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# Evolving ‘places’: The paradigmatic shift in the role of the fashion designer

## ABSTRACT

*This study examines the concept of ‘place’ in the design process and the evolving role of the fashion designer. The contemporary fashion marketplace has reached unprecedented levels of abundance. This is altering society’s relationship with design. Consumers’ basic needs are being over-met and have moved well beyond the material realm; consumers are increasingly driven by their search for meaning and emotional fulfilment through design. The result of this process is the altering of their perception of design ‘value’ from the tangible to the intangible. While the traditional values of aesthetics and function remain essential components to design, a product’s ability to deliver ‘emotional value’ to the user must increasingly become the focus for designers. To succeed, a designer must shift his/her sense of ‘place’ – namely, the figurative ‘place’ from which he/she designs. Rather than creating fashion from myopic, personal biases, future designers must enter the ‘place’ of the design process by rigorously researching their consumers’ psychographics and emotional needs to ‘design emotion’. The new role of the fashion designer – the ‘Designer-As-Social-Scientist’ – takes a much broader view of the consumers’ needs. The evolution of the ‘place’ of the design process will result in products having greater meaning and emotional value; designers standing out in the over-saturated market; and businesses increasing consumer loyalty and resultant sales by offering only those products that are truly desired by their target audience.*

## KEYWORDS

fashion design  
design process  
fashion industry  
consumerism  
fast fashion  
Generation Z

## INTRODUCTION

Fashion cannot lock itself in the so-called ivory tower anymore. We need to be conscious of the world and reflect on what's happening.

(Cédric Charbit, Chief Executive of Balenciaga, in *Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company* 2019: 49)

The traditional role of the fashion designer is no longer relevant or sustainable. As the contemporary fashion marketplace reaches unprecedented levels of abundance, saturation and consumption, consumers' needs and desires for design move well beyond the material realm. No longer is object creation, which offers traditional forms value (e.g. material worth, aesthetics and function), the sole goal of designers. Now, their creations must carry an 'emotional value' that targets consumers' unique practical *and* emotional needs.

This new form of design practice requires the designer's sense of place – namely, the figurative creative 'place' from which he/she designs – to shift, along with their role as a fashion designer. The conventional notion of the 'designer as auteur' whose personal proclivities and dictates are blindly followed by devotees is being replaced by designers who, through their use of new design and research processes grounded in the social sciences, offer emotionally compelling products that provide 'emotional value'. By doing so, the designer's sense of 'place' from which they begin and hone their design process is shifted: rather than creating fashion from myopic, personal biases, future designers must enter the 'place' of the design process by rigorously researching their consumers' psychographics and emotional needs. This research grounds and substantiates their work and, consequently, yields the heightened 'emotional value' increasingly sought by consumers. Designs become more meaningful and desirable to consumers who, due to this heightened 'emotional value' and sentiment, may cherish and retain the products longer, thus contributing to global sustainability.

The need to shift the designer's role into one which crafts emotionally compelling narratives and products is partially attributed to society's changing relationship with design. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, design became a near-obsession in the media and for consumers who wanted greater accessibility to 'high design' objects. Mass retailers responded en masse by orchestrating collaborations with 'guest star designers', including architect Michael Graves for Target, fashion designer Vera Wang for Kohl's, and decorator Jonathan Adler for JCPenney. Around the world, consumers responded with unprecedented levels of consumption, leading fashion brands to respond with equally extreme levels of production that overwhelms shoppers with choice.

As a result of these shifts, a new relationship has emerged between design and consumer. When viewed through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), the overabundance that characterizes first-world societies enables consumers to have their basic needs met and seek out meaningful life experiences for esteem and self-actualization. The consumers' search for meaning generates the increasing importance that emotionally compelling narratives have in oversaturated markets where consumers are inundated with offerings. Moreover, recent studies debunk the common assumption that the greater the choices, the more likely people will buy; the novelty of overabundance that captivated early twenty-first-century shoppers is now causing 'choice paralysis' due to its ubiquity in the marketplace (Schwartz 2006; Iyengar and

Lepper 2000). These studies shed light on the marked decline in both sales and consumer satisfaction (emotional value) that results from having too much choice. Consequently, the consumers' dissatisfaction (and low emotional value of products) leads them to re-enter the marketplace in a continued attempt to seek emotional value where the cycles of overconsumption, overproduction and dissatisfaction repeat themselves.

To succeed designers must adopt a new role – the 'designer-as-social scientist'. In this role, designers will pivot from the traditional 'place' of the design process to a new place that begins with detailed, substantiated research to illuminate the consumers' specific needs for emotional fulfilment. The research findings subsequently ground all proceeding stages of design – from design concept to final product to presentation format(s). This new 'place' and role of the designer may result in products having greater meaning and emotional value; designers standing out in the oversaturated market; consumers supporting sustainability by holding onto products longer due to the sentiment they feel towards their objects; and businesses increasing consumer loyalty and resultant sales by offering only those products that are truly desired by their target audience.

