

Chapter 52

Co-Creation via Digital Fashion Technology in New Business Models for Premium Product Innovation: Case-Studies in Menswear and Womenswear Adaptation

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on co-creation as a key business model for Bespoke and Semi-Bespoke menswear tailoring and women's swimwear brands that use innovative concepts and processes to create premium products for a younger and more demanding consumer segment. The Millennials, Generation Z and Generation C all like to co-create products for their own body-shape fit and product design preferences. The discussion commences with a review of key texts on digital fashion technology and practices enabling 'co-creation' strategies. The research methodology is mixed method including consumer questionnaires, online survey observation with analysis of companies utilizing new digital practices to meet consumer's demands. The latest developments in digital fashion scanning, sizing, product design and customization of new and existing ranges will evidence how co-creation strategies can brand-stretch and add value creation. Includes best practice process steps for visualization, professional style advice and co-creator recommendations via the e-commerce website or social media.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 20 years a paradigm shift has taken fashion companies from designing, manufacturing and marketing their apparel as finished offerings to targeting markets and customers who want more from their consumption. Marketing strategies include better body-fit and either choices of fabric and trim, shape and style or the customer becoming part of the design-production process as a co-creator of

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their own garments. This approach has been enabled by progressive changes in fashion technology via increasing availability and use of methods such as digital 3D body-scanning, pattern-cutting and manufacturing. Consumer's constant use of mobile phones, apps and tablets to research for products prior to consumption and the multiple-choice that co-creation via web 3.0 offers for individual fit and styling enables the deployment of value co-creation strategies as a mechanism driving new or expanded business models for fashion companies (Funk, 2009; Osterwalder & Pigneur, 2010; Zhang & Chen, 2008). The willingness of consumers to engage in their daily lives with all forms of technology is often described and evaluated via the technology acceptance model (TAM) (Davis, 1989). These recent shifts in attitude and behavior have mainly been documented as prevalent with younger female and male consumers from middle-high income demographic and social-cultural strata who require style choice, individuality and a better fitting garment. This sector of society are known in marketing terms as the 'Millennials' born 1981-1996 and 'Generation Z' (GenZ) born 1997-2003 identified as the youngest generation currently becoming significant consumers (Merriman, 2015). For this sector luxury or designer fashion is not only about displaying wealth and status symbols but also about defining their individual unique style and constructing their personal look within a product or brand. This is identified as the biggest growth potential sector for co-creative customized value services. Luxury brands such as Burberry and Pringle are now offering co-creation services and sports brands such as Nike have been offering customized trainers for some time. For Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and start-up companies this creates economically viable business models which maximize premium-product revenues. Examples include Threadless.com which provides the opportunity to select from a choice of designer winning tee-shirts or co-create your own from scratch (Piller, 2011). Also Knyttan where you can choose a sweater design or create your own and have it made up on a knitting- machine and hand sewn the same day as your design creation purchase (Follows, 2015)

This chapter focuses on two of the most problematic body-sizing and styling fashion markets - Menswear semi-bespoke apparel and women's semi-bespoke Swimwear for the Asian consumer. This includes several previous qualitative research studies on bespoke menswear undertaken or updated yearly since 2007 by Ross (2007, 2009, 2012, 2015), in conjunction with other recent surveys and research case-studies and an in depth study of the Hong Kong semi-bespoke swimwear market conducted by Chen (2015). An aim of the review is to map the acceptance and embedding by consumers of co-created premium apparel. Also explored is fashion company willingness to invest in new methods of product innovation with digital fashion-technology enabling fashion consumers to purchase co-created menswear and womenswear with an improved fit and self -styling. Benefits of this approach include adaption of products for differing body-types, cultural and religious style codes and individual color, textile and pattern preferences now technologically, operationally and economically viable for all mid-premium price band product ranges in international fashion markets.

Current (i.e. 2016) and most recent longitudinal research (Ross, 2015) shows an increase in the bespoke and semi-bespoke menswear industry shifting towards co-creation strategies via digital fashion technology and a supporting study carried out extensive in-depth research into the concept of Semi-Bespoke, Co-creations for the womenswear market in swimwear (Chen, 2015). The research includes digital design and manufacture aids, use of e-commerce, social media and style-advice with many of the contemporary adaptations to new technology in anthropometrics (measurements), manufacturing, and e-commerce mapping the changes into a new digital age both for manufacture and consumption. Exploration of attitudes and operations from both the production and consumption perspectives documents the current paradigm shift forming a seminal influence on the future of the fashion industry.

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