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‘That’s so last season’: An investigation into the speed of trend re-emergence and its impact on the life span of high street garments.

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Abstract

Fast fashion is damaging the environment through over-production and over-consumption, with millions of clothes thrown away yearly. This article argues that the constant renewal of trends encourages style obsolescence, where consumers buy cheap, trend focused items to wear a couple of times, before being discarded, and replaced with another trend. To understand how trends impact the lifespan of garments, several studies were conducted, with information being extracted from the FashionMap archive. FashionMap is a seasonal collection of high street fashion, 2000 – 2017, sourced and stored by NTU. Over 1800 items were studied to assess whether trend cycles shorten garment life. Trends in the archive were tracked, informing the decision to do an in-depth study on the most prevalent; the stripe. Analysis found that most trends do reoccur with subtle changes, creating desire for new clothes. To assess retailers’ consideration to sustainability, t-shirts, shirts and jeans were studied. The findings show most garments are made using synthetic materials in the Far East, making the carbon footprint of basic items high. The near immediate replacement of trends, the focus of the article, allows the high street to provide low quality, cheap garments, as long as they are ‘on trend’.

Keywords: Fast fashion; Sustainability; Trends; Trend cycle

Introduction

With an estimated 235 million items of clothing being thrown away by Britons annually (Smithers, 2017), the damage being caused to the environment by the fashion industry is a fundamental problem. Second only to the oil and chemical industries, the fashion industry is one of the largest polluters of the world's natural resources (Conca, 2017), a worrying statistic which has to be attributed, in part, to the rise of disposable, fast fashion. The fast fashion phenomenon is perpetuated by trend turnover, known as the constant adoption and abandonment of certain styles. As Jenny Lantz (2016) argues this trend turnover is caused by numerous factors, including the consumers' status, both social and economic, mimetic behaviour and a conflict of identity (Lantz, 2016:20). This endless adoption and abandonment of trends is driven by the consumer's constant need for the next new thing, labelled 'neomania', by Roland Barthes in 1957. High street fashion now exists in a cycle of over production and over consumption. This cycle is exemplified by Zara, whose innovative use of the 'Just in Time' (JIT), or LEAN method of production (Robinson, 2015), is reported to have factories producing over 1 million garments a day (Qutab, 2017, Eagan, 2014). By using JIT/LEAN, Zara has managed to cut production time down with new designs reaching stores in just 15 days (Robinson, 2015). The speed in which new designs can reach stores has meant clothing companies are working faster than ever to keep up with the competition, with Zara adding new lines twice weekly to every store (Petro, 2012, Baker, 2016).

Given the role of trends in fueling the speed of fashion, this article will explore the impact trends have in influencing the disposability of fashion. This article refers to a trend using its Oxford dictionary definition as being 'a fashion' and a fashion as being 'a popular or the latest style of clothing, hair, decoration, or behaviour' (Oxford Dictionary, 2017). Given the scope of this article, it was not practically possible to study every trend available on the high street; so to understand the speed of trend re-emergence, a smaller scale study was undertaken. This article focuses on a specific recurring trend, the stripe, tracking its variations on the high street over a 17 year period, using the FashionMap archive in the School of Art and Design at Nottingham Trent University.

The items in the FashionMap archive, which include clothing, shoes and other accessories, have been researched and sourced by second year Fashion Design and Textiles Design students undertaking two week optional projects twice yearly. These research driven projects focused on what the trends of the season were at a high street level and tracked the trends development historically. The research conducted by the students resulted in their purchase of an outfit, representative of this trend, to style and shoot. The outfit was then recorded in a digital archive and added to the physical FashionMap archive. The physical archive contains over 1800 items from over 200 trends, with many trends reappearing multiple times over the years. Once all the trends had been analysed, one particular trend reoccurred throughout – the stripe. As such, due to its obvious popularity, the stripe is the subject of this investigation. Despite the stripe being considered a staple item, as seen on pinstripe suits, shirts, and Breton tops, the large number of variations and the seasonal changes it goes through mean that it is a trend.

By selecting striped garments and accessories from the archive, a study of how the stripe has evolved through the years was made. The objective was to explore whether trend re-emergence really is reducing the life span of high street garments. To better understand the notions of disposability surrounding our clothing, the consideration of sustainability in the fast fashion sector has also been measured. A study of the country of origin, price and fibre content of three different garments, the t-shirt, the shirt and the jean, through the years was conducted, demonstrating whether cheap, fast fashion has reduced the life span of our clothing, leaving us constantly seeking the new.

