to-measure garments with the target market across the globe.



Comparisons are made continuously to analyze the hand properties and the compositions of the trace elements in the linen fabrics that have been designed and manufactured in the different regions across the globe. Inoue et al. (2010) extrapolate research aimed at examining the women linen fabrics produced in Japan, Italy, and Poland. The paper ascertains the differences in the thermal, mechanical and air permeability properties. The thermal conductivities of the women fabric linen from Poland are higher than those from Italy and Japan are. However, the distinctions among the fabrics are not remarkable although the elements they consist of are different (Inoue et al. 2010). The paper provides necessary information on the fabric linen and their difference in the linen but fails to connect the quality and elements of the fabric to their abilities to attract the various customers across the world.

The impact of globalization and the changes in the manufacturing industry are some of the recent developments that may revolutionize the fashion industry and especially the mid-market made-to-measure women garments that target the Chinese clients (Buxey 2005). The author begins the paper by likening the Australian textiles, clothing, and footwear (TCF) industry that has been struggling since the government effected the introduction of the dismantling tariffs. Nonetheless, the TCF sector in the country has been actively involved in sourcing the Asian intermediaries, suppliers, and retail chains to expand their business outreach. The policymakers in the Australian TCF industry predicted that the local producers would have a boost in their efficiency and export their made-to-measure designs to boost their sales, which had begun nosediving (Buxey 2005). Such a strategy would work for the competitive made-to-measure designers in the fashion industry with increased marketing, which would benefit the mid-level designers in the Chinese fashion sector.

The sustainability of the fashion industry in China with a more significant focus on the city of Hong Kong is talked about by Pui-Yan Ho and Choi (2012). The authors explain why fashion companies based in mainland China as well as in Hong Kong need to go green and reevaluate their business models to establish and maintain sustainable supply chains. Pui-Yan Ho and Choi (2012) explain that the fashion designers in the region may apply what they term as the Five-R framework, which has been tested and proven efficient on a few local fashion brands. The framework is majorly meant to help the brands have a competitive advantage in the fashion sector of the country and the world primarily through the strategic management of the setbacks posed by the environment (Pui-Yan Ho and Choi 2012). The sustainability of the Chinese brands, which target the mid-market made-to-measure women garments, is linked with the consideration of the product development process and the extension of the product lifecycles, which is connected with the effective supply chain management in the Chinese fashion sector.

Global competitiveness is an essential aspect of the fashion industry. Akoorie and Ding (2009) evaluate the feature of global competitiveness among the local fashion brands in the province of Zhejiang in China with the emphasis laid on the hosiery sector of the town of Datang. The authors make use of both a case study approach and the data triangulation techniques that are based on the archived reports and the statistical agencies of both the central and local governments in China. The clustering of the fashion industry players in Datang enable their regional economic development by enhancing the local competitive advantages, which have enabled the companies to create an identity, that is recognizable in many countries worldwide. In turn, the fashion brands in Zhejiang attract labor, capital, and other resources, which are useful to the process of investment (Akoorie and Ding 2009). The women made-to-measure designers in

China are supposed to make use of the strategic mergers and acquisitions, which boost their businesses and fortify them for marketing.

The Swedish fashion industry is one of the best examples of sustainable fashion players in the world. On many occasions, Swedish fashion trends have been an excellent example to influence those of the United Kingdom which has most contributed to the thriving of the fashion industry in major cities such as London in the UK which is considered as one of the fashion capitals of the world alongside New York, Milan, and Tokyo. The small companies in the fashion sector in Sweden provide useful sourcing strategies and especially for the made-to-measure garments which the other countries across Europe in addition to the UK are more than eager to adopt. Jones (1997) suggests that the success of the Swedish fashion industry counts on the efficiency of their sourcing strategies. The deregulation of the pricing and the other impediments to the success of the fashion industry in Sweden has further improved the activities of the leading players in the fashion sector, which is a trait both the Chinese government and its fashion industry can follow.