## **THE BROADENING PLACE OF DESIGN IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

Design has become a near-obsession and a dominant force permeating nearly every facet of our daily lives. In her book *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness*, Virginia Postrel (2003) asserts consumers' interests in 'designed' objects suddenly spiked in the early 2000s. During this time, the increased attention to design in the media and greater accessibility to 'high design' at retail became markedly more democratized and widespread across consumer demographics. Postrel writes:

Aesthetics is more pervasive than it used to be – not restricted to a social, economic, or artistic elite, limited to only a few settings or industries, or designed to communicate only power, influence or wealth. Sensory appeals are everywhere, they are increasingly personalized, and they are intensifying.

(2003: 5)

For the average middle-class consumer, the sudden and unprecedented interest in 'high design' fostered an equally growing compulsion for acquiring all things 'designed'. The surge was due in part to the ubiquity of the internet that promoted higher standards of choice and aestheticism among consumers, increase of marketing campaigns that pushed conspicuous consumption, growing affluence, and emergent technologies that facilitated hyper-accelerated and less expensive production output (Postrel 2003; Palomo-Lovinski and Faerm 2020; Proud 2014). Consumers filled their daily lives with 'high design' – no matter how pedestrian or utilitarian the object – such as Karim Rashid's Garbo wastebasket for the Italian company Umbra that has sold over 7 million units and is featured in the permanent collection of the Brooklyn Museum of Art (Volf 2016; Postrel 2003). Rashid even designed a 'Millennial Manhole Cover' for New York City's Consolidated Edison (ConEd) Company after beating out seven other internationally renowned designers in a competition juried by panellists representing such venerable institutions as New

York City's Museum of Modern Art, The Cooper Union and The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Roane 1999; ConEd 1999). Similarly, the highly acclaimed and multi-awarded architect Michael Graves was commissioned by mass-retailer Target to design a range of over 2000 household objects that included outdoor patio sets, tea kettles, clocks and ice cream scoopers – many of which were produced and achieved remarkable success in sales (Target 2012; Luckel 2019).

The proliferation of these partnerships between world-famous designers and mass-retailers is highly promoted and aims to satiate consumers' demand – particularly in the apparel sector. For instance, Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) has partnered with such fashion luminaries as Karl Lagerfeld, Sonia Rykiel, and Stella McCartney with laudable media attention and financial success. Buyers' demands for these partnerships are so extreme that when Target debuted its design collaboration with Missoni, the retailer's website crashed in less than two hours after their online launch due to the unprecedented volume of website traffic for the collection (Clifford 2011). H&M experienced similar levels of consumer frenzy during the unveiling of its partnership with Balmain: approximately 500 people slept outside the London store the night before the opening, and in Seoul, South Korea, crowds waited outside stores for one week before the apparel was made available to shoppers (Paton 2015). These experiences escalate the corporation's profits while deeply impacting consumers' sense of time and place. The urgency to purchase goods that are offered for a limited time escalates consumers' emotions and this, in turn, reduces their inhibitions and rational thinking when shopping. In a state of near-panic, shoppers purchase excessive amounts of merchandise before they vanish forever.

This sudden, pervasive interest in design has led many other mass industries and traditional institutions to respond to their audiences' peaking interest in all things designed. The television industry was among the first to capitalize on their audiences' heightened demands by creating design-focused programming. Although a spattering of fashion-themed television existed in the latter decades of the twentieth century (e.g. *Style with Elsa Klensch* that was launched in 1980), it was not until 2004, when *Project Runway* was launched, that design-themed television shows began to reach unprecedented viewership and accolades: *Project Runway's* US syndicate grew 150 per cent in just four seasons (Givhan 2014; Otterson 2015), was awarded several prestigious Emmy Awards, and the show has aired 25 versions internationally. Shows that feature design competitions target broad audiences and span creative disciplines in order to attract large quantities of loyal viewers. For example, the programmes *Shear Genius* for hair styling and *Top Design* for interior design provide audiences with diverse forms of 'design process-as-entertainment'. Viewers learn about the participants' personal histories, creative processes, and professional pursuits. As a result, viewers form an emotional bond with the contestants and their design work, like a sports team enthusiast highly favouring a specific team player. The designers – and the design processes they invent – evoke a positive emotional response to viewers due to this relationship and sentimentality. The experience transcends the traditional attributes of design (i.e. function and aesthetics) when viewers form deeper emotional associations with the products via the context of the makers and the unique design processes showcased (Turkle 2011).

The meteoric enthusiasm for design has led it to be featured in places that, historically, did not spotlight design – such as fine art museums. In 2000, The Guggenheim Museum took an unexpected departure from exhibiting

venerated modern art by staging a retrospective of Giorgio Armani's fashions in 2000. Despite the controversy that surrounded the show – a case of 'intellectual corruption' felt by some critics (Muschamp 2000) – many other leading US museums similarly responded to their audiences' interests in design that emerged starting in the early 2000s.