Methodology

In order to investigate whether trend turnaround is affecting the life span of our clothing, several research methods were used, which included a combination of primary and secondary methods. The use of secondary sources fell primarily into the analysis of literature on fashion, sustainability and trend re-emergence, with primary research being conducted in order to fill the gaps in knowledge highlighted through a literature review. This knowledge of literature ensured all primary research analysis responded to theoretical approaches towards fashion trend adoption, fast fashion phenomena and sustainability. Alongside the literature, other secondary research was conducted using internet sources with online articles on business practice, sustainability and shopping habits.

Another resource used was the research portfolios created by students working on the FashionMap. These portfolios contained trend boards, PowerPoint presentations and photoshoots with information on the catwalk influences, retailers and the history of the trend. As a tool for contextualisation of the trends history, this source of information was useful. However one of the main limitations of this method was that the quality of student research varied and not all information found was reliable. In this case, alternative, more reliable information from reputable sources was used. These included academic journals, online sites like The Guardian and Forbes and magazines like Vogue and Elle. At times, tracking the trends back through history was difficult as the student's original work was created when the trend was current. As such, information on the trend at the time of purchasing the outfit would have been more easily available, whereas attempting to delve back through history to fill gaps in knowledge years later proved challenging.

The archive itself was the main source of primary research on trends. Both the physical archive and the digital database contained information on each garment needed for the creation of trend maps. These trend maps included detailed timelines, tracking the trend through history and providing vital information on the trends development. To better understand the evolution of the stripe trend, a detailed history of its various sources of inspiration was produced. The history of these stripes has clear links to the different styles that have been available over the years on the high street. Alongside the creation of the timelines, how environmentally friendly the garments were was tracked. This was done by using a 'systematic method of gathering evidence' (Kirsch and Sullivan, 1992:2) by searching every archive entry for t-shirts, jeans and shirts and making a record of the changes in fibre content, country of origin and price. By highlighting the changes within the fashion industry on a high street

level from the year 2000 to 2017, whether or not sustainability was a focus for retailers could be tracked.

As at least six outfits were purchased each season, there was a wealth of garments within the archive and, although this provided a fairly detailed view of high street fashion, the age of the people purchasing the outfits had a limiting effect. As all outfits were bought by students, the focus was on youth fashion and youth aimed stores like Topshop, River Island and New Look. How those trends were interpreted by older generations, or whether the same trends were present, was overlooked as were more classic high street stores that would not have appealed to the students shopping for the outfits. In order to counteract the 'fragmentary nature of archival work' (L' Eplattenier, 2009: 74), the findings of all methods will all be evaluated in relation to the effect they have had on the life span of garments as this is the fundamental knowledge needed to answer the question.

Trend Re-Emergence

The trend process is influenced by many factors. Barthes notion of 'neomania' suggests that a psychological impulse is present in consumers, leaving them constantly on the lookout for new things, regardless of whether they are necessary (Barthes, 1957). Lantz suggests that mimetic behavior 'is a prerequisite for the mass adoption that now almost, but not entirely defines, fashion' (Lantz, 2016:21). With the rise of fast, trend focused fashion, many items of clothing are thrown out long before they have worn out and, typically, after only a few wears (Birtwistle and Moore, 2006). Fashion has become a vehicle for mass consumption, with trends being adopted en masse and then abandoned on a whim. Reasons why this frivolous attitude to our clothing exists have long been discussed, with early studies examining fashion on a broader scale and providing insight into why style is valued over substance within fashion (see Simmel and Blumer). Written long before the emergence of fast fashion, Georg Simmel (1904) was one of the first to view fashion from a sociological standpoint. He found that there are two conflicting components of our psyche which influence our relationship with fashion; the need to imitate and belong to certain social groups, whilst simultaneously feeling the need to create difference and segregate from other groups (Simmel, 1904:542). Similar findings of imitation are supported to a certain extent in a study conducted by Herbert Blumer (1969), with just one variation. Simmel's (1904) notion that the elite, upper classes will cease to adopt a trend once it has been imitated by the masses on the basis that class lines must be clearly demarcated is not supported by Blumer's findings. Alternatively, Blumer (1969) believes that 'collective selection', instead of class differentiation, is the cause of new fashions being sought and adopted. He defined collective selection as a groups desire to appear to have good taste, to be aware of the new developments and to demonstrate the ability to select a style from the many on offer (Blumer, 1969: 282).