The emerging fashion industry players in China require state of the art strategies to introduce a sustainable mid-market made-to-measure fashion trend for the women in China and the rest of the world. Unnithan et al. (2018) explain that the crowd designed fashion concept designed by Hashboosh.com, a startup venture in the fashion industry. The crowd designed fashion strategy used by the venture raises questions regarding its sustainability as the company is reported to breed its competition rather than developing a competitive that would enable the organization to emerge in the global fashion market (Unnithan et al. 2018). However, the fashion model advocated for by Hashboosh.com appears unique and may benefit the mid-market level made-to-measure women garment designers and manufacturers in China and the other countries



(Unnithan et al. 2018). Notwithstanding, the crowd designed fashion concept may work in the case where extensive SWOT analysis is conducted for the specific designer since it facilitates the designing and manufacturing of the made-to-measure garments among the Chinese brands targeting the female customers in and out of the country.

The made-to-measure garments made for the women in the mid-market levels in China require having a branding strategy that enables the companies to target the major markets and the desired customers effectively. Yadav and Sagar (2018) look at brand management, brand strategies, and strategic management in the case of Amazon in India. Amazon has come up with the ways of popularizing the renowned brand campaigns such as Try to kar and Kya Pehnu, which have spread their presence into the numerous cities across India. The uplifting of the brands have cost Amazon careful strategic brand management, which is essential in the fashion industry as well in the case of the mid-market made-to-measure ladies brands across China. Marketing of the brand has to be done in the various ways that appeal to most of the customers such as the use of social media marketing (Yadav and Sagar 2018).

There was need to provide more insight into the repositioning for the global stage in the case of Under Armour (James and Whitney 2018). The sports apparel and footwear subsector in the more significant fashion industry of the world has been competitive with players such as Reebok, Adidas, and Puma dominating the market. The rise of Under Armour in the industry shocked most of the industrial players in the sector and is currently a leading company in the same with strategies that can be useful to the other ventures in the fashion industry across the globe (James and Whitney 2018). One of the strategies that Under Armour makes use to stay ahead of the fashion game is to focus on the athletes that turn into superstars. The company targets them as customers as well as models for the brand representation and in the process

attracting the other clientele. The company has a comprehensive social media presence, which facilitates the marketing process (James and Whitney 2018). The made-to-measure Chinese designers and manufacturers are set to gain more from focusing on the individual clients and providing them with the exact products and services that they require.

An analysis of the Taiwanese and European fashion marketing strategies that can inspire the mid-market made-to-measure ladies' garments designing by the Chinese fashion brands is provided (Hung 2006). The author brings out a clear difference between a successful and unsuccessful brand in the fashion industry. The research was performed with the carrying out of interviews among the buyers and the brand managers in the fashion sector. The most significant finding of the paper indicates that the adaptation to the local market within Europe in the building of the fashion brand image contributes to the success of the fashion brands in the Taiwanese markets as well as in the other countries across the Asian continent. Hung (2006) advocates for the concentration on the local brands for the Chinese fashion designers and manufacturers before they can advance to the outside markets in the other countries across the globe.

Various researchers have studied the strengths and weaknesses of the Chinese fashion industry compared to the Taiwanese fashion industry. According to Huang and Tan (2007), the color sensitivity, ability to apply materials, sensitivity to fashion, the trend in the fashion, and the positioning and strategies used to manage the fashion markets are the various factors responsible for the upward growth of Taiwanese apparel industry worldwide. The consumers also had their factors to consider before purchasing an apparel design. Some of the factors were the style of fashion, the quality of cloth and their taste in fashion. Taiwanese manufacturers in the apparel industry, unlike the Chinese ones, often blend the consumer and market factors to determine the



best made-to-measure trends that are treated as favorites by the customers from all over the world (Huang and Tan 2007). The study of the Taiwanese fashion designers is, therefore, an open call for the Chinese manufacturers to analyze their markets and apply strategic management to the design and manufacture of the various fashion items to the customers in and out of China.

