

# A Literature Study of Behavioral Changes in Clothing Design Firms Before and After the Epidemic Shock

Xiaoya Liu

## Abstract:

Clothing companies have been under much pressure these past few years in the face of the sudden onslaught of epidemics. Customers were unable to buy, and businesses were unable to sell. This paper aims to study and analyze the fundamental shift in the sales format of apparel companies before and after the epidemic, from offline sales at the beginning to online sales during the outbreak and finally to the combination of online and offline sales modes after the epidemic. Literature studies have found that online and offline sales are the most suitable for the current economic situation and market. Four different apparel companies are mentioned in the paper as the most examples: Prada, Zara, Chanel, and Adidas. Policymakers should encourage the development of online e-sales to improve the current economic efficiency through better access to user information through digitalization, and policy should provide relevant support, taking into account the sales of offline brick-and-mortar stores.

**Keywords:** Organizational behavior; Fashion company; Market strategy; Clothing Design Firms; Epidemic

## 1. Introduction

Vogue Business in China (2021). During the years following the epidemic, many changes have occurred in the traditional fashion industry model. For example, showrooming, online ordering, etc. Ordre, a fashion buying platform, launched a virtual selling platform during the epidemic that provides 3D images. How has the fashion buyer's store changed in the form of a transformed way of buying goods? On the one hand, there is a lack of resonance and a lack of walkability. Olivia Chen, director of Assemble by Reel, a department store in Réo, feels that virtual buying has left her feeling a little lacking. In the showroom, we are immersed in it. Buyers can use multiple senses to gain an insight into the story that the designer is trying to convey so that they can better choose the mix of goods and deliver the brand's story to the consumer in the store in the most appropriate way, whereas buying remotely doesn't have the effect of creating a high degree of empathy. Chen also believes there is a certain amount of difference between the product in person and in the image, whether the weight of the fabric or the clothing. Whether it's the fabric's weight or the garment's dynamics. On the other hand, there is the changing strategy of buying from buyers. Whether or not the cost of purchasing overseas brands will be used to buy local brands will depend on the store. However, no matter how the ordering strategy changes, the bottom line of a buyer's store is to ensure the sell-out rate. For example, in the case of Eth0s, a buyer's store, the design and business decisions of the brands under the store have become more

conservative under the epidemic's impact. For, business expansion plans will want to stay down. Then there is the fast-growing Chinese market. China's increasingly internationalized local buyer's store market is still niche. However, how information is delivered has changed due to social media, further stimulating the Chinese market's desire for niche brands.

According to the report, the epidemic has boosted apparel companies' commitment to online sales. Consumers remained relatively sensible about spending on apparel after the epidemic. Only 13.3% of respondents said they would spend with a vengeance on clothing after the epidemic. 63.3% of the respondents said that after the epidemic, their consumption expenditure on clothing only recovered to 0%-40% of the normal period, of which 30% of the respondents chose to spend on clothing after the epidemic only recovered to the normal period of 0%-20% of the consumption expenditure. In comparison, only 6.7% of the respondents chose to spend on clothing consumption expenditure recovered to the normal period of 80%-100% of the respondents. Economist Song Qinghui said that apparel companies could carry out seasonal clearance, new products on the market, and other promotional activities above the major e-commerce platforms, synchronized online promotions, the issuance or distribution subsidies, and other activities, a multi-pronged approach to stimulate the accelerated recovery of the apparel consumer market. In March 2020, online sales benefited from the effective control of the epidemic, the restoration of logistics, and the chain of some rebound. Women's apparel, home textiles, and sports shoes and

apparel sales on Ali's platform (Tmall & Taobao) grew at a year-on-year rate of +4%, +11%, and +6%, respectively. More than 60% of respondents preferred buying apparel through e-commerce platforms.<sup>1</sup>

This report effectively explains that our research aims to study the change in behavioral patterns of apparel companies before and after the epidemic and whether they will switch from offline to online marketing.