The emergence of trickle down (Sproles, 1981:116), and bubble up theories (Polhemus, 1994:10) has resulted in a retail world where high street versions of designer garments can be made and ready to sell within weeks of being shown and where street style and subcultures typically considered to be low status, are influencing high end fashion. As such, class lines have been blurred, making Simmel's

notion of class differentiation somewhat outdated. Yet, despite its date, Blumer's (1969) theory of collective selection still has some areas of relevance in terms of why there is a constant re-emergence of trends. However, to reflect the changing times and provide more insight into the British High Street as it is today, more contemporary approaches are required. Consumers believe they are constructing an individual, new style for themselves from the latest trend but, in reality, the look has already been curated for them by the store they are shopping in. In the summer of 2017, Topshop was offering 5,121 items online in new clothing alone, all released with an accompanying lookbook and social media posts across five platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and Pinterest). Sifting through over 5,000 items for a new outfit is a mammoth task, but with the innovative uses of social media, an outfit can be seen on Instagram or the lookbook and a few clicks later will be on its way to one's front door (Achenbach, 2012). Without knowing of the others existence, multiple consumers will have followed these same steps, all purchasing the same new, on trend outfit they were subtly shown from the thousands on offer. Despite being written almost 50 years ago Blumer's theory of collective selection is still being evidenced in the 21st century, with consumers unknowingly adopting trends as a group, rather than individuals. Having then worn the outfit several times, it is likely they will discard it for the next trend, which will come around faster than ever (Yuille, 2015).

The speed in which new trends reach the high street has made the distinctive Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer seasonal lines less clear to the consumer. Instead of a bi-annual or even quarterly change in styles, customers are faced with bi-monthly, and as demonstrated by Zara, bi-weekly changes in style. The fast turnaround of trends means that rather like a new car losing its value as soon as it is driven off the forecourt, a garment bought on the high street will lose its style value far quicker than ever before, with new trends popping up the very same week. Day et al, (2015) conducted a literature review of 65 journals written between 1998 and 2014 relating to the fast fashion phenomenon. One significant finding from their study was the notion that style obsolescence is the main reason for the disposal of clothing (Bianchi and Birtwistle, 2010; Birtwistle and Moore, 2007; Joung, 2010 in Day et al, 2015). This has huge relevance in terms of the way the high street works; if clothes are so cheap to buy, consumers will not mind throwing them away before it is necessary as they can easily replace them with more disposable, low-cost items. Another key finding of the literature review was the frequent use of Zara to exemplify a fast fashion brand. Considering its prevalence within the FashionMap archive with 128 entries to date, Zara's trend focused style and ability to add new lines with increasing speed has given it the potential to be a large contributing factor to the high levels of fast fashion waste.

Given the speed in which a trend comes in and out of fashion, the demand for high street retailers to constantly churn out something new is high. Considering the volume of trends already seen, the innovativeness of the garments is no longer a priority when compared to the speed in which something new can reach stores. The same trends are constantly recycled, with a far shorter gap in between their appearances on the high street, a notion studied in *Fashion as Communication* (Malcolm Barnard, 2002) and *Fashion and Anxiety* (Clark and Miller, 2002). Both studies suggest that despite the fashion industry's success, which can be attributed in part to its ability to constantly

provide the 'new', this reliance on trends has also had negative effects on both the consumer and the environment. Knowing that an item might not be there the following week in a store like Zara or H + M gives consumers a sense of now or never whilst shopping. This feeling of missing out is likely to cause overconsumption, the effects of which are detrimental to the environment. By conducting an initial literature review, it was clear there was a distinct lack of focused trend research on the cultural influences which have caused the re-emergence of some trends and the disappearance of others, which has huge relevance on how the high street operates. For this article to better understand the cycle of trend recycling, a list of all recorded trends in the FashionMap since 2000 was compiled with over 200 found. Of these 206, very few came in fashion only once with the majority reoccurring at least twice over the years. Animal inspired trends such as fur and animal prints came in 11 times over the 17 years and different variations of stripes came in on 26 different occasions. It is arguable that these two styles should be classed as style staples rather than trends, but having tracked the changes in the garments each time they reappear on the high street, the differences leave them firmly on the side of trends.