This interest resulted in increasing design exhibitions at bastions of 'fine art'. For instance, the Department of Textiles and Fashion Arts at the renowned Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, held just six exhibitions in seven years between 1997 and 2004. Yet, in the same amount of time between 2012 and 2019, the quantity jumped 183 per cent to 17 exhibitions (Museum of Fine Arts Boston n.d.). The growing number of design exhibitions has been met with their visitors' equally growing enthusiasm. For example, when New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art's Costume Institute held a monographic exhibition of Alexander McQueen's work in 2011, 661,409 people visited in just three months (Freeman 2011) and, due to its unexpected popularity, the show was extended by one week with additional hours (Freeman 2011).

This ability of design to reach and connect diverse populations across both literal and figurative 'places' was particularly evident by the Institute's recent exhibition, *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination*. The display of religious and secular garments attracted more than 1.65 million visitors, making it the *most* visited exhibit in the entire museum's 146-year history (The Metropolitan Museum of Art n.d.). The exhibition's unique 'conversation between fashion and religion' (Valentine 2018: n.pag.) underscored design's ability to surpass mere aesthetics and functionality and to provide broad audiences with a sense of community and emotional fulfilment through design. The ability of design to transcend traditional boundaries and places in the twenty-first century was noted by Anna Wintour, editor of US Vogue and elective trustee of the Metropolitan Museum's board when she remarked, 'One of the [museum's] mailroom guys told me yesterday how much he enjoyed the show. It just shows you how fashion now reaches [and affects] so many different people' (Freeman 2011: n.pag.). Collectively, these exhibits extend the traditional 'place' of fashion from traditional centres (e.g. Paris, Milan and New York) to new 'places' that may culturally and financially impact diverse audiences.

## **SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS OF TIME, CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION IN THE FASHION MARKETPLACE**

The twenty-first-century consumers' obsession with design, promoted and sustained through pop culture, has contributed to unprecedented rates of consumption and production of 'designed' objects. Globally, the household final consumption expenditure – the market value of all goods and services purchased by households – has grown nearly 3600 per cent between 1965 and 2016 (Index Mundi n.d.). The United States has an exceptionally high household final consumption expenditure: it ranks number one out of 179 other countries and has risen 3765 per cent since 1960 (Index Mundi n.d.). The nation's level of consumption is so high that it spends more money on trash bags than the combined gross domestic product of ninety other countries, the average American will consume 53 times more goods and services than someone from China, and if all countries used resources at the rate the United States does, we would need approximately five planets equivalent to the Earth to sustain us (LaBarre 2003; Scheer and Moss 2012; Leonard 2010).

The dramatic spikes in the production and consumption of the apparel subset of overall consumption are *particularly* egregious. Due to streamlined operations, advanced technology, and rising consumer spending, clothing production doubled between 2000 and 2014 alone (Remy et al. 2016). This level of hypervelocity found in the ‘fast-fashion’ sector has enabled companies to produce unprecedented quantities of apparel and textiles with great efficiency – eradicating the industry’s previous sense of ‘time’. For instance, the Spanish conglomerate Zara has approximately 200 designers who develop 40,000 styles each year, of which 12,000 are produced and shipped to 88 countries (McLaren 2013; Siegel 2011). The leading fast-fashion retailer H&M sells more than 500 million items annually from its nearly 4968 stores around the world (Leonard 2010; Statista 2019). To satiate their global consumers’ near-obsessive demand for new offerings, these companies typically design, produce and distribute products in just twenty days (Leonard 2010). This hype-accelerated ‘sketch-to-floor’ production and distribution system, aided by technology, now allows some retailers to debut 24 fashion collections each year, offering new designs on the sales floor every two weeks (Remy et al. 2016; Peterson 2014). The current fashion cycle has fostered completely new concepts of time and place for consumers who now both expect and demand an overabundance of offerings with increasing speed, rapid update of design products, and accessibility. In fact, ‘the number of garments produced annually has doubled since 2000 and exceeded 100 billion for the first time in 2014: [this equals] nearly fourteen items of clothing for every person on earth’ (Remy et al. 2016: n.pag.). Moreover, through this hyper-speed cycle, fast-fashion brands must leverage economies of scale in order to keep pace and profitability with this type of business model. As a result, there is little room for customization. Instead, these companies develop uniformity in product lines, regardless of sociopolitical or geographic variations. Thus, they present the same products in New York as they do in Dubai. This ‘global economies of scale’ approach propagates homogenous design that, in turn, fails to address fully the individual’s unique physical and/or emotional needs (Quinn 2019).