The fashion industry partially embodies this social and cultural dynamic. It has a unique nature of diversity, complexity, volatility, and speed. The production, consumption, and artistic aspects of fashion are all included in the notion of the fashion industry. Although there are some differences between expensive designer fashions and mass-produced garments in shopping malls worldwide, in general, both expensive and common clothing designs in the fashion industry cover the following processes: design, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, promotion, and advertising.

Organizational behavior in the fashion industry can be divided into these four main stages. The first is the production of raw materials; second, the manufacturing industry produces fashionable goods; third, retail sales; and the last is various kinds of advertisements and promotions. In this era of competition, satisfying customers' needs in the shortest possible time is the only way to grab a certain market share and customers' favor. In addition, to find a better organization and management model in the fashion market, it is necessary to pay attention to time-to-market, time-to-service, and time-to-reaction.

The research literature on behavioral changes in apparel companies can be broadly categorized into four different areas: supply chain, demand side, price adjustments, and changes in marketing strategies.

In the fashion industry, the components and makeup of supply chains differ from business to business. They are influenced by various factors, such as the items offered, target markets, competitive priorities, worldwide strategies, lead times, delivery delays, and supplier consolidation. (McMaster et al., 2020). Supply chain disruptions create many complications when supply chains face global infectious diseases. When China, the world's largest producer of textiles and apparel, was hit hard by COVID-19, everyone was kept under strict lockdown at home, which led to delays in the manufacturing supply chain. A large number of orders were subsequently delayed or canceled.

According to McMaster et al. (2020), the fashion industry

is especially susceptible to embargo limitations because it is not a necessary sector. The COVID-19 pandemic affected supply chain operations and management by disrupting supply and demand, indicating the flexibility needed to reduce demand and pandemic risks. Additionally, there are distinct aspects of pandemic disruption due to the asynchronous spread of pandemics and the varying control measures among countries. Because they were forced to spend a lot of time inside their homes, the demand side of the equation declined due to a change in people's clothing needs. This manifested in a reduced need for clothing and a significant drop in the frequency of purchases (McMaster et al., 2020). Inditex, the parent company of Zara and H&M, reported a 24.1 percent decline in sales in the first two weeks of March 2020. (McMaster et al., 2020, as cited in Inditex 2020). Furthermore, a different study discovered that in the seven weeks following the embargo, consumer spending in Denmark decreased by 27%. They contend that due to the crisis and the ensuing jobless rate, consumer expenditure has been shifting more and more toward needs like food and other daily requirements. (McMaster et al., 2020, cited in Andersen et al., 2020). In response to this phenomenon, apparel companies that do not want to face the economic crisis have to adapt their business processes and internal behavioral patterns to respond to their customers' emerging buying and spending habits to survive.

Based on Maslow's basic principles, we can clearly understand that human beings' demand for food is positioned at the bottom of the hierarchy, i.e., "physiological needs." As a representative of essential consumer goods, the demand for food continued to grow at the beginning of the epidemic (Maslow, 19). As people were restricted from going out, some consumers engaged in panic buying and hoarding behavior. Everyone unconsciously turned their attention away from other places to food. However, it is worth noting that in this era, clothing is used more as a decoration to satisfy people's pursuit of the beauty of life and aesthetics rather than just covering the body as in the past. People prefer to express their spiritual world through clothing, which embodies an outwardly beautiful way of presenting oneself to the outside world.

For price adjustments, people began quarantining themselves to stop the introduction of the virus as consumer behavior changed dramatically. The economy almost went into recession, and many businesses, large and small, faced wage cuts, layoffs, and store and factory closures. Some clothing companies minimized the epidemic's impact on sales by lowering and raising prices. For some general apparel brands, downward price

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<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://mr.mbd.baidu.com/r/15LgB26q4P6?f=cp&u=4e99a995812d69ba>

adjustments were the way to go, helping to minimize the company's financial losses in the short term. However, some luxury brands try increasing their profits by adjusting their prices upwards through the opposite mode. For example, by increasing the prices of its products, Chanel can capture the mindset of some of their audience and mitigate the impact of the decline in sales during the closure of its stores. This was effective in the short term but did not compensate for the loss by raising prices (Xie & Youn, 2022).

