(REVIEW ARTICLE)

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Fashion consumers' response to the COVID-19 pandemic and today's future

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Abstract

This study examines the effects of the pandemic on the consumption of clothing. After referring to some general elements and characteristics of the situation during the period of Covid-19, the issue addressed and the research carried out are then thoroughly analyzed. Consumption and behavior of the consumers during the pandemic in the broadest sense are the first point of analysis. This study makes three major contributions. First, it highlights the history of the future of covid-19 in fashion. Second, it contributes to research within the fashion marketing domain by examining the interface of the distinct sections of socioeconomic changes. Finally, it presents a snapshot of guidelines to direct companies in understanding the future requirements for sustainable fashion, by offering rich implication for marketing managers and academic research in marketing.

Keywords: COVID-19; Fashion marketing; Textile and fashion industry; Future of marketing

1. Introduction

While it is widely acknowledged that sustainable fashion in the apparel industry has been a subject of academic discourse since the 1990s and its significance is increasingly emphasized due to various factors such as economic impact and environmental concerns. In today's world, it can be argued that the fashion industry has been greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the influence on fashion consumers and the industry's future scenario is extensive.

Fashion marketing is being influenced by three major factors. Among these are socioeconomic and technological trends, sustainable fashion, and new marketing trends. Relevant literature was used to examine notable trends (Mohr et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2024; Thorisdottir et al., 2024; Tiwari et al., 2024). In our opinion, these factors will likely have an impact on the fashion industry, with an emphasis on digital innovation, sustainability, and adaptability to changing consumer preferences and global conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected various industries, including the clothing and textile sectors. The importance on community distancing, the use of protective equipments, and other preventive measures has prompted companies in this industry to re-evaluate their existing practices and adapt to the changing landscape. It is clear that researching the effects of COVID-19 in the fashion industry and identifying implications for marketing practitioners is a valuable endeavor.

By having that purpose in mind, the objectives of the research are threefold: to analyze the effects of COVID-19 in the fashion industry from the social and economic view; to highlight the changes in a sustainable fashion; and to provide current and future implications to marketing practitioners.

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2. Methodology

We used the methodology of an integrative literature review in order to identify key concepts, sources, and gaps in research related to the effects of COVID-19 in fashion, and provide an overview of the available common themes, patterns, or gaps in the research (Torraco, 2005). An integrative review typically has a different purpose than other literature review methods, such as scoping or systematic review.The objective is to evaluate, criticize, and synthesize the literature on a research topic in a manner that facilitates the creation of new theoretical frameworks and perspectives (Snyder, 2019). The current methodology is used when the case of examine mature topics, the purpose of using an integrative review method is to overview the knowledge base, to critically review and potentially re-conceptualize, on the theoretical foundation of the specific topic as it develops. To accomplish that, we gathered secondary data from journals, books, professional and industry websites, and other reliable sources (such as ScienceDirect, Scopus, Google Scholar, Research Gate, EBSCO, SpringerLink, Directory of Open Access Journals). Keywords and themes related to COVID effects in the clothing and fashion domain were part of the review process, i.e. coronavirus, COVID-19, fashion retailing, sustainable fashion, socio-economic changes, consumer behavior.

2.1. Review of socio-economic implications

The beginning of COVID-19 in China in 2019 has led to its spread to other parts of the world. Due to the impact on the production and distribution of fashion goods, the fashion domain experienced widespread disruptions in global supply chains, which resulted in delays and shortages, and transportation restrictions were a factor. Many organizations have made the switch to producing functional items (Sarma et al., 2023). Regardless, the duration of the pandemic has had an impact on consumer practices and shopping strategies. Consumers' personal and behavioral processes were impacted by the pandemic, with consumer vulnerability and resilience indirectly influencing repeat purchases through purchase satisfaction (Gordon-Wilson, 2022). COVID-19 has led consumers to shop more sensibly (Cambefort, 2020; Tarnanidis et al., 2015; Sheth, 2020; Tarnanidis and Sklavounos, 2024).

Consumers have reformed their spending priorities due to economic uncertainties and job losses. Non-essential items, including fashion and clothing, saw reduced spending, as consumers focused more on essential goods and savings (Papachristou et el., 2021; Tarnanidis et al., 2023b). Additionally, there was a shift in emphasis from traditional beauty and fashion trends towards accessories that complemented mask-wearing. Individuals were able to express their style by wearing accessories like earrings and eye-catching headpieces, making them popular.