This constant stream of affordable ‘high design’ that entices consumers to buy things more often creates unprecedented levels of consumption. Shoppers now demand roughly four times the number of garments they did in 1980 (Leonard 2010). Between 2000 and 2014, the number of garments purchased each year by the average consumer increased by 60 per cent (Leonard 2010; Remy et al. 2016). Across nearly every apparel category, consumers keep clothing items about half as long as they did fifteen years ago, and on average across consumers, for every item bought, one will be discarded in the trash each year (Remy et al. 2016; Leonard 2010). This one-to-one ration of garments acquired-to-garments discarded has led consumers to discard approximately 10.5 million tons of apparel into landfills – an increase of 354 per cent since 1980 (United States Environmental Protection Agency 2019). The demand for new apparel and its subsequent discard is especially accelerated in the contemporary fashion marketplace where the cost to dry clean a garment sometimes can be equal to the price as the garment itself. This prompts many consumers to wear a garment a few times and then discard it so they can purchase a newer, more fashionable version. The poor quality of fast-fashion apparel accelerates the disposal cycle since cheap fashion is more likely to be thrown out rather than be repaired when stained or torn (Siegel 2011). Moreover, a significant quantity of women (33 per cent) consider clothes ‘old’ after fewer than three wears (Barnardo’s 2015).

Thus, fashion moves between the state of usefulness and garbage at hyper-speed. This rapid life cycle decreases the sentimental value placed on items by consumers. In this mindset, clothing then simply becomes 'stuff' or a 'thing' with no meaning. Yet, for a brief moment in time, buyers acquire instant gratification by owning the designed item before they quickly come down from the 'buying high' that consumers often experience (Quinn 2019). At that point, buyers again quickly re-enter the market in a circular quest for emotional fulfilment through 'designed' products.

## **OUR EVOLVING RELATIONSHIP WITH DESIGN**

The fashion industry's evolving sense of time and place – due in part to the skyrocketed rates of production and consumption – has fostered marked shifts in consumers' relationship with design. While numerous shifts have occurred since the early 2000s, the scope of this article will examine three that are particularly salient. These include the shift in the emotional value consumers increasingly seek from designed products and/or associated systems as a result of the fashion industry's hyper-acceleration; the shift in the psychological effects of overabundance on consumers and subsequent need for more concise product curation/editing in the marketplace to bolster business sustainability; and why/how an understanding of these two shifts and future planning must be strategically aimed towards the emergent generation of consumers.

### ***The 'emotional value' of design in the future marketplace***

Consumers' excessive demands for 'high design' have contributed to the emergence of an oversaturated marketplace. This oversaturation creates an overabundance of products in which consumers are inundated and overwhelmed with choices. For most first-world consumers, their basic needs are not just met but, rather, far surpassed. To succeed in the future marketplace, designers must differentiate their offerings in ways that go beyond the standard attributes of design (aesthetics and function) through a new attribute: 'emotional value'. Pink (2005) contextualizes this marketplace and the ways consumers will relate to and engage with design in the near future. He states:

Abundance has satisfied, and even over-satisfied, the material needs of millions – boosting the significance of beauty and emotion and accelerating individuals' search for meaning. As more of our basic needs are met, we increasingly expect sophisticated experiences that are emotionally satisfying and meaningful. These experiences will not be simple products. They will be complex combinations of products, services, spaces, and information. They will be the ways we get educated, the ways we are entertained, the ways we stay healthy, the ways we share and communicate.

(2005: 46)

Pink's assertion aligns with the pyramidal framework of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943). Instead of needing basic necessities such as food, shelter and safety (situated at the pyramid's lower levels), today's first-world shoppers actively seek out meaningful products and life experiences that will fulfil their higher-level needs for esteem, creativity and self-actualization (located

at the pyramid's apex). In an overabundant world consumers' basic needs are met, and this allows them to climb higher up the hierarchical pyramid to its peak. This elevated pursuit changes how consumers relate to design: their engagement with product is no longer driven by need but by the desire for emotional fulfilment. This fulfilment is gained through the designer's uniquely compelling narratives and design processes that manifest in the objects and/or systems themselves.

Of course, this does not imply the primary purpose of design can (or should) be marginalized: that it must work and elevate aesthetics which are 'fundamentally the art of using line, form, tone, color, and texture to arouse [a] reaction in the beholder' (Van Doren 1954: 166). Rather, the emotional value of design that is being sought by consumers must drive all stages of the design process, instead of being a consequential result of the product's final outcome. In this shifting design process framework, rather than creating designs from their personal proclivities and hoping consumers respond positively, designers must begin their design processes first by ascertaining their audience's unique and ever-shifting psychographics. To do this, designers must employ social science research methodologies that will elicit relevant findings and, in turn, will enable them to strategically develop more meaningful products that yield greater (and longer lasting) emotional value for the consumer. Moreover, designers must expand their offerings well beyond physical objects by (as noted by Pink) including those that encompass all aspects of daily life, such as 'designed' services, systems and experiences.