According to Silvestri (2020), the absence of artificiality has contributed to the rapid development of artificial intellectualization. Social distance in the context of the epidemic has highlighted the importance of digital channels more than ever, with fashion companies having to sell their products through e-commerce, and blockades have elevated digitalization as an imperative for the entire value chain. According to reports, because digital channels can be less profitable than traditional brick-and-mortar retail, firms should prioritize digital expansion and provide a first-rate client experience. Artificial Intelligence was created over a decade ago and is gaining prominence at home through the epidemic blockade; it is a product of its time, easily monitoring user opinions, automating tasks, analyzing users, and providing them with a customized experience. AI has the potential to modernize and disrupt the whole fashion value chain as it slowly develops. In recent years, the Internet has been used as a new marketing strategy to capitalize on the influence of influencers, and brands have been able to generate huge profits for apparel companies by working with influencers from different platforms. This has been accelerated by the COVID-19 epidemic in the last few years, which has increased the growth of social media marketing. Xie et al. (2022) write that Kering, the company that owns labels like Gucci and Saint Laurent, stated on July 28, 2020, that 13% of its total retail sales in the first half of the year came from e-commerce, up from 6% in the same time the previous year (Kering, 2020). In a conference call with investors, Chief Financial Officer Jean-Marc Duplaix stated that digital growth is still accelerating even with the reopening of stores in China and around Europe. (Bain, 2020). Luxury fashion firms would do well to consider e-tailing and establish new channels globally, particularly in China, given that younger consumers are accustomed to using online media. The Chinese social commerce site RedBook introduced a new live-streaming capability, which Louis Vuitton was the first brand to test out. (FashionNetWork, 2020). A famous person was invited to livestream. Since then, many high-end fashion and beauty businesses have started using live web broadcasting to market in China. (Yu, 2020). Furthermore, Louis Vuitton

opened a unique Valentine's Day flash store via the WeChat app, enabling users to place orders online. (Wang, 2020). While all of this data from the paper demonstrates the viability of digitization, there are still shortcomings. The study has fewer academic sources to refer to and lacks sufficient literature to support it. In addition, luxury fashion brands are updating their responses all the time. Therefore, this study needs to keep up with the times and not stay at the current stage.

The company's innovativeness is reflected in the innovativeness of the garment itself after the epidemic. A better response to future crises. This led to the request to integrate a green entrepreneurship program into the apparel design curriculum to create innovation and value in design thinking. Clothing focuses on emphasizing green, recyclable fabrics. For example, since the consumer behavior of our generation was deeply affected by the epidemic in its general context, it no longer chooses low-priced, medium-quality, fast-fashion, but rather high-quality, distinctive, and long-lasting clothing. In the age group of 24 to 39 years old, they pay more attention to pursuing sustainable life and enhancing their awareness of environmental protection. A company used eco-clothing design to appeal to the younger generation's weaknesses in embracing their brand. For example, a ready-to-wear clothing line made from marine waste and pineapple leaves. These products have greatly appealed to the modern young crowd to consume them (Silvestri et al., 2023)

In all, based on the former studies, little existing research in the literature suggests whether this negative effect of the costume industry will see a reversal of trend in terms of changes before and after the epidemic. By contrast, this paper argues that this positive effect will continue after the epidemic and eventually outweigh its negative effect, making the net effect positive after the epidemic. It is innovative to explore the underlying factors of market strategies based on the behaviors of costume firms and achieve the sustainable running of their industry and supply.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1 Literature Review Method

The Literature Review Method is interpreting, evaluating, and summarization of research on published information. And through the study of the literature, it develops a scientific understanding of the facts. It is relevant to the entire work and a crucial component of academic research and paper writing. Additionally, by conducting a literature review, we can gain insight into the state of related field research, formulate our research questions based

on prior findings, prevent duplication of effort, foster creativity, and add to the body of knowledge in science. Since scientific research is ongoing, literature reviews are essential to academic studies (vom Brocke et al., 2009). There are two main forms of literature reviews. The most typical is seen in the “background” or “literature review” portion of a graduate thesis chapter or journal article. The existing literature is synthesized in this section, which will either give a theoretical foundation for the proposed research, validate the methodology and approach, establish the research question’s existence, or show how the research adds to the body of knowledge. (Paré, G., & Kitsiou, S. 2017 ; Levy & Ellis, 2006). It also typically points out the knowledge gaps the empirical research intends to address (Sylvester, Tate, & Johnstone, 2013).