Researchers in the fashion industry differentiate the English and the Chinese clothing patterns as they identify the entrepreneurial opportunities that are available for the Chinese fashion designers and especially those dealing in the mid-market made-to-measure ladies garments in the English markets (Liu and Kennon 2003). After the clothing, pattern-cutting systems were introduced to the various parts of the world, and the garment designers were able to substantially cut the time and skill that they required to design and manufacture the clothes in the desired fit (Liu and Kennon 2003). Since the cutting patterns were different in the various parts of the world according to the clients being targeted, the Chinese cutting designs differ from the English ones. The introduction of the English designs in the garment designing in China is an opportunity for the mid-market companies to introduce new fashion designs to their customers in the country.

Japan and European countries possess most of the inspirations to the Chinese mid-market made-to-measure garment designers in their quest for sustainability. However, Au, Taylor, and Newton (2000) argue that the east and the west think differently when it comes to fashion designing. The aesthetic, historical, marketing, and cultural factors are used to discuss the difference in fashion designing between the two regions of the world. The European fashion designers used to contrast Europe and Japan in fashion design are Christian Lacroix and Karl Lagerfeld while those from Japan are Issey Miyake and Rei Kawakubo (Au, Taylor, and Newton 2000). The strategies bring up the differences in the images that their customers have regarding

the fashion trends and the design theories that the west uses and the east does not. The Chinese mid-market designers and manufacturers may bridge the gap by embracing both the Japanese and European fashion designing techniques.

Agreeably, the globalization strategy has been proven helpful to the expansion of the major fashion brands across the globe such as Under Armour, which has diversified its customer base to attract more athletes. Kuang-Ying Loo and Hackley (2013) explores how internationalization has helped in the growth and expansion of high-end Malaysian fashion brands. The Malaysian manufacturers have been involved in the process of mapping the process of high fashion internationalization onto the general retail internationalization to attract the global customers of the other cultures. The process has enabled them to engage in fashion marketing and branding which has enabled them to reach the target clientele in the international market. The internationalization strategy works for the mid-market made-to-measure garment designers in China as well.

Bangladesh has had its fashion industry implement various business management strategies in most of its fashion designing brands (Khattak and Park 2018). The authors describe an interview of the chairperson and chief executive officer of VIYELLATEX Group, one of the most popular fashion firms involved in the environmental upgrading in the apparel industry both in Bangladesh and in the rest of the world. The company was able to alter its social, technological, and organizational processes to reduce the adverse impacts of the environmental impacts of the business. The firm displayed desirable corporate sustainability in its environmental upgrade, which inspired the other fashion designers from across the globe to join in the environmental upgrade and embrace corporate sustainability (Khattak and Park 2018).

A case study regarding survival in specialty retail focused on Ann Taylor, a fashion design founded in 1954 was explained by Assenza, Eisner, and Kuperman (2009) to provide more light to the Chinese mid-market made-to-measure garment designers. Ann Taylor LOFT was widely known for its woman's power suit and the classic black dress which were launched to appeal to a more casual and cost-effective consumer who was unable to afford most of the women's designs at the time. When Kay Krill was promoted to the president of Ann Taylor Stores Corporation back in 2005, the rebuilding of the brand was difficult for her since she had to parallel it to the market share and the image of LOFT (Assenza, Eisner, and Kuperman 2009). During the economic crisis of 2008, Ann Taylor was negatively affected by the macroeconomic climate of the globe posing significant uncertainties in the fashion retail market. Nonetheless, under the presidency of Krill, the company targeted long-term growth.

### **Research Methods**

Qualitative research was performed on the various brands in and out of China to collect the various strengths and challenges of the mid-market made-to-measure garment designing. The case studies were also used to collect the multiple strategies that the fashion brands targeting the women in China can use to ensure that they create the sustainability that they would require to attract the consumers both from China and the rest of the world. The other data collected from the case study points to the strategic fashion management that creates and maintains success in the fashion industry firms targeting the Chinese women and specifically in the market of the made-to-measure garments, which are of late increasing in popularity. The case studies enabled the researchers to obtain the various data at a lower cost than it would have been had the researchers decided to use the other methods of data collection such as the surveys and the questionnaires. The use of the case study approach also reduced the time that the scholars took to



obtain the information regarding the fashion industry in China and how it integrates an international approach to the sales and attraction of new customers from the different countries of the world.