One example of consumers' growing need for emotional value through 'designed' experiences is the exponential growth of the wellness industry. Wellness is 'the act of practicing healthy habits on a daily basis [...] so that instead of just surviving, you're *thriving*' (Pfizer Official Website 2019: n.pag., original emphasis), thus exemplifying contemporary society's ongoing quest for self-actualization in our overabundant world (Maslow 1943). Consumers' desire to achieve this elevated hierarchy of 'personal best' is evidenced by the industry's sudden popularity. The Global Wellness Institute (GWI) reports:

[T]he global wellness industry grew 12.8 per cent from 2015-2017, from a \$3.7 trillion to a \$4.2 trillion market. To put that in economic context, from 2015-2017, the wellness economy grew 6.4 per cent annually, nearly twice as fast as global economic growth (3.6 per cent). Wellness expenditures (\$4.2 trillion) are now more than half as large as total global health expenditures (\$7.3 trillion). And the wellness industry represents 5.3 per cent of global economic output.

(2018: n.pag.)

Wellness tourism – which affords consumers a more immersive 'designed' experience aimed at elevating their self-actualization – has seen an especially pronounced growth, from USD 494.1 billion in 2013 to USD 563.2 billion in 2015 (13.98 per cent) (GWI 2018). In fact, world travellers made a staggering 830 million wellness trips in 2017, 139 million more trips than in 2015 – and these represented 17 per cent of total tourism expenditures (Zaczkiewicz 2019; GWI 2018).

### ***The effects of too much choice on consumer behaviour***

The oversaturated market that inundates consumers with too much choice has fostered an unexpected shift in consumer behaviour. At the advent of



the twenty-first century, many retailers (e.g. the aforementioned 'fast fashion' companies) began to overstock their stores to seemingly limitless capacity while accelerating product turnover, which is a practice that continues today. By utilizing this model, these retailers operate under the assumption that if they offer people more choices, then people are more likely to find *exactly* what they are looking for, and therefore they are more likely to buy it (Schwartz 2006). This assumption is grounded in psychological theory and research literature that affirms the positive affective and motivational consequences of having personal choice (Iyengar and Lepper 2000).

However, the growing body of research literature in this area reveals a paradox: if consumers are presented with too many choices, they are actually *less* likely to buy. In this scenario, if they do buy, they are less satisfied with their purchase (Schwartz 2006; Iyengar and Lepper 2000). In a ground-breaking study, Professors Sheena Iyengar of Columbia University and Mark Lepper of Stanford University tested their 'choice overload hypothesis' – the tentative assumption that an overabundance of choice may decrease a person's motivation to choose or the satisfaction with the finally chosen option (Scheibehenne et al. 2010) – by conducting an experiment in which shoppers at an upscale food market were offered alternating varieties of jam. On one day, shoppers saw a display table with 24 varieties of jam. On another day, shoppers saw a similar table with only six varieties of jam on display. The large assortment drew 60 per cent of customers while only 40 per cent stopped by the smaller one. On average, all customers sampled two jams. Yet, 30 per cent of the shoppers who had sampled from the smaller assortment purchased jam, while only 3 per cent of those who sampled from the larger display bought jam (Iyengar and Lepper 2000; Tugend 2010). The findings from this study (and others) reveal that while consumers may find an extensive array of options appealing and novel at first sight, it often causes 'choice overload', causing confusion for the buyer, which subsequently reduces their motivation to buy. The greater the choice, the more time and effort consumers need to expend on selecting the 'right' choice for themselves. That time and effort can lead to 'anxiety, regret, excessively high expectations, and self-blame if the choices don't work out' (Schwartz 2006: n.pag.) – thus causing consumers to withdraw from the act of choosing altogether.

Research studies also reveal an excess of choices often leads consumers to be *less*, not more, satisfied once they actually decide. During an experiment subsequent to the 'choice overload hypothesis' experiment, testers asked participants to select chocolates. In the results of this experiment, Iyengar and Lepper noted:

[C]hoosers in extensive-choice contexts enjoy the choice-making process more – presumably because of the opportunities it affords – but also feel more responsible for the choices they make, resulting in frustration with the choice-making process and dissatisfaction with their choices. Indeed, participants in the extensive-choice condition reported experiencing the decision-making process as being simultaneously more enjoyable, more difficult, and more frustrating. Later, after actually sampling their chocolates, extensive-choice participants reported being more dissatisfied and having more regret about the choices they had made than did limited-choice participants. [...] [Extensive-choice participants were] burdened by the responsibility of distinguishing good from bad decisions.