### 2.2 Case Study Method

A case study is a common research method that analyzes specific problems within a particular environment, situation, or organization. Case studies represent an assessment tool’s unique objectives, advantages, and procedures compared to other methods (Yin, R. K. 1992). Data analysis offers the clear benefits of combining qualitative and quantitative data and capturing the intricacy of real-world scenarios to enable in-depth research on phenomena. It usually refers to the problems in the actual work as a case, through the research and analysis of specific case studies to support and discover the problem and finally put forward the problem. Explanatory case studies, descriptive case studies, and exploratory case studies are the three basic types of case studies. To begin with, an explanatory case study is the primary response to the case study’s query, yet it is not the case of the case study. The explanatory case study mainly answers the question of ‘how’ or ‘why.’ Generally, the researcher has no control over what happens. Typically, this kind of case study concentrates more on actual occurrences. Second, a descriptive case study examines important phenomena by examining the progression of interpersonal events. The aim is to gain a deeper understanding of different aspects of an event. Finally, an exploratory case study focuses on finding answers to questions such as ‘what’ or ‘who.’ Additional data-collecting techniques, such as surveys, experiments, interviews, and so on, are typically used in conjunction with the data-collection methods for exploratory case studies.

### 2.3 Comparative Study Method

By pointing out intriguing parallels and differences across situations, comparative analysis improves our descriptive abilities and is essential to developing concepts. It can aid in the inductive discovery of new hypotheses and

the development of theories. It is frequently used to test hypotheses (Collier, 1993). Comparative study is also known as comparative analysis and analogical analysis. It is a kind of analyzing technique to compare two or more things or objects to discover their similarities and differences. It is a basic method for people to recognize things. The method is used in many spaces and is an important cornerstone of scientific research techniques. Comparative analysis is a research method with a long history, the essence of which is to grasp the essential attributes of the research object and its characteristics through “comparison,” which often has different types under different research conditions.

For example, the existing types of comparative analysis method includes: “seeking the same comparison method, seeking the difference comparison method, the same and different common comparison method.” the further deepening of the results of this type of method, namely, “homogeneous and heterogeneous extraction” technique, which is very important in the use of systematic literature review and evaluation. This technique is important when using systematic literature review and evaluation. It can be separated into horizontal comparison methods based on comparison time and space, parallel comparison methods, group comparison methods, dynamic comparison methods, and so on based on comparison methodology. Its advantage is to have a strong reference perspective strong. It’s an analytical technique that, by comparing the actual and base numbers, indicates the difference between them to comprehend economic activity’s successes and issues. It’s also a way to research and evaluate how similar or different items and individuals are from one another. It is comparable to the equivalent substitution method and is frequently employed in scientific investigation activities.

## 3. Case Study

### 3.1 Prada

We expand upon the primarily offline social dynamics and apply them to the online setting by conceptualizing the OLBSN. OLBSN: meaning consumers share luxury brand experiences through social media in pursuit of their social motivations, simply referred to as the Online Luxury Brand Self-Narrative (Yukti Sharma et al. 2022).

During the embargo period, the sudden surge of digital media played an integral and important role in people’s lives. The use of social media by people to further their social goals has increased (Barnes, 2021). They began to share their insights, experiences, and lives on social media in large numbers, expressing their unique ideas through elaborate online self-narratives (Bell et al., 2007). In addition, they also usually associate themselves

with products of high value, showing their difference by attaching brand labels (ForwardPMX, 2020). OLBSN has an important positive impact on today's digital media society, bringing different benefits to individual luxury brands. Thus, we note that OLBSN has the potential to pacify consumers' material enjoyment, thereby conferring socially motivated benefits, including "value-expression" and "social regulation" functions (Jin, 2012).