Qualitative data were also collected using the interviewing method. The interviews were performed over the telephone and emails for both the customers and the fashion brands operating in China and targeting a mid-market made-to-measure garment designing. The interviews focusing on the fashion brands in the country focused on South Bund Fabric Market, Shanghai Tang, and Times Tailor all based in Shanghai. All the managers were reachable by phone. The three companies were selected for they have some aspects in common. Firstly, the three designers are based in China, which was the focus of the study. Secondly, the fashion designing companies are based in Shanghai which is the second largest city in mainland China after Beijing and a vital fashion center both in China and the entire world. Thirdly, the three companies specialize in mid-market made-to-measure designing in the fashion industry. The questions dedicated to the company managers included those that bring out the aspects of sustainability, strengths in the Chinese market, the weaknesses in the fashion industry of the country and the solutions that they think can address the issue of reduced sustainability among the Chinese made-to-measure garment designers for the women across the country. There were five customers interviewed. Two of the customers were involved in telephone interviews while three of them conducted email interviews. The interview questions directed to the customers were structurally similar to those directed to the fashion designers only that theirs majorly targeted where the fashion industry in China stands in the sustainability and meeting their demands in the made-to-measure garments for the women. The interviews were used since they can delve into the personality of the interviewees, which provides detailed information regarding the personal

opinions, feelings and the perceptions of the mid-market made-to-measure garment subsector of the fashion industry in China. Generally, the interviews are also useful to the research since they have a high response rate owing to the one-to-one interaction with the interviewers and the interviewees compared to the other methods of data collection such as the questionnaires and surveys.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

### **Analysis**

The data collected using the interviewing and the case study methods were analyzed using the thematic content analysis procedures. The analysis method was used to record the patterns recorded on the patterns which were observed on the data from the customers and was done differently from the information collected from the fashion designers based in Shanghai. The first step that the thematic content analysis followed was the familiarization of the researchers with the data. The data collected from the respondents over the telephone was transcribed to convert it into the text from the audio format to ease the process of data analysis. The researchers then had to read and reread the data to ensure that there were no irregularities or mistakes in the transcription process. The researchers then take their notes on the initial ideas before they code the collected data and dive into the thematic analysis. The next step in the thematic content analysis is the generation of the initial codes for the data. The researchers used the NVivo software to generate the initial codes that they required for the analysis process. NVivo saved the researchers the time that they would have used to take notes and highlight particular parts of the text they are analyzing if they had been using the manual coding process. In the initial coding, the researchers were able to come up with as many themes as possible from the responses that were given by the managers of the fashion brands and their customers. The



other step in the thematic content analysis was the search for the relevant themes that were derived from the coded data. The various codes that the researchers had generated from the data collected from the participants were then sorted into the different themes that they represented to reduce the workload of the coding and analysis process further.

The next step that the researchers used in the analysis of the collected data were the review of the themes. After the sorting of the various codes into the different themes that were collected from the study, the researchers then refined their themes to ensure that the number of themes or categories that had been compiled further reduce to have more robust broader categories that can easily be explained. The review of the categories by the researchers was performed at two instances: at the level of the coded data and the level of the themes. The researchers reread the data extracts that comprised of every theme in a bid to enhance the formation of a coherent pattern by the data. The rereading enabled the researchers to identify the various coded data that did not fall under any of the categories, which would affect the accuracy of the research. Concerning the data fitted into the different categories, the researchers developed a thematic map that they used to visualize the connection between the themes and how they develop one another and connect with the responses of the respondents. The researchers also made sure that the relationship between the themes in the study reflected the meaning of the data in the study as a whole. The first theme that the researchers found regarding sustainability was that internationalization was a pivotal contributor to the growth of sustainable fashion brands in and out of China. The major strengths that the Chinese fashion designers attributed their success to were the proximity to Tokyo for the export of made-to-measure garments and Taiwan for the market as well as sourcing for the raw materials for the production of the various fashion designs from China. The challenges included the far distance from European countries, for instance,

Italy, the United Kingdom, and France, as an inspiration to Chinese fashion design and the United States of America for the market and especially in major cities such as Los Angeles and New York. The researchers produced the report that led to the discussion of the major themes found in the research.