Tracking the Stripe

To understand the development of the stripe on the high street, the history of stripes on garments first needs to be studied. By focusing on the cultural influences of specific types of stripes, the reasons why particular styles have re-emerged at certain times and why consumers never fall out of love with stripe will be evidenced. Once considered a sin, stripes were first brought to Europe in the 1260s by the Carmelite monks who wore black and brown striped habits (Pastoureau, 2001). Pastoureau's historical study of stripes suggests that at this period in time, the stripes were not well received, with 11 successive Pope's attempting to ban the monks from wearing them. Pastoureau also found records from 1310 when a cobbler was sentenced to death for wearing stripes, considered at that time to be a deplorable garment worn only by those on the fringes of society; prostitutes, street performers and cripples (Pastoureau, 2001). Five centuries later, stripes continued to be banished from the mainstream, with the early 1800's seeing stripes used as a way to further punish criminals, with prison uniforms in the USA adopting a striped pattern. The bold black and white stripe was cheap to produce and believed to represent prison bars, making the prisoners feel even more enclosed (Ash, 2010:25). Following a murky past from banned religious orders, death sentences and criminals, it is hard to comprehend the much loved style was once detested so strongly.

One might not associate fashion staples with government legislation, yet the classic Breton stripe originated in 1858 with the Act of France (Annis, 2010). The Act stated that all seamen in the French Navy must wear the same uniform; a navy blue and white striped knitted shirt, with each of the 21 stripes representing Napoleon's victories at sea. Originally known as a 'mariniere', the striped top later become known as the Breton as a result of its production in Brittany (Tramuta, 2017). The Napoleonic Naval reputation, in addition to the comfort and practicality of the Breton top, saw, unlike its US counterpart, stripes transfer from the margins of society to the mainstream as ordinary French citizens adopted the trend. Today the association between the stripe and French fashion, continues (ibid).

Following a holiday to the coast on the South of France, the iconic fashion designer Coco Chanel is said to have been so inspired by the sailor's uniforms that she incorporated the striped top into her 1917 collection (Barnes, 2013). Half a century on from the diffusion of the stripe into everyday life, it became a staple in high end fashion through its adoption by iconic fashion designer Coco Chanel. Having long been a champion of ridding women of the tight fitting corsetry favoured at the time, the comfortable and practical garments Chanel offered hailed a new era for women's fashion (ibid).

Following the introduction of stripes by Chanel, they continued to remain in fashion with various designers picking them up over the years, including Elsa Schiaparelli in 1939, Missoni in 1953 and later Jean Paul Gaultier in the 1980s (V and A, online; Vogue, online). Missoni's innovative use of knitwear machines led to the development of their signature brightly coloured striped jumpers, a style which is still being produced today (Missoni.com). In contrast with Missoni's bright colours, Gaultier championed the original nautical aesthetic, applying classic Breton stripes to a multitude of garments (Vogue, online). Strong nautical themes have made his entire brand become synonymous with the sailor stripe with fragrances being sold in packaging shaped like ship funnels, adverts featuring sailors and boats and a catwalk show in 2001 featuring models styled to look like shipwreck survivors (Boots.com, Youtube.co.uk, Vogue.com). Alongside the Missoni and Breton stripe, the sports stripe has also been a key part of fashion, currently seeing a revival with the rise in popularity of athleisure and brands like Adidas.

Current styles of branded sportswear originally emerged in 1929, when tennis player Henri Lacoste created a performance polo top with a crocodile patch on the front (Lacoste.com). Nicknamed a 'crocodile' on the court (ibid) Lacoste's addition of the animal on the front of his polo's paved the way for other players to follow suit. One such player was Wimbledon champion Fred Perry, who created the now iconic shirt featuring the laurel logo in 1952 (fredperry.com). One of the first pieces of performance sportswear to make the move into fashion, the shirt was adopted by a subculture known as the Hard Mods in 1966, turning it into a skin head, street style piece of clothing (Hewitt, 2013). Before this, sportswear would only have been worn for its original purpose, yet today it is commonplace to see people wearing sportswear in their day to day life. One particular sportswear brand currently in the midst of a huge revival is Adidas. Adi Dassler registered Adidas Sportschuhfabrik in August 1949, creating a high performance lightweight sports shoe with three stripes (Adidas.com). Just five years later, the shoe helped the German National Team win the World Cup in 1954, giving Adidas worldwide attention and making it a staple on sports pitches for years to come (ibid). The introduction of an Adidas tracksuit featuring those signature three stripes in 1967 paved the way for the brand to be the global super power it is today (ibid). Differing from the Missoni and Breton stripe, the classic Adidas sports three stripe has long been a part of fashion with collaborations with Yohji Yamamoto in 2002, Y-3 in 2003 and Stella McCartney in 2004 (ibid).