(2000: 1003)

As a result, having unlimited options can lead customers to be more dissatisfied with the choices they make. Although these findings seem counter-intuitive to the research on the benefits of choice, corporations have taken notice and experimented with the streamlining of their products with notable success. In one scenario, Proctor & Gamble experienced a 10 per cent increase in sales when it reduced the number of versions of a popular shampoo (Osnos 1997). The streamlining of design offerings will be particularly critical for the growing emergent generation of consumers whose attributes are markedly different from those of previous generations.

### ***The evolved needs of the emerging generation***

Design practitioners must reimagine how they develop the relationships between their products and their audiences – namely, through the development of well-curated offerings that strategically target and fulfil the emergent generation's values and needs for emotional fulfilment from designed objects and/or associated systems. The new 'Generation Z' (those born between 1995 and 2012) currently represents nearly 32 per cent of the world's population and will be the largest generation to date (Miller and Lu 2018). As consumers, they will make a pronounced impact in the marketplace: by 2020, Generation Z will account for 40 per cent of all consumers and have USD 3.2 trillion in purchasing power (Finch 2015; Twenge 2017). Therefore, it is incumbent upon designers to understand how these consumers' sense of time and place is markedly different from past generations. Generation Z's unique perceptions that subsequently shape their needs from design will require current fashion industry practices to evolve so that designers and brands can flourish and remain sustainable.

A growing body of research reveals new consumer attributes commonly found in Generation Z. These attributes have emerged in strong reaction to world news events that occur with increased regularity. Chitrakorn, citing one particular attribute, notes:

It is clear there has been a shift in the way [Generation Z-ers] view transparency. In today's world of post-truth politics and 'fake news', consumers' distrust of governments and media has extended to every aspect of their lives, [including] fashion. Surveys suggest that trust in businesses fell in forty per cent of countries in 2017, with more than two in five consumers saying they didn't know which brands to trust.

(2019: 64)

Distrust is so high among Generation Z that 45 per cent of them report that they always research a company's background before making a purchase and that 'fashion [brands] will be most scrutinized [in the areas of] creative integrity, sustainable supply chains, value for money, treatment of workers, data protection and authenticity' (The Business of Fashion [BoF] and McKinsey 2019).

Generation Z's heightened attention to these areas – particularly sustainability and social justice – gained prominence following a stream of recent catastrophes. For example, in 2013 over 1100 people perished in the Rana Plaza garment factory collapse in Bangladesh, causing outrage among consumers who now seek increasing transparency about supply chains (Thomas 2018). In 2018, consumers were stunned when learning Burberry had incinerated

USD 37.6 million worth of unsold goods rather than offering them on sale (Chitrakorn 2019). These, and other nefarious acts involving garment sweatshops, worker abuses, child labour, and ecological disasters, have put the fashion industry under scrutiny by consumers who want to know if their products were made ethically and sustainably (Chitrakorn 2019). Moreover, 94 per cent of Generation Z consumers believe companies have a responsibility to address environmental and social issues, and 92 per cent would switch brands to one associated with a good cause, given similar price and quality (Cone Communications 2017). Thus, a brand's *practices* – and not merely the physical products they offer – will factor heavily into the purchasing decisions and brand loyalties of this generation. In the context of fashion design, a garment's traditional forms of tangible 'value' (e.g. textiles used) must also include advanced forms of intangible emotional value that the consumer experiences, in part, due to the company's ethics and attendant practices. Cédric Charbit, Chief Executive of Balenciaga, underscores this future shift in the fashion industry by stating, '[A] brand is not only here to sell product to the client. It's also about communicating and conveying messages and values to the entire community of the brand' (BoF and McKinsey 2019: 48).

Fashion brands are improving their practices by creating initiatives that promote ethical manufacturing, sustainability, environmental wellness, social justice, and brand transparency. In manufacturing, a growing form of transparency includes brands providing information about their products' origins and/or the environmental impact of manufacturing. For instance, the H&M owned Arket lists where each product is made, the location and name of the factory, and even shows pictures from the manufacturing floor (BoF and McKinsey 2019; Bain 2017). The retailer Reformation applies its 'RefScale' methodology to 'measure the environmental impact of every garment it sells and discloses the results to customers' (BoF and McKinsey 2019: 61). RefScale tracks pounds of carbon dioxide and gallons of water used in production (Gerdeman 2014). Other supply chain tracking technologies include analysing dust samples and using artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to trace the geographic history of a product (BoF and McKinsey 2019).

Social justice is also being addressed with increased scope by fashion brands. Levi's developed a campaign against gun violence; designer Jeremy Scott walked his runway in a T-shirt urging 'Tell your senator no on Kavanaugh' (in reference to the then-embattled US Supreme Court justice); and H&M launched a Pride collection to support the 'LGBTQ' community. These initiatives resonate deeply with consumers' new needs and values (particularly those of Generation Z) while also having a broader, more tangible impact. For example, when Balenciaga supported the United Nations World Food Program, customers told various store managers that it was the first time in their life they donated to an organization (BoF and McKinsey 2019). This social-justice initiative enabled Balenciaga to engage with the global community well beyond conventional sales transactions – beyond the traditional place of the retail environment – and provide its audience a newer form emotional value. Additionally, through this initiative, a new sense of the brand's literal and figural 'place' emerged – from the conventional confines of the retail store to the 'places' the encompass society's physical and emotional wellbeing. New relationship 'places' were formed for all parties involved: the relationship between brand-audience and the relationship between user-designed object.