## **Discussion**

### **Sustainability Possibilities in the Mid-Market Made-to-Measure Ladies Garments**

The value of internationalization is immeasurable in the fashion retailers and manufacturers based in China and specializing in the mid-market made-to-measure women formal and casual outfits. Globalization has provided the firms across Europe and the far eastern countries such as Taiwan and Japan to access the international market with the increase in marketing activities in the world such as with the use of technology. The spread of the Chinese fashion brands across the internet is, therefore, a remarkable step towards the improvement in their brand image, which consequently leads to the increase in their sales and thus improving their revenues and sales from within the country and out of China. Therefore, the rise of internationalization is a factor that the mid-market fashion designers in China are thus targeting to attract the global customers and increase the volume of apparel exports just like Australia is doing with the help of the government in the promotion of exports by reducing the applicable charges. The idea has been drawn from one of the interviewed managers who has highlighted the importance of social media to marketing. The mid-market fashion designers in China can collect the measurements and desired designs of the consumers online to learn about the market trends.

The Chinese fashion manufacturers and designers are also working hand in hand with the United Nations in its quest to reduce the environmental impacts that the manufacture of the garments is causing. More fashion brands in China are coming into term with the need to make

use of particular elements as they manufacture clothing and other apparel items to significantly contribute to the reduction in global warming across the globe. The value of environmental sustainability among the Chinese manufacturers has come after examples have been drawn from the Bangladesh based fashion brand that gained international recognition for the practice of environmental awareness to contribute positively to the fight against environmental pollution. More firms in the world are also joining hands with the Chinese fashion brands as they advocate for green production and the other processes of the supply chain activities to reduce impacts on the environment but at the same time promote quality. One of the interviewed managers attributes the environmental sustainability to the use of pineapple leather from Spain to replace cotton and the other synthetic fibers.

The sustainability of supply chain management is a bracket of the fashion management that the mid-market made-to-measure garment designers in China have acquired. The Malaysian fashion brands have made a move to boost their supply chain activities in the sales and supplies of their apparel items, which has increased their financial performance on the average. From the Malaysian high-end fashion brands, the Chinese fashion designers and manufacturers have picked on the various traits involving the supply chain that is meant to increase their profitability by drumming upon the brand awareness and the attraction of more customers in the fashion industry from an international perspective. The fulfilling of the customer tastes and preferences is another sustainability perspective that the firms in the Chinese mid-market made-to-measure brands have considered in the recent past with their introduction of the cost-effective apparel items in the market.



**Strengths of the Garment Designers in China**

The Chinese brands make the country one of the leading exporters of textiles ahead of Germany, Bangladesh, Turkey, and Italy. Additionally, the textile exports have made to the list of the country's most significant contributor to the annual revenue. The country is close to Japan and Taiwan, which serve as some of the most active importers of the fashion items made in China. Japan's import of the fashion items designed and manufactured in China is contributed to by the popularity of Tokyo, its capital, as a major fashion center alongside the other cities in Western Europe and North America. Taipei, the capital of Taiwan Is also having a boost into fashion market along with the substantial growth in the economy of the country to become one of the Asian tigers including Singapore, South Korea, and Hong Kong. The above-listed countries have had a remarkable increase in financial growth in the twenty-first century and serve as the financial capitals of the world.