### 3.2 Zara

The second case of the costume brand is Zara; Zara's products are highly seasonal and are known for shorter production cycles of weeks rather than months. Therefore, there may be some latent demand. Zara's online sales in 2017 before the outbreak were 2.5 billion euros, then it experienced COVID-19, with online sales in 2020 nearly tripling. Many offline stores have faced closure during this period.

Improving the sustainability of consumption and how it is consumed became even more crucial for businesses and consumers throughout the economic recovery.

In terms of sustainable consumer behavior, Zara is committed to incorporating more sustainable practices into its production. Fast fashion companies used to face harsh criticism for creating items that hurt the environment. Zara is on track to achieve its objectives in 2020 and will keep up its sustainable business practices. They have achieved progress by using more sustainable raw materials in their operations and products and cutting down on plastic consumption. Sustainable development is still Zara's top priority. It also upholds an environmentally friendly management style for its stores, offices, and other facilities. Regarding consumption patterns, during the lockdown and quarantine, the COVID-19 pandemic altered consumer behavior by increasing reliance on internet commerce and electronic payment methods. The coming era may alter how customers purchase, and merchants need to prepare for this shift as stores reopen. About 87% of Zara's physical locations were shut down. (Indetex.com) As a beginning point for restoring its lost momentum, Zara's online sales have achieved substantial traction despite the general drop in sales in the fashion industry. People shifted from offline brick-and-mortar shopping to online ordering to avoid contracting the coronavirus. Several new omni-channel initiatives were introduced in the first half of 2020, leading to the closure of smaller stores and their consolidation into larger ones. Using the Zara App, the firm introduced "store mode," which enables 25 locations throughout Spain to provide customers with new capabilities, including 30-minute product pickup. (Shabir & AlBishri, 2021).

### 3.3 Chanel

Since millennials are the most technologically savvy luxury consumers—approximately half of the data indicates that they purchase online—online sales are crucial to these new customers. (Deloitte, 2017).

Before the pandemic, Chanel's business model had been for the brand to sell in physical stores. It chose not to sell online. Nonetheless, Chanel has shown incredible value in the unique and customized service and experience the brand brings to its customers by retaining this non-online sales approach. Chanel has invested a lot of money in advertising: television commercials, magazines, in-store/resale point marketing, runway shows, and many other "brand-supporting activities" (Deloitte, 2017). "sources were valued at \$1.46 billion in 2017 (Paton, 2018). Unlike other luxury goods, Chanel does not have an online sales channel. So, Chanel will face major difficulty in this crisis period because it is impossible to make up for the offline sales through online revelekey as other luxury brands. According to the president of Chanel Fashion, various internet marketing techniques, such as content production, were established during the blockade to enable sales associates to engage with clients. (Guilbault, 2021). However, not all brands can achieve successful conversions. Chanel wanted to cope with the impact of COVID-19 on sales by raising prices, which in the short term was a way to increase some profits, but in the long term, it did not seem to be a very good way to do it. Therefore, the brand is not continuing to invest in marketing. Chanel experienced a decline in production and sales along with a decline in the value of its advertising and promotional expenses. The decline in international business has caused the revenue to fall and come down quite a bit.

### 3.4 Adidas

In the first year of the opening of the epidemic, it faced great challenges. Firstly, in the Chinese market, due to the controversy about Xinjiang's different cultural conflicts, Chinese consumers boycotted sales purchases, greatly impacting the company's performance and brand image. On the other hand, the rise of other sports brands in China took advantage of this opportunity to capture the market.

