

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Future of fashion rests on brands' ability to authentically connect

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Post-Pandemic Market Trends in The Fashion Industry. Image credit: Fashionbi

By NORA HOWE

As the fiscal and emotional impacts of the global pandemic continue to unfold, fashion brands should strategize ways to create authentic, long-term relationships with their consumer markets.

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Although most COVID-19 safety restrictions have been lifted for now, the cultural changes brought by lockdown have remained and consumer behaviors have shifted. Fashion and luxury brands must begin rethinking how to effectively approach the changing needs of a new post-pandemic consumer market, according to a report from [Fashionbi](#).

"Luxury brands should invest more in local marketing channels and content marketing which can either entertain or support the people in this difficult period," said Yana Bushmeleva, COO of Fashionbi, Milan.

Fashionbi sourced information from third party global consulting firms, research reports and consumer surveys, while additionally examining brand activity and analyzing campaign trends.

Trends to remember

At unprecedented levels, consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of their purchase behavior, seeking brands that prove environmental and social responsibility. Price and sustainability has become the most important criteria for consumers.

According to [Wunderman Thompson](#) data, 90 percent of consumers in the United States and United Kingdom believe that brands have a responsibility to take care of the planet and its people. Consumers expect brands to be sustainable and transparent to the core, not just in their communication therefore ethics has become a priority in brand strategy and structure.

As brands begin to shift their marketing strategies to align with consumer values, it is important for them to remember to be sustainable internally, not just in what they advertise. From employees to consumers and environment, brands need to consciously think about their actions in all aspects.

Reportedly, U.K. retailers canceled about 2.5 billion pounds in contracts and wages from Bangladeshi suppliers when COVID-19 hit. In March, fashion advocacy group Remake launched the [#PayUp](#) campaign to call out these

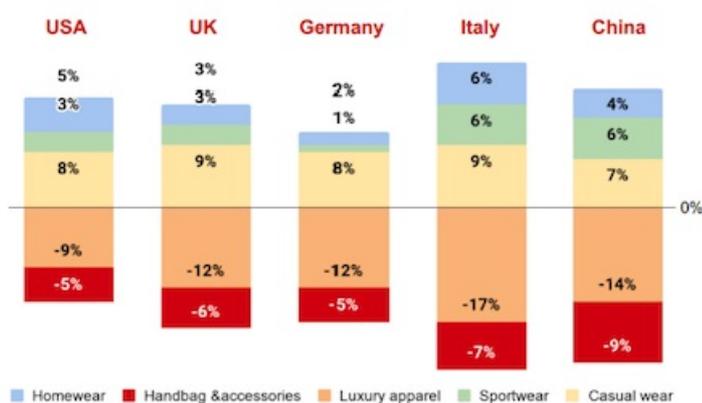
brands, which inevitably influenced global brands to commit to pay back their workers in full.



#PayUp campaign. Image credit: Remake

Personal expression through style dipped as everyone remained in their homes throughout the pandemic, casual wear and athleisure have become the top selling products since March. As lockdown requirements became stricter and work-from-home efforts rose, the need for physical and emotional wellness escalated.

According to [Heuritech](#) analyses, one of four COVID-19 posts was about healthy lifestyles during lockdown. In the U.S., online sales of pajamas grew by 143 percent between March and April, according to data from [Adobe Analytics](#). While in the U.K., year-over-year sales of activewear rose by 97 percent, leggings making up 50 percent of Q1 sales, according to consulting agency [Edited](#).



Future Gross Change Expectation in Overall Spend Across Fashion and Luxury Categories due to COVID-19. Image credit: Boston Consulting Group

"Brands can enlarge their product offers toward the direction of home-wear and healthcare," Ms. Bushmeleva said. "For those that do not have wellness lines, they can collaborate with niche beauty companies or launch special capsule collections."

Consumer driven future

Brands are looking to consumers to listen and understand what they want from the fashion industry. While the fashion industry has historically set the trends, the global response to COVID-19 has shifted the power in favor of the consumer.

Despite a decrease in fashion purchasing during the COVID-19 crisis, consumers are realizing they can find high-quality exclusive items in a more affordable and sustainable way through secondhand shopping.

As the consumer market seeks sustainable and responsible fashion in the secondhand market, luxury brands should explore selling secondhand themselves, instituting buy-back programs or partnering with existing platforms to leverage industry knowledge ([see story](#)).

Due to the shift from tourist shoppers to local shoppers, localization strategy is essential to be applied to approach local shoppers by understanding the consumer sentiment and their cultural context. In June, [The Atlantic](#) highlighted that international tourism would not return to pre-lockdown levels too soon, with wealthy shoppers from Asia and the Middle East absent, the European luxury industry would be hanging on by a thread ([see story](#)).

"All the trends were already existing on the market," Ms. Bushmeleva said. "The pandemic just accelerated the

process and pushed the brands to act faster.

"My advice for luxury brands is to apply the global marketing approach, she said. "A big portion of revenue has been driven by shopping tourism, which is no longer possible with the closed borders and quarantine restrictions.

"Therefore, leveraging local customers is crucial."

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