The other strength that is likely to contribute to the sustainability of the mid-market made-to-measure women garment market is the ability of the Chinese manufacturers to blend the fashion designs from the east and the west. The customers interviewed had both eastern and western tastes in fashion which would be a benefit to the Chinese mid market garment designers to have a blend of both worlds and target more customers. Research has identified that there exist differences between the clothing designs and patterns from the countries in the western world such as the US, UK, France, Sweden and Italy and those of the countries in the Far East such as Taiwan, Japan, and China. All the companies interviewed in Shanghai reported having a mix of the western and eastern inspired fashion designs in their brands which were meant to attract more Chinese women as well as the others from the different parts of the world. The creativity and

uniqueness in the mix is also a strategic move towards the increase in popularity of the fashion brands based in China to target the global clientele.

The other strength that the interviewees stated was the diverse product portfolio. Most of the brands targeting women in the past were involved in the design and manufacture of the high-end formal suits, which were primarily unaffordable to the majority. Lately, the Shanghai-based made-to-measure garment designers have adopted a more relaxed and casually designed outfit which target the relaxation of the dress codes at work in China and the other countries such as the US which drives the women towards the brands that design affordable made-to-measure casual garments. The diversity in the products that the Chinese brands have introduced to target the women have also been noted, as the exports to Tokyo can focus the female models for example in the Tokyo fashion week without having to be too expensive for them.

### **Weaknesses Faced by the Garment Designers in China**

One of the flaws that the fashion designers targeting women based in China have to battle is the distance they are located from the US and the western European countries including France, Italy, and the UK. The stated countries contain the fashion capitals of the world, which makes them essential and lucrative markets for the fashion items made in China for the women. The exports from China to the US, for example, may incur the fashion designers lump sums and being mid-market level organizations, the companies may have little or no profits after delivering the products to their target clients based in the west. The far distance from China to the US also restricts the flow of the raw materials from China to the fashion sector in the United States of America, which leads to the reduction in the sales in the textile industry from China. In the end, the mid-market made-to-measure garment designers based in China lack the international recognition that they aspire for in the processes of production, marketing, and delivery.



The other weakness of the China-based mid-market organizations is the weak social media presence that some of the customers interviewed stated was the difference between the fashion brands in China and those in the other parts of the world. The role of social media in marketing has increased with the advancement in the level of technology in fashion management worldwide. Most of the leading brands in the world have an active social media presence, which is used to attract more customers in the fashion market and aimed at increasing sales and profitability of the ventures. The role of the company websites in the marketing and accessibility for the local and global customers desiring to purchase clothing online has been underestimated in China with only a few fashion brands having a defined social market process although the rest are emphasizing and implementing social media marketing.

The Chinese mid-market made-to-measure women garments designers have emphasized the affordability of their products so much that they have been oblivious of the need to have products that target the various customers in the market based on their financial capabilities. Therefore, the firms have lacked the classic luxurious styles that are attracting more target customers in the market. Most of the fashion-designing firms located in Hong Kong deal in the high-end classic and luxurious products that have gained a higher recognition compared to most firms in the mainland China that still design cheap clothing that does not appeal to the customers. Besides, the countries in Western Europe are embracing classic and luxurious made-to-measure garments that have a vast market in the US and the UK.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Recommendations**

#### **Increase in Social Media Presence**

Increasingly, renowned fashion brands such as Under Armour and Louis Vuitton are using the social media as a tool to market their clothing and other apparel, as well as interacting with the clients to know their individual needs and address their complaints. The fashion brands are also using social media to report on the fashion news, which provides the customers with updates and announcements regarding the release of new fashion lines and promotions (Lindgren, Sinclair, and Miller 2010). The Chinese mid-market made-to-measure garment designer targeting the women in the country and the rest of the world is supposed to ensure that they have an active social media presence to interact on a one-to-one level with the consumers in the target market. They can do so by having their social media managers open and run the Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn accounts for the companies as some of the most famous social media sites used for marketing and engagement with customers.

