

NAVIGATING CHANGE: SHIFTING IDENTITIES IN FASHION FROM BRAND-CENTRIC CAPITALISM TO POST-PANDEMIC CONSUMER FOCUS

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KEYWORDS

Post-pandemic consumer approaches, Fashion industry business models, Clothing and identity, Ecological resources, New brand scenarios

ABSTRACT

For decades and over a century now, we have known a certain fashion cycle - trends evolve, they emerge, behave, subside and then (most often) resurface at another time. Fashion has been a part of identity politics with practices of consumption and production that are now well known evils.

As the world becomes more globalised, people are looking at more local approaches to food, to economy and to sustenance. What's interesting is that while looking outside at the world, humans have realised that most solutions lie inwards. The pandemic has made us stop, pause, think, reset; and although most life is back on track and the busy-ness of business is almost as it was pre-pandemic, there has been a tiny shift that is changing our perspective towards our consumption habits as humans.

The various cultural aspects that have defined us are becoming more prominent as of this last decade due to various reasons, political and otherwise. Visible cultural indicators such as food and clothing, are once again taking its inspiration from the antiquated, the indigenous and the local embodied knowledge systems.

There is research on how associations between body and dress may modify perceptions or aspects of identity that are communicated through dress (1995). In 'The fashioned body' (2015), Entwistle is of the view that '... we increasingly identify with our bodies as containers of our identities and places of personal expression'. Roland Barthes who has stated fashion is a sign, with its own semiological meanings, is being proven true like never before where a lot of fashion brands and consumers are switching to building contexts around aspects of localised production and consumption as a way to signify the above shift.

This paper researches on ways in which brands are re-structuring their businesses to accommodate this shift and mindsets. The new generation is questioning practices, it is looking for narratives that resonate with its newer, younger mindset.

Through a qualitative and observation-based approach, this paper will undertake brand studies on fashion brands in India that have emerged within the last decade, that has originally either had a practice to work with the local or has undertaken this approach post pandemic, and the response it has received from its customers on the same. This will help evaluate mindset shifts and also look at how one of the fastest growing economies as well as the largest young population of the world is consuming fashion and clothing in today's day and age.

Fashion has the ability to drive masses, to create subcultures, to shift economies, to create mass hysteria, also to fill landfills and to add to climate change; and finally, fashion has the ability to invent and reinvent itself constantly! This reinvention and transition (of business approaches) at this time will define a future plan for contingency.