

RETAIL

Democratization of fashion is changing brands' marketing strategies

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Online shopping and fast fashion are a few of the primary drivers of this new wave. Image credit: Fashionbi

By DANNY PARISI

Luxury fashion has always thrived on a culture of exclusivity, but the modern age has brought about a democratization of the apparel and accessories space that brands are still currently navigating.

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With the rise of digitization, fast fashion and advancements in the production of apparel, fashion is more ubiquitous than ever before. In a new report, Fashionbi looked at some of the causes of this democratization and where it might be driving the industry.

"If we dig deep we can say that today, in contrast to the beginning of 2000, we live in an unstable political and economic environment," said Yana Bushmeleva, chief operating officer at **Fashionbi**, Milan. "We are more involved in social issues and we actively defend our ideas and rights.

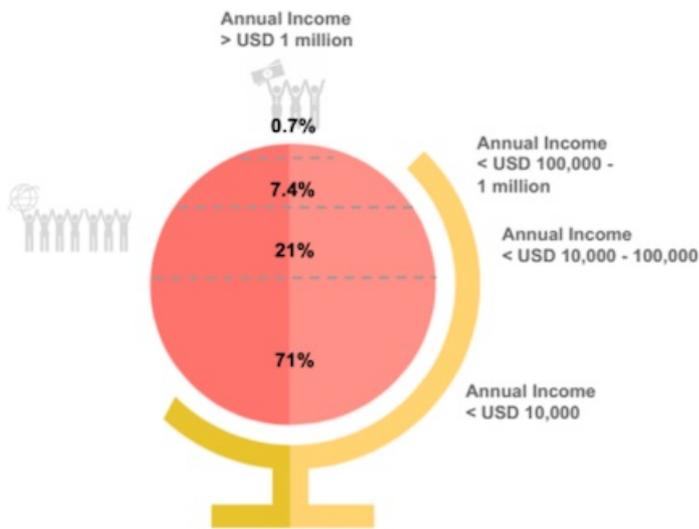
"We can say that we also live in fear of war, terror, bankruptcy of the big companies, and so on," she said. "This kind of situation impacts the way we look and dress, since fashion is a mirror of the times and generations."

Democratization

While high-fashion remains an exclusive business, recent trends have led to a democratization, as Fashionbi puts it, that is disrupting the entire industry.

Whereas before, only the wealthiest elite would be able to access a relatively limited supply of luxury fashion goods. With the rise of fast fashion and improved production models, fashion goods are more readily available and more affordable, leading to more customers purchasing them.

Additionally, the diffusion of brands across digital channels has given customers a large number of ways to purchase those goods.



Fashion consumers. Image credit: Fashionbi

For example, Yoox Net-A-Porter Group released its H1 2017 results showing 1 billion euro revenue after a 20 percent increase in organic sales.

One of the results of this democratization has been a number of partnerships between high-end designers and mass brands. Fashionbi lists Karl Lagerfeld's collection for H&M, Alexander McQueen for Target and Stella McCartney and Yohji Yamamoto for Adidas as examples of these kinds of collaborations.

The democratization has also pushed more brands to market products on social media and digital channels where they can be seen by more people, rather than in the exclusive pages of expensive magazines.

Faster fashion

Along with this democratization has come a redefinition of what it means to be luxury.

For example, during a panel discussion at the FT Business of Luxury Summit on May 16, Floriane de Saint Pierre, president and founder of human resources consultancy Floriane de Saint Pierre & Associates, pointed out that the traditional definition of luxury has gone out of style. Exclusivity and ownership has been replaced by the luxury of ease and comfort.

For instance, many consumers are foregoing buying a country estate because they have Airbnb rentals at their disposal, while wallets and ties are going out of style as mobile payments take off and wardrobes become more casual ([see story](#)).

This can take the form of affordable collections, such as a recent partnership between Jean Paul Gaultier and mass retailer Lindex.

	Premium Brands Always	Fast Fashion Brands Before	Fast Fashion & Premium Brands Now
Fashion Shows	✓	X	✓
Special Events	✓	X	✓
Red Carpet	✓	X	✓
Celebrity Endorsement	✓	X	✓

Fashion marketing. Image credit: Fashionbi

The collection includes women's wear, children's wear and accessories, and displays many of Jean Paul Gaultier's quintessential themes, such as prints and elaborate details.

Prices for the collection go no further than \$270, a figure that would seem minimal for Jean Paul Gaultier's main products, but the partnership's underlying and temporary purpose preserves the brand's integrity ([see story](#)).

The change can also be seen in how luxury brands are delivering their products in a more accessible way.

For example, Burberry allowed consumers to purchase pieces from its fall menswear collection immediately after the runway show.

Consumers were able to "Shop the Runway" following the brand's London Fashion Week show Jan. 8 through to Jan. 22. By shortening the time between collection presentation and commerce, Burberry was able to give consumers a unique experience of owning an item long before it hits store shelves ([see story](#)).

These changes show an industry in flux as it attempts to deal with the newly democratized fashion landscape.

"What we tried to show with this report is that many top brands rely on the same products and ad campaign ideas and sometimes it is difficult to distinguish one product from another, one brand from the competitive company," Fashionbi's Ms. Bushmeleva said.

"So what the companies can do is be aware of the current situation and the business trends, but propose to the market new products and marketing strategies or think about disruptive strategy without relying on the celebrity endorsement and 'top wanted products' such as white sneakers," she said.

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