

The role of new generation of fashion designers

Vai trò của nhà thiết kế thời trang thế hệ mới

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Abstract

Fashion design is one of the professional careers with a long history. To become a professional fashion designer requires comprehensive knowledge and skills in many fields with multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge. More importantly, in the context that globalization and consumerism present great challenges in the fashion industry, new generation designers need to raise their awareness and responsibility towards the environment and society. This article focuses on clarifying the