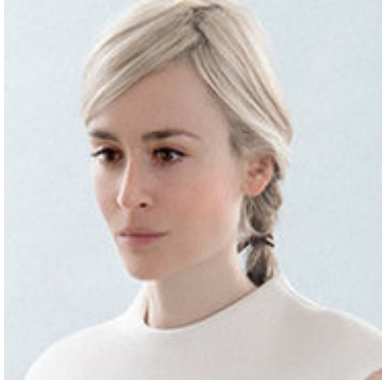


COLUMNS

5 reasons behind the menswear boom

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No one can deny that menswear is having a bit of an extended moment.

Starting with 2011, according to Bain & Co., menswear sales have grown at nearly double the pace of womenswear. Euromonitor projects that they will reach \$110 billion by 2019. That is up 36 percent from 2014.

Menswear is a giant outperforming all other mass industry sectors and gaining impressive cultural capital. What is behind this phenomenal growth?

1. Gender fluidity

It would be too simple to think that rise of menswear has its roots in the metrosexual.

The changing definition of masculinity cannot really be explored without tackling the changes of femininity, too.

Both genders have transformed rapidly in the past few years, with same-sex equality, transgender identity and female leadership becoming exceedingly prominent in our conversations, culture and legislation.

The new generation is more fluid in their definition of gender, and their fashion affinities reflect this.

“Both sexes will buy items they like, regardless of whether they are categorized as men’s or women’s,” said Danny Chow, divisional merchandise manager for menswear at Joyce.

It is not like luxury fashion itself is not pushing the boundaries of the gender roles.

Brands such as Rick Owens, Thom Browne, J.W. Anderson, Céline or Dries van Noten opt to promote self-expression and experimentation over gender.

From Richard Nicoli and Rad Hourani, to Kanye wearing Celine, Michael Kors and Tory Burch launching menswear collections and J.W. Anderson launching womenswear, the limits in business and style of fashion increasingly become as fluid as the gender of their audience.

“I find it very difficult to see the boundary between women’s wear and menswear,” claims J.W. Anderson.

Miuccia Prada agrees.

“Anytime I do a men’s show, I’m thinking this would be fantastic for women – or, at least, for me,” Ms. Prada said.

“It feels instinctively right to translate the same idea for both genders,” she added after her S/S 2015 menswear show.

Gender fluidity adds both creative pressure and widens the creative territory for “traditionally” menswear and womenswear brands. It pushes them toward expressing the core brand concepts through experiences that transcend the specific items from the runway.

2. #menswear

What used to be street cred is now the online cred.

Instagram, Tumblr, Pinterest and Twitter showcase the multiplying sources of cool. There are brands, celebrities, magazines, bloggers, models and consumers all reposting each others’ Tumblr remixes.

Personalities such as Bryan Boy and Dan Trepanier and company represent every global luxury brand imaginable. Thanks to Sartorialist, the idiosyncratic, the eclectic and nerdy are in again.

#menswear is all about the discovery of the next item to add to a personal mix, instantly shareable and covetable by others.

The #menswear generation has “grown up like they are on a stage at all times,” notes Ben Lerer, cofounder/CEO of Thrillist Media Group. “That leads to being more thoughtful about the way you look and more comfortable with the idea of shopping for yourself.”

Zara and Topshop fuel the #menswear trend by churning out straight-from-the-runway items at their signature speed and agility. This new menswear accessibility leads to its wide adoption in the mass market, driving even more #menswear content and

conversations around it.

3. Hipsters are reincarnated yuppies

There is a Jack Spade ad in New York subway cars featuring a well-groomed hipster sitting by the Williamsburg Bridge, wistfully staring at newly built condos across the river. Someone wrote over it, “yuppies suck” (edited version).

Yuppies are the original young urban professionals from a different era. Today’s yuppies - also known as the creative class – does not wear suits to work every day. Instead, they wear Balmain skinny jeans, fitted blazers, Margiela shirts and limited-edition Nike sneakers.

Young urban professionals in 2015 mix streetwear and fashion with the same ease that they followed Supreme and Original Fake in their younger days.

The entryway to luxury menswear is often through sneakers, but self-expression of creative class does not stop there.

The young urban workforce makes their living on being creative. They move around the industry that did not exist at the time of original yuppies, ranging from digital advertising to digital product development and startups of all kinds.

The digital industry has a flat organizational structure, emphasizing play and prototyping. It is obsessed with music and lifestyle and nurtures open office spaces and teamwork. This industry is not white collar or blue collar. It is no collar, so dress accordingly.

4. Lifestyle is in, trends are out

Menswear has long been considered the least profitable segment of the fashion industry. This is largely due to the fact that the category moved at a glacial pace and adhered to the trend cycle even longer and more obsolete than the biannual new collection releases that we have today.

Consumer demand of recent years for incessant newness first yielded multiplication of fashion seasons and then gave in to a year-round feed of product drops fueled by social media. Menswear followed.

Destinations such as Hypebeast or Highsnobiety amplify and scale what might have just been a fragmented niche menswear scene into a vibrant aggregate of eclectic lifestyle inspiration.

Instead of a trend (singular), we have a lifestyle (an aggregate).

A lifestyle is rooted in personality, an individual combination of high and low, vintage and contemporary, places I like to go to as much as pieces I like to wear.

A lifestyle-first attitude led to constant demand for ever new menswear products and looks, fueling supply.

5. Brands = media

The Internet is a constant stream of entertainment that mixes fashion, food, wellness,

sports, music, reality TV and travel, and turns their protagonists into global menswear icons. Think David Beckham, Kanye, Bryan Boy, Jay Z, Bradley Cooper or James Franco, and the bet is you would be able to remember what they wore when you last came across them or their photo.

Menswear brands strive to up their editorial game to successfully compete with the digital-first luxury retailers such as Mr Porter that demonstrated just how lucrative it can be to fuse content and commerce and shorten the gap between consumer inspiration and their conversion.

LUXURY MENSWEAR makes up 40 percent of the global market. Men covet menswear, but women covet it too – think those amazing Cavalli coats – because both genders look for any ammunition they can get for their lifestyle.

Indeed, they care less about traditional social categories, gender or otherwise, than about the newness, creativity and conversational currency of their fashion choices.

A brand with a distinctive lifestyle concept – reflected in both menswear and womenswear – has greater chances for attracting the creative class and increasing its profits. Its underlying advantages are decreased commoditization of their products, relevance outside and beyond fashion cycles, and creative economic outcomes in the form of new ideas, new business opportunities and regional and global growth.

And then, of course, there is China.

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