#### **The Collaboration of Fashion Designers**

The cooperation of the small and medium enterprises in the fashion industry across the Zhejiang province in China have provided them with economies of scale that favor their production and delivery of the products into the fashion market. The collaborations among the organizations have given them an international recognition in the industry thus increasing their brand awareness and attracting more customers with the increase in the revenues and profits as the long run result of the collaboration. The other firms outside Zhejiang can form alliances, mergers, and acquisitions which are meant to provide them with the opportunities to pool resources, which enable them to be part of the megaprojects in the fashion industry that may

provide them with more profits and international brand awareness in the end (Malem 2008). The collaborations also increase the ability of mid-market fashion designers to market their products to the fashion sector and attract more women as prospective customers.

### **Green Initiatives for Sustainability**

Environmental sustainability is a crucial contribution to the entire sustainability of mid-market fashion brands in China. One of the critical developments that have been introduced into the fashion industry to enhance environmental sustainability is the introduction of leather made from pineapple to replace cotton, which is saturated in polyester and pesticides in today's world of fashion. The pineapple leathers have already been introduced to the world with the generation reported to come from the waste leaves and is also said to cost half as much as the conventional leather from the cows (Stylios 2006). The Chinese fashion brands may implement the use of pineapple leather for instance to reduce the use of cotton which has dominated the fashion industry of the country. The companies, in that case, will be contributing to the worldwide advocacy regarding the reduction of the wastes in the environment as in the pineapple leaves and the decline of the use of synthetic fibers, which increase global warming.

### **Introduction of Luxurious Fashion Brands**

The high-end fashion designers in the international market such as Gucci, Giorgio Armani, and Burberry, among others, are brands that have specialized in luxurious clothing and other fashion items for the financially well-up clientele across the globe. The companies have gained their global recognition owing to their ability to produce and market their luxury brands for the niche markets and having a unique selling proposition towards the same. Additionally, other fashion brands in the world are known for their outstanding low-cost brands that offer a great deal of quality to the customers while at the same time being affordable to them (Wu et al.



2015). The Chinese mid-market made-to-measure designers may also adopt a luxury brand perspective but make the clothing affordable to the female customers both in China and above without having a reduction in the quality of the garments. That will ensure that they strategically target customers from different wealth classes. Such strategies will increase their profitability due to the boost in sales.

### **Internationalization of Fashion Brands to Attract Global Clientele**

The fashion brands based in China may form partnerships with those that are located in the other parts of the globe to ensure that they access the global clients more appropriately and conveniently (Guercini and Runfolo 2015). The collaboration will also diversify the product portfolios of the various Chinese mid-market brands which will be the most immediate step preceding global brand awareness and substantial financial progress.

### **Conclusion**

In retrospect, the fashion industry is highly dynamic in the modern world, and the profitability and sustainability of the fashion-designing firms across the globe are mainly dependent on their ability to embrace and work with change for their benefits. As such, most of the firms in the mainland China, the fashion brands have not entirely stepped up their fashion production and marketing trends to match those of the other countries both in the far east and towards the western parts of the world. The conclusion has been reached after analysis and discussion of the various interviews conducted on the managers and customers of the different fashion players in Shanghai.

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## **Appendices**

### **Interviews on the managers of the fashion brands**

#### **South Bund Fabric Market**

Interviewer: Good morning. You are speaking to Brenda Summers from Fashion World. Whom am I speaking to please?

Interviewee: Good morning Brenda. My name is Randy Montpelier.

Interviewer: Nice to interact with you, Randy. I would like to ask a few questions.

Interviewer: Pleasure is all mine. Sure, let us begin.

Interviewer: How sustainable would you say your company is?

Interviewee: I would say...er...moderately since we still make use of nylon and polyester.

Interviewer: What are some of the strengths that are in the Chinese mid-market fashion industry targeting women with the made-to-measure outfits?

Interviewee: firstly, the brands are authentic and secondly, they are pocket friendly.

Interviewer: What are some of the weaknesses facing the Chinese mid-market fashion industry targeting women with the made-to-measure outfits?