Each of these styles of stripes has appeared in the FashionMap archive at various points with brightly coloured stripes reminiscent of styles by Missoni and Pucci, being sold in stores like BHS and Topshop in late 2000 early 2001. The Missoni stripe was featured in Cosmopolitan in February 2001

and with this interest in the colourful stripe, the high street was quick to put out its own version with Mango and Morgan selling their own versions, evidencing the influence that the catwalk can have on high street fashion trends.

When stripes returned the following year, the colour scheme, layout of stripe and cut of the garments differed greatly from the year before. Harper's Bazaar style story was labelled 'Sail Away' and demonstrated a much sleeker look with a much more classic nautical red, white and blue colour scheme.

In the space of a year, stripes had come in fashion twice, but the style of the stripe was different. The colourful Missoni style garments would have looked outdated amongst the sleek new, nautical revival. This article adheres to the concept of 'newmania' as argued by Barthes (1957) and it is apparent here. Consumers will have had perfectly adequate clothing from the previous years' stripe, yet their desire for 'the new' caused them to replace their garments with others that are more fitting to the trend of the time. Nautical stripes would appear again in Spring/Summer 2005 and 2006, with additions to the Fashion Map archive for both years (Fig. 1).



Figure 1: FashionMap entry 'Urban Cruise' S/S 2005

While Breton stripes have remained a staple, the top to toe nautical themed look has not made a return to the FashionMap archive since then. Instead being replaced with several consecutive years of athleisure styles. 2006 to 2012 saw relatively smart, tailored looks for both men and women being prevalent, paired with blazers and fitted trousers, none of which would have been wearable when the 'Acitvewear', 'Active Lifestyle' and 'Defining Lines' trends came into fashion from 2013 onwards. Sportswear classics like Adidas were favoured once more and a much bolder, primary colour palette was in (Fig. 2).



Figure 2: FashionMap entry 'Defining lines' S/S 2017

Searches for stripes on stores like Topshop, River Island and Zara at the time of writing brought up almost 800 results for women's clothing alone. The key thing to notice from this search was the monochrome colour scheme on many pieces, suggesting a move away from the brightly coloured sports style seen in the last few seasons. Monochrome stripes originated as prisoners outfits and have since made their place in the fashion world, with high street retailers and high end designers

alike incorporating them into their garments. The long journey the stripe has been on and its evolution perhaps explains why the stripe is still so loved in all of its forms. The influence of various designers, fashion trends and social changes helped take a garment associated with prisoners and people one wouldn't want to associate with into a piece of fashion.

Disposable Fashion

The difference between styles that were popular in February 2017 to September 2017 indicates to consumers the need for a new wardrobe overhaul. Clothes that are far from being worn out after just a few months are obsolete in the style stakes already. The 'ongoing need and drive for change' (Yuille, 2015) which causes the constant buying and replacing of clothing has a detrimental effect on the environment (Klepp et al, 2005; Fletcher 2008). As evidenced through the evolution of stripes from February to September, trends are moving faster than they have before, perpetuating a cycle where consumers are buying clothes just to throw them out the following season when the next trend is in. The impact of this, however, is problematic. The short time in between one trend coming in and another taking its place is a contributing factor to the high, negative impact the fashion industry has on the environment. As a result of this, sustainability is fast becoming one of the most pressing issues within the fashion industry. Yet, despite being one of the largest contributors to environmental damage, fashion is also at the forefront of innovating ways to combat the negative impact that it has. Designers such as Christopher Raeburn and Iris Van Herpen are pioneers in sustainable fashion and have inspired future generations of fashion graduates such as Katie Jones and Faustine Steinmetz to pursue sustainable fashion labels (Hall, 2016). There have been a number of studies focusing on fashion sustainability with an emphasis on fast fashion, product quality and durability, all of which inform the notions of disposability which surround our clothing. The findings from studies on sustainability and fashion are extremely beneficial for understanding the changes being made by the industry and the response of consumers towards them. Despite this, there appears to be a lack of research regarding the development of specific details of garments such as price points, country of origin and fibre content.