An increase in focus on sustainability was due to the pandemic's awareness of environmental issues. The top priority of consumers has been to purchase fashion that is both eco-friendly and ethically produced (Lee and Choi, 2023). They embarked on a search for functional features in their clothing preferences, including antimicrobial fabrics and UV protection. The emphasis on health and practicality influenced the buying decisions for outdoor clothing. Brands are accelerated by their digital presence (Jaderná et al., 2020; Jaderná, 2022). The prominence of virtual fashion shows and online retail experiences has increased. E-commerce was necessary for brands to reach consumers, leading to investment in online platforms and technology (Atik and Ozdamar, 2023). As a result of the pandemic, people began to buy brands that exemplified social responsibility, as evidenced by Khairand Malhas in 2023.

According to different scholars (Sinurat, 2023); Xiao, 2023); Mahmoud et al., 2023; and Tarnanidis et al. (2023b), there are in the retail five main sections on which the changes are focused, starting from the material procurement, component supply, production networks, export channels and marketing networks. Research and development and the logistics network (including purchases and distributions) were facing immense difficulties (Kaftan et al., 2023). Many fashion organizations, in addition, outsourced production to high-end fashion *manufacturers*. Other studies acknowledged the need to select different management models (Profumo et al., 2023). Given the widespread operational disruptions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, it is especially important. Many organizations have been forced to think of immediate solutions to overcome losses and survive in the post-lockdown market, as it will be the "new normal". Furthermore, the pandemic has caused a feeling of uncertainty about the future, as individuals have begun to reevaluate their social practices (Cioppi et al., 2023; Huang et al., 2023).

Organizations that prioritize mental health and the well-being of their customers are more likely to establish long-lasting and resilient relationships with them (Khair and Malhas, 2023). As such, this research reveals fashion-related behaviors during the pandemic to better understand consumers' and suggest further practical implications (Liu et al., 2023; Esposti et al., 2021). In addition, the use of data science and machine learning technologies is a key for competitive advantage, as it enables continuous sales management, product demand forecasting, and customer retention by providing them with personalized offers and recommendations (Haukkala et al., 2023).

We can argue that the COVID-19 pandemic has had profound socioeconomic impacts on the fashion industry, affecting various stakeholders and leading to significant changes in the daily operations of businesses (Liu et al., 2023; Amin and Herjanto, 2023; Haukkala et al., 2023; Boardman and Chrimes, 2023; Tam and Lung, 2023; Lica et al., 2023). The pandemic triggered a global economic downturn, which resulted in a decrease in consumer spending on non-essential items, including fashion. High unemployment levels and financial uncertainty caused consumers to prioritize essential purchases, which had an impact on the sales of many fashion retailers.

The focus of consumers was on essential and practical items when they reassessed their purchasing priorities. As lockdowns and remote work become more common, the demand for fashion has shifted toward comfort and casual wear. The supply chain is experiencing disruptions due to lockdowns, decreased foot traffic, and other issues. Investing in online platforms and digital marketing was a better choice for brands than relying on brick-and-mortar stores and traditional mechanisms (Chakraborty and Biswas, 2020; Sumarliah et al., 2021).

Brands have shifted towards digital presentations, virtual fashion shows, and online marketing strategies to reach consumers. More conscious consumers are aware of the environmental impact of their clothing purchases, and they are more ethical and eco-friendly. Consumers demonstrated a passion for the community and supporting local businesses. As a whole, the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 on the fashion industry include shifts in consumer behavior, changes in business strategies, disruptions in supply chains, and an increased focus on sustainability and digital transformation. In response to the challenges presented by the pandemic, the industry has gone through a period of adaptation and reevaluation of practices (Tarnanidis et al., 2024).

3. Results and discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted various aspects of society, including the fashion industry and consumer behavior. Several mediating effects have been observed in the realm of fashion consumption due to the pandemic. Given the nature and extent of these changes, below we describe the most important implications for marketing managers, and academic research in marketing. With lockdowns and social distancing measures in place, there has been a notable surge in online shopping for fashion items. Consumers turned to e-commerce platforms to meet their fashion needs, leading to an acceleration of the existing trend of digital transformation in the fashion industry Youn, et al., 2021; Loureiro, 2023).

The pandemic has prompted a shift in consumer priorities. Comfort and functionality have become more important considerations in fashion choices, as people spent more time at home and embraced casual and athleisure wear over formal or trend-driven clothing (Vătămănescu et al., 2021; Vladimirova et al., 2022). The luxury fashion sector experienced disruptions, with a decline in demand for high-end and non-essential items. Economic uncertainties and changing consumer values led to a more cautious approach to luxury spending (Xie and Young, 2020). Awareness about sustainability increased during the pandemic, leading to a growing interest in eco-friendly and locally produced fashion. Consumers became more conscious of the environmental and social impact of their clothing choices (Piller, 2023).