These relationships that create a new sense of 'place' between fashion brands and consumers will be a key operative of the emerging small-scale

challenger brands – those that disrupt and challenge fashion conventions through either branding, communication or distribution (BoF and McKinsey 2019). Unlike large, globalized fashion conglomerates (e.g. H&M) whose homogeneous products must appeal to a massive range of consumer preferences and demographics, the small scale of ‘challenger brands’ enables them to nimbly target specific, narrow consumer audiences by developing the types of innovative, compelling and authentic narratives favoured by younger consumers (Moulton et al. 2019). These ‘disrupter brands’ are particularly successful at gaining Generation Z’s attention through social media. In fact, as noted in one research study:

If performance were measured by social media growth alone, the big incumbent fashion players would already be in trouble. Brands such as H&M, Dior, and Zara grew their Instagram fan base by less than 30 percent in [nine months]. Many disruptors saw their Instagram following expand by more than 130 percent over the same period, and some by more than 300 percent.

(BoF and McKinsey 2019: 71)

Consequently, the retail space is also shifting in the fashion marketplace. At Nordstrom, for example, ‘small brands are taking retail space from “heritage,” “established,” and “proven” brands. The small challengers make up 13 percent of the overall mix – but account for 31 percent of brand additions made in 2018’ (Moulton et al. 2019: 76).

All of these factors must be considered by designers going forward. They must rethink the ‘place’ from which their designs originate and ensure that place is no longer self-reflective but, rather, reflective of society’s needs from designers. Rather than starting from a place where designs are based on personal preferences, designers must adopt a more human-centred approach by moving into a position of deep understanding of the consumer’s demands. Questions such as, ‘What is the emotional value of this item?’ and ‘What response will a buyer have to this item?’ are now at the forefront, replacing traditional assertions about value stemming solely from the designer’s perspective. This human-centred approach may also foster increased collaborations with consumers that further shift the traditional hierarchical ‘place’ from which designers have historically operated. Designers now must research their audiences’ emotional demands. They must identify clearly the values and beliefs their audiences have before entering the design process. Only once the designer has put her/himself in the place of the consumer will the designer be able to ‘design emotion’, which will be the primary driver for design production for specific audiences.

### **THE CREATOR’S NEW ‘PLACE’: FASHION DESIGNER AS SOCIAL SCIENTIST**

The new ‘place’ from which designers situate their design practice and their role as designers will require an understanding of advanced research methods both in design as well as in the social sciences. The synthesis of these two formerly siloed research practices will provide designers with the framework they need to understand the complexity of people, cultures and belief systems that exist beyond the designer’s own world-view. This new framework will serve as the foundation upon which they must establish future

design proposals and products. Design initiatives that were previously formed by personal preferences and speculations must now be researched deeply to determine what their *target* audiences truly want and emotionally desire. Tim Brown, CEO of the renowned design company IDEO, addresses this paradigmatic shift in the design process and resultant formation of 'emotional value' in designed objects when asserting:

Now [...] rather than asking designers to make an already developed idea more attractive to consumers, companies are asking them to create ideas that better meet consumers' needs and desires. The former role is tactical, and results in limited value creating; the latter is strategic and leads to dramatic new forms of [emotional] value.

(2008: 86)

Fashion designers, before entering every creative venture – from the designing of apparel to the construction of a retail space – must begin by first asking themselves a series of questions that will help ground the research process and answer questions such as: 'How does my customer wish to feel in six or twelve months from now?', 'What will be my customer's emotional needs?', 'How can my designed object(s) and/or experience(s) provide consumers with the identified emotional fulfillment they seek?', and 'How can these objects and/or experiences provide consumers with long-term gratification?'. This research framework will be essential when targeting the growing population of Generation Z consumers who 'are increasingly demanding that the products produced by fashion brands are original, reflecting their own desire for their fashion choices to be reflections of their sense of style, self-image, and values' (Amed et al. 2019: n.pag.). The intensifying search for intangible emotional value is demonstrated through recent research findings that show Generation Z consumers are spending less on apparel and more on experiences, such as aforementioned wellness tourism (Zackiewicz 2019; BoF and McKinsey 2019; GWI 2018).