In order to address this gap in knowledge, a study was conducted on three staple garments. All of the t-shirts, jeans and shirts in the FashionMap archive were analysed to better understand trends in fibre content over the years, whether certain countries are large producers of certain items and whether the price points of certain retailers are justified or indeed ethical for the workers involved. 73 t-shirts were found in the archive throughout the years with only four being made in the UK and two in the USA. The two t-shirts belonged to a group of just fifteen garments from the entire archive of over 1800 made in the USA; all were made by American Apparel. The company which prided itself on being 'ethically made', 'sweatshop free' and 'made in the USA' (Bowman, 2017) filed for bankruptcy in 2015 (Ferrier, 2015). Two years later and a sale of intellectual property to Canadian group Gildan has led to American Apparel relaunching online in the USA with an updated business model (Singer, 2017:online). Consumers can choose between identical garments, one made in the USA and its 'twin' which is 'globally made'.

The 'globally made' garments do not specify where in the world they came from, instead listing 'sourced internationally' under the garment origins (Gustashaw, 2017). Both garments are made in the same fabric and look exactly the same with the only difference being the price. There is around a 20% higher price for the American version than the 'globally made' version (ibid). An interesting move by American Apparel which relies on consumers to have stronger principles than they do a desire to hold onto their disposable income and one which is predicted to be slowly phased out (ibid). A study found that 'whilst there is evidence ... that consumers are concerned about environmental and social impacts' there is 'limited evidence that [environmental issues are] having a significant impact on macro-level purchase behaviour' (Kim et al, 2013 in Day et al, 2015:95). Despite the lack of evidence to determine whether the American made garments will sell less than the globally made clothes will sell it is reasonable to suggest this is the case. In a retail world where having the latest trend is key, are consumers likely to want to pay more for garment that they may not want to wear next season just on the basis it was made in the USA or will cheap, disposable fashion from around the world prevail?

Further analysis of the country of origin in the archive found that 438 items were made in China, with 15 of these being items from the most recent collection bought. This suggests that despite sustainability being a current issue, many high street retailers are still not willing to relocate manufacture to British soil. Rather than produce a plain white t-shirt in England, the cotton will be shipped from the country it is picked from, to the place the cotton is woven into fabric, to the country of manufacture and then back to England to be sold (Clay, 2012). Despite the costs involved in transporting the materials and garments, stores are still able to sell garments at low prices, suggesting costs have been cut somewhere along the line for the companies to make a profit. Perhaps the clearest example of this is Primark, who, despite incurring numerous transportation costs, still made £323 million in profits (Armstrong, 2017). While cheap clothing made in China may be good for the consumer, the effect on the environment is high. For instance, it is estimated that 20,000 litres of water are used to produce a single cotton t-shirt and pair of jeans (Clay, 2012). The constant cycle of production and consumption of the fast fashion industry means that the required natural resources for simple items are extreme. The speed of the constant cycle of production and consumption means the resources used to make clothes are never put back into the environment (Yuille, 2015:3).

A common suggestion to combat the negative effects of fast fashion is to shop vintage (Siegle, 2013; Hackett, 2016; Cowdery, 2017). However this is not necessarily practical. Vintage clothing will eventually run out and the fast fashion garments we see today are unlikely to stay intact long enough to become vintage. Cline (2012:90) believes that a 'systematic quality fade' has occurred over the years, with fabrics becoming 'thinner and lighter' (Cline, 2012:89) as a result of the desire for quantity over quality. This fade in quality has resulted in a generation of consumers who are not used to seeing good quality across the high street and are unable to assess whether a garment will last. To them, high quality is either a thing of the past, found buried deep in rails of vintage clothing or at the high end of fashion (Koskennurmi and Paivikki, 2005). With the fashion environment travelling at such speed, consumers must act quickly to maintain their fashionable status, whether a garment is as good

quality as it would have been 20+ years ago is not an issue. High quality is accepted as something that is no longer provided by the high street.

To assess this quality fade, the 3 key garments from the FashionMap archive were analysed for fibre content. The shirt is a staple of many a working wardrobe and as such should be of high quality to withstand the cycle of wearing, washing and ironing, yet half of the 42 shirts comprised fully, or in part, of synthetic fibres. Of 35 pairs of jeans, only 18 were 100% cotton, yet 25 of these cost £30.00 and over. This implies consumers appear to give little consideration to the quality of what they are paying for, instead buying things based on the 'aesthetic level' (Swinker and Hines, 2006:21). 18 t-shirts were 100% synthetic with a further 13 being synthetic-natural fibre blends. 41 of these t-shirts were 100% cotton but none were made in the UK or USA (Fig.3-4).