Fashion shows, events, and traditional fashion cycles were disrupted. The industry adapted to virtual fashion weeks and digital presentations. Trends also shifted, with an emphasis on versatility, longevity, and timeless pieces over fast fashion (Chrimes and Boardman, 2023).With remote work becoming the norm for many, there was a surge in demand for comfortable yet presentable work-from-home attire. The focus shifted from formal office wear to clothing suitable for virtual meetings and home environments (Himawan et al., 2022;Leal et al., 2023; Black et al., 2023).

Social media and digital influencers played a significant role in shaping fashion trends during lockdowns. With more time spent online, consumers turned to social platforms for inspiration and information, influencing their purchasing decisions (Le and Aydin, 2023; Arania et al., 2022). The shift towards more sustainable consumption may lead to the continued growth of fashion rental services and the second hand market. Renting and buying pre-owned clothing can be seen as more environmentally friendly alternatives to traditional fast fashion (Handa and Bhalla, 2023; Jalil et al., 2023).

Restoring the fashion industry after COVID-19 necessitates sustainable fashion to be of utmost importance. This measurement is employed to gauge the state of both our business and the environment. In order to achieve social justice, it is important for everyone to work towards increasing sustainability, reducing environmental impact, and promoting social justice. The experience of a global pandemic will raise awareness of the importance of sustainable fashion (Kulsum, 2020; Pratap et al., 2023). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is bringing the fashion industry together: producers, brands, young fashion designers, retailers, consumers to jointly create sustainable fashion solutions for production, distribution and consumption, and together drive social and environmental change (Pang et al., 2022;

Annunziata et al., 2023). Sustainable fashion has become more important as the fashion industry tries to rebuild and recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Brydges, 2020; Ye et al., 2023).

Prioritizing sustainable fashion practices is not only important for ethical and environmental reasons but also for the long-term viability and success of the fashion industry as it rebuilds and evolves in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Tarnanidis and Manaf, 2024; Hallier, 2022). A fashion ecosystem that is more resilient, responsible, and innovative can benefit from sustainable practices (Pratap et al., 2023). For the past twenty years, researchers have focused on different aspects of supply chain risk management, such as risk identification, assessment, mitigation, and monitoring. While building supply chain resilience has been proposed to address supply chain risks, the COVID-19 outbreak has proven without a doubt that even the best combinations of traditional strategies such as flexibility, robustness, flexibility, spare capacity, excess inventory are not enough to tackle this particular global pandemic. Suppliers are often located in different countries because the global supply chain goes beyond one country's geographical boundaries.

4. Conclusions and future directions

To sum up, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to modifications in the fashion industry and consumer conduct. The current trends were accelerated, digital strategies were emphasized, and consumer preference towards comfort, sustainability, and practicality was reshaped. Most fashion companies are knowledgeable about how to implement new digital initiatives. So they have time to test the market and wait for consumers to adapt to new ways of shopping. However, the COVID-19 crisis has forced customers, employees, supply chains and all other stakeholders into digital channels and new ways of thinking.

The current crisis may serve as a new digital agenda. Emerging designers, cultural shifts, and technological innovations are among the new influences and events that are influencing the latest developments in fashion. Fashion companies can manage the post-COVID landscape by adapting to these trends, showing resilience, agility, and a commitment to meeting the changing needs of consumers. Consumers are becoming more conscious of the environmental and ethical aspects of their purchases. There is a growing demand for transparency and sustainable practices in the fashion industry. Brands that prioritize sustainability are likely to attract and retain environmentally conscious consumers.

Sustainable fashion practices can contribute to the resilience of the fashion industry. By adopting environmentally friendly materials, ethical production methods, and fair labor practices, fashion brands can build a more resilient and responsive supply chain that is better equipped to handle disruptions (Sarma et al., 2023) Using eco-friendly materials, reducing waste through recycling and upcycling, and adopting circular economy principles. Sustainable practices may require initial investment, but it can lead to long-term cost savings. For example, circular fashion models. Fashion brands that adhere to ethical and sustainable practices may find it simpler to attract investment and top talent, which will help the industry grow and innovate overall.

Governments and regulatory bodies are increasingly focusing on sustainability in various industries, including fashion. Adopting sustainable practices helps fashion brands align with evolving regulations and meet the expectations of socially and environmentally conscious consumers. Sustainable fashion can enhance a brand's image and reputation. Consumers are more likely to support and be loyal to brands that demonstrate a commitment to social and environmental responsibility. Positive brand perception can contribute to increased customer trust and loyalty. The pursuit of sustainability in fashion encourages innovation in materials, production processes, and business models. This drive for innovation can lead to the development of new, more sustainable technologies and practices that benefit both the industry and the environment

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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