Retailers are also responding by offering shoppers experiences that provide emotional value and fulfilment, dubbed 'retailtainment' by the fashion industry. For example, to address Generation Z's growing demand for fashion brands to address social justice, Tom's Eyewear placed virtual reality headsets in 100 stores, enabling customers to be transported virtually to Peru to see the local, on-the-ground impact of the company's *One for One* charity campaign (Moore 2017). Similarly, House of Vans' 30,000 square foot building in London contains a cinema, café, live music venue, art gallery, and concrete ramps for skateboarding and biking. The designers, acutely aware of Generation Z's desire to connect with peers through experiences, developed a vast communal space their customers will surely remember due to the emotional value they receive from the brand and this unique space. Jeff Gennette, Chairman and Chief Executive of Macy's, notes:

A store needs to be broader than just a place of transaction. It needs to be a place where people gather and if you don't bring in experience, education and entertainment, you're not going to do as well. When you create community within a store and you bring customers together they stay, they linger – and they buy things but they come together in another way.

(BoF and McKinsey 2019: 55)

The hybridized role of 'designer-as-social scientist' will require designers to 'comprehend both the problem and the context of the problem and how to design or create solutions that are efficiently and aesthetically desirable for the community' (Van Zandt 2011: n.pag.). This new ethos of design practice that serves as the base of the new location of 'place' in the design process is underscored by Cédric Charbit, Chief Executive of Balenciaga, who notes, 'A product can no longer be only and purely craftsmanship plus creativity and heritage: we need to add values and emotion to it. Products need to be meaningful' (BoF and McKinsey 2019: 48). The new generation of 'designers-as-social scientist' will utilize research methodologies that accurately determine what consumers truly want and emotionally desire. This will result in a more holistic approach in the ways designers create artefacts and systems. This shifting 'place' will enable porous relationships that will result in the development of new design methodologies. As posited by Zimmerman:

While design research comes in many forms, ranging from quantitative market research to personal interviews, experimental design analysis and qualitative research, it also represents a willingness to look beyond the immediate concern of crafting a project, as well as an openness to integrating new insights into the design process itself.

(2003: 185)

To succeed in this new role, designers will have to learn to understand the psychological, social and economic traits of their buyers in order to design products that meet customers' very specific needs. Designers, applying their research findings, must design 'emotion' that then directly influences what kind of design to make, for whom to make it, what its general aesthetics will be, and the design's ultimate end-use. Designers must articulate the *why* of their choices and the work itself, which is essential to ensuring they provide the emotional fulfilment buyers demand. By adopting this new role and paradigmatic shift of the creator's 'place', the designer will be able to create uniquely compelling narratives – the emotional value behind their designs.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It's wonderful to participate in the clothing and fashion world, if we can buy pieces that have value, have a story. Anything that will make you hold it close to your heart. We all travel. If you're going to travel to Indonesia and you pick up an ikat jacket that's made by hand, you know the backstory, you know the village community that created it – you'll be the last person to put it in a bin. [...] So, we need to give clothes that valued nostalgia, that cultural context, that narrative that makes us want to keep them longer.

– Bandana Tewari, sustainable activist and former Vogue India editor  
(ABC 2019)

In the highly evolved marketplace for fashion design, the concept of 'place' in the design process and the role of the fashion designer is changing rapidly. Designers are creating in a saturated marketplace that over-meets consumers' basic needs; this is altering society's relationship with design. The consumer's perception of design 'value' has evolved from the tangible to the intangible. While the traditional values of aesthetics and function remain essential

components to design, a product's ability to deliver *emotional* value to the user must increasingly become the focus for designers if they are to attract buyers and sustain consumer loyalty. The growing need for this focus is attributable to several factors. These include the mass obsession with 'high' design; the oversaturated marketplace in which designers struggle to stand out and capture consumers' attention; and excessive rates of consumption fuelled by affordable 'high design' and consumers' use of it for emotional fulfilment (i.e. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs).

The factors that are creating an increased demand for emotional value in design will also create a new role for the fashion designer, namely that of the 'Designer-As-Social-Scientist'. No longer confined to the creation of *aesthetically* pleasing objects, this new role will also require designers to understand better the psychosocial needs and wants of their audience so they may craft well-targeted *emotionally* compelling designs. In this role, designers will pivot from the static and myopic 'place' in which the traditional design process resides to a new 'place' that takes a much broader view of the actual emotional needs of their audience, a view that is based in social sciences research practices that reveal how and where the consumers' future emotional needs are headed. Rather than designing from personal proclivities and unproved assumptions, in the future designers will ask, 'What type of narrative will emotionally resonate in my targeted audience? How can I apply this to my designs and the design process as a whole? How can my emotionally-led design process contribute to sustainability?'

In many ways, design is a service to customers. When designers' work becomes informed by the emotional needs of its audience, they will respond with more enduring designs. The distinctions between creators and analysts – or, designers and social scientists – will blur as everyone engaged in the process of defining, planning and designing product and systems will be instrumental in the future of design. It is by doing so that the designer and design industry will remain successful and sustainable.

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