By focusing on key areas like sustainability and the history of a key trend such as the stripe and how it evolves with the trend cycle, this study was able to gain insight into developments on the high street from a specific time period. The various methods used found that a 'systematic quality fade' (Cline 2012:90) has indeed taken place, with far more garments made using synthetic fibres like polyester and viscose being used instead of cotton. Yet, this is not proving to be an issue for consumers, whose main priority is buying the next trend, not garments to last. The stripe study evidenced the short space of time needed for a trend to change with just a few months for a completely different style to emerge in stores. The high number of garments in the lower price points from stores like Topshop, River Island and H + M, mean clothes do not hold much value with their owners. If the style goes out of fashion, the garments can easily be disposed of and replaced with whatever new trend is deemed 'in'.

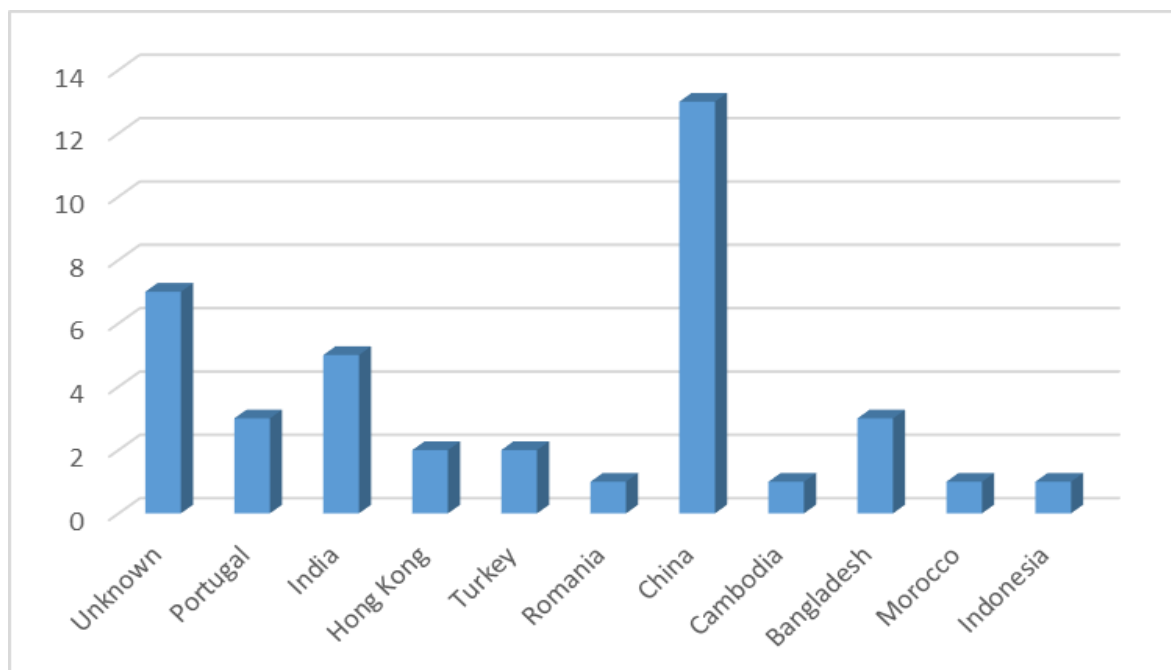


Figure 3: Analysis of the country of origin of t-shirts in the FashionMap, 2017

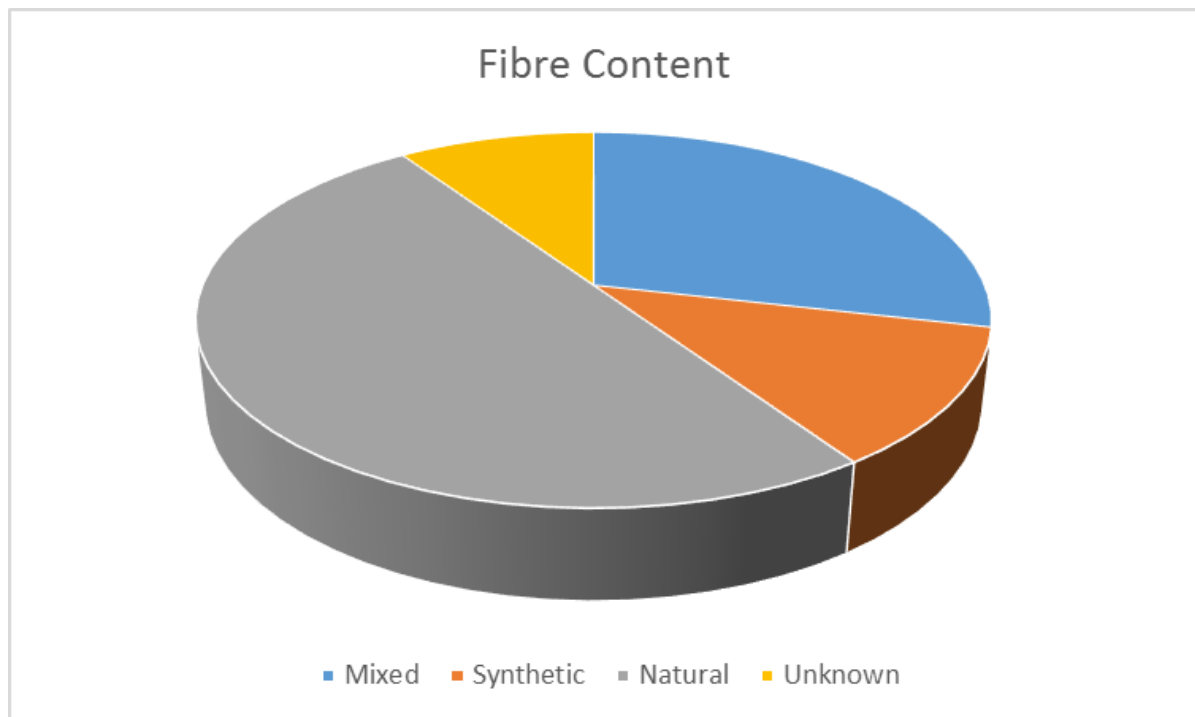


Figure 4: Analysis of the fibre content of t-shirts in the FashionMap, 2017

By looking at the trend cycle and how quickly changes occur, it is clear to see that garments life spans have been shortened, spurred on by companies selling cheap, trend based clothes.

Conclusion

Trends on the high street have reached a point where they are faster than they have ever been before. What was once a desirable item on the catwalks and style pages will be languishing on sale racks a few short months later. The garments quality, nor its durability, will have faded, yet the price is slashed due to it being rendered obsolete in the style stakes. The difference in the stripe trend garments that were available in February 2017 to the ones available in September 2017 show how fast the trend turnaround is. With February's purchases now looking outdated, the consumer must decide whether to keep the garment, swap it for a newer version or dispose of it. Whether or not they