Interviewee: the lack of proper marketing and delivery paths, definitely.

Interviewer: Is your company active on social media sites?

Interviewee: not really.

Interviewer: Have you collaborated with fashion brands in and out of china before?



Interviewee: not in the recent past but there are plans underway for the same in future.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time Randy.

Interviewee: Anytime Brenda. Pleasure.

**Shanghai Tang**

Interviewer: Good morning. You are speaking to Matthew Rodriguez from Fashion World.

Whom am I speaking to please?

Interviewee: I am Sarah Rose Winter. Pleasure to connect with you this morning.

Interviewer: I would like to ask a few questions.

Interviewee: sure. Let us go ahead.

Interviewer: How sustainable would you say your company is?

Interviewee: highly sustainable. We are making use of the pineapple leather to make women's outfits from Spain.

Interviewer: What are some of the strengths that are in the Chinese mid-market fashion industry targeting women with the made-to-measure outfits?

Interviewee: quality and cost effectiveness.

Interviewer: What are some of the weaknesses facing the Chinese mid-market fashion industry targeting women with the made-to-measure outfits?

Interviewee: lack of proper marketing and the fluctuation of the market.

Interviewer: Is your company active on social media sites?

Interviewee: yeah. We are on Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Interviewer: Have you collaborated with fashion brands in and out of china before?

Interviewee: Yes, we have. We had a merger with a Taiwanese supplier last year and an Australian supplier early this year.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time Sarah.

Interviewee: you are welcome

### **Times Tailor**

Interviewer: Good morning. You are speaking to Meagan Calhoun from Fashion World. Whom am I speaking to please?

Interviewee: hello Meagan. I am Benedict Kiyosaki.

Interviewer: may I ask a few questions?

Interviewee: Let's dive right into it.

Interviewer: How sustainable would you say your company is?

Interviewee: moderately. We specialize in cotton fur coats that conserve the energy used for heating during winter.

Interviewer: What are some of the strengths that are in the Chinese mid-market fashion industry targeting women with the made-to-measure outfits?

Interviewee: originality and cost effectiveness.

Interviewer: What are some of the weaknesses facing the Chinese mid-market fashion industry targeting women with the made-to-measure outfits?

Interviewee: distance from the United States of America, Western Europe, and Australia.

Interviewer: Is your company active on social media sites?

Interviewee: yes. We are on Facebook Meagan. You should definitely follow us.

Interviewer: I will do it as soon as possible.

Interviewee: thank you.

Interviewer: Have you collaborated with fashion brands in and out of china before?

Interviewee: No, we have not.

Interviewer: Thank you for your time Benedict.

Interviewee: you are always welcome.

### **Interviews on the customers**

#### **Customer A**

Interviewer: Good afternoon. I am Greg Hunter from Fashion World. Whom am I speaking to please?

Interviewee: I am Maya.

Interviewer: Are your fashion tastes in the western or eastern fashion trends?

Interviewee: western.

Interviewer: What does affordability mean to you when it comes to fashion?



Interviewee: low costs and high quality

Interviewer: Does social media presence play an active role in your selection and purchase of fashion items?

Interviewee: absolutely.

Interviewer: What comes into your mind first when luxury fashion brands are mentioned?

Interviewee: a lot of expensive stuff right there.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time Maya.

Interviewee: sure.

### **Customer B**

Interviewer: Good afternoon. I am Anne Lucas from Fashion World. Whom am I speaking to please?

Interviewee: hey Anne. I am Jefferson.

Interviewer: Are your fashion tastes in the western or eastern fashion trends?

Interviewee: eastern.

Interviewer: What does affordability mean to you when it comes to fashion?

Interviewee: good quality and pocket friendly outfits.

Interviewer: Does social media presence play an active role in your selection and purchase of fashion items?

Interviewee: not really.

Interviewer: What comes into your mind first when luxury fashion brands are mentioned?

Interviewee: a lot of good and classic taste in fashion.

Interviewer: Thank you so much for your time.

Interviewee: pleasure is all mine.