In addition, Adidas has outsourced almost all of its supply chain to take advantage of lower costs, making the company very dependent on its suppliers. With the onslaught of the epidemic, there are still 45 trade regulation restrictions until now, which will push Adidas' profits to continue to fall until 2025 (Boehmer & Harrison, 2021). To reduce the cost of sales, Adidas focuses on cooperation in some countries of Vietnam and Indonesia. In addition, the supply chain has escalated its complexity

as customers demand shorter and shorter times for goods to arrive, so the demand for logistics is increasing.

### 3.5 Comparison

These four apparel brands have different organizational behaviors due to their unique market positioning and business strategies. Chanel and Prada prioritize luxury and exclusivity, Zara focuses on fast fashion and affordability, and Adidas combines sportswear with sustainability and innovation.

A comparison of the internal organizational behavior of these four different brands shows that Chanel has a relatively centralized structural organization. The top executives usually determine key decisions to maintain the brand and quality. They prioritize the brand's image over profit maximization and take a long-term brand-building approach. In addition, the brand releases fashion with low frequency and avoids mass production and distribution. However, Zara is known for its fast-fashion models and low prices. The company's organizational behavior is centered on rapid response to fashion trends and customer needs. They emphasize speed and agility in design and production. The organizational structure is also relatively decentralized, allowing store managers and local teams to make decisions about inventory and stocking based on local preferences. They own most of their production, allowing them to control the entire supply chain and shorten lead times. Some of the organizational models of Prada and Chanel are somewhat similar. Still, there are artistic collaborations, and Prada often works with artists and designers to create fashion that pushes the boundaries and defies traditional norms. The last brand is Adidas, a sports brand that focuses on providing customers with functionality. The brand's high global reach, as well as the high level of innovation in its products, is reflected in the great emphasis placed on product innovation and technology in sportswear, constantly updating and improving its products to bring new and different experiences to consumers.

## 4. Conclusion and Discussion

This paper shows whether post-epidemic fashion companies will shift their consumption patterns online. Other studies have generally agreed to emphasize the development of online sales. Conversely, this paper focuses more on how the fashion company operates by combining offline and Internet sales. This is because the fashion industry has special characteristics compared to other industries. The retailing of apparel requires more than just looking at it; it requires touching and feeling the different fabrics used in each piece. This will give customers a better visual and tactile experience. The main

emphasis is on the importance of offline physical store sales.

This article is somewhat similar to Karunathilaka's point that the COVID-19 epidemic has completely changed the general environment of the present society (Karunathilaka, 2020). People's behavior, how they shop, and many aspects of their beliefs have changed. Consumers globally are looking at products and businesses in a whole new light. (Eger et al., 2021) This has accelerated the market for consumer electronics. However, it distances itself from Silvestri (2020), the author whose approach to post-epidemic consumption focuses more on the virtual online shopping experience with AR, VR, and AI and on the future of that consumption. In contrast, this paper focuses more on a hybrid model of online and offline retailing, arguing that this approach may be better able to help fashion companies recover from the massive impact of the epidemic. The fashion industry, like many others, is at a crossroads. While online sales have proven to be a vital lifeline during a pandemic, the future may not be entirely digital. Brick-and-mortar stores can offer unique experiences, brand engagement opportunities, and personal interactions with customers that e-commerce cannot replicate.

In essence, pandemics are making the fashion industry reevaluate and adjust to consumers' shifting tastes. While there is no doubt that many fashion companies will continue to invest in and expand their online sales channels, it is also important to recognize the enduring value of the physical retail space. The future of fashion retail is not an "either/or" proposition but rather one of striking the right balance between the physical and digital realms to provide consumers with the best of both worlds. Ultimately, the fashion industry must remain flexible, adaptable, and responsive to changing consumer behavior. In this dynamic balance of online and offline sales, fashion companies may find sustainable success in the post-pandemic era.

The limitation of this paper is the unpredictability of the outbreak and the fact that people are unprepared and have no effective way to cope with the onslaught. Besides the uncertainty of the market, mainly in terms of the trends for the future market. In addition, the limitations of the existing literature on the subject make it difficult to develop a deeper discussion. Finally, the ideas presented in this paper can be used as a new starting point for apparel companies to move to a combined online and offline sales model after the epidemic.

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