have worn away and have reached the end of their use life is no longer the main reason for the disposal of clothing. The effect that this has on the environment is extremely damaging. The vast amount of resources used to produce just two garments will not have been replenished in the time they are used for, and the resources needed for them to be broken down in landfill only perpetuates the problem. Garments should be made to last, not for a few wears and through the analysis of key areas of high street fashion such as price, fibre content and the country of origin, a better understanding of how environmentally friendly high street garments really are. This form of research also indicated how, and if, the high street has changed at all over the 17 years of the archive. The low prices of the garments mean that consumers will still feel they are getting value for money when they only wear things a few times, as a £10.00 garment will still only equate to just over a few pounds per wear. Low quality fabrics will be expected by consumers for the money that they have spent, so they

will accept a synthetic blend as being the norm when it comes to fast fashion. The rise of fast fashion has given clothing a notion of being frivolous to consumers; many are blinded to the impact on the environment and care only about whether or not it is on trend. Thus the life span of garments is shortened, due to the rise of fast, disposable fashion. Instead of viewing garments as on trend, but cheap and therefore disposable, consumers should look for items that transcend trends and are investment 'staple' pieces that can be worn regardless of the trends of the season. Wardrobes can be supplemented with a few items that are on trend, but high quality ones which will last and not end up being thrown away after a few wears. By changing their shopping habits and focusing less on whether garments are on trend but instead on the quality and number of wears they can get from them, consumers can lengthen the life spans of their garments and contribute less to.

References

List of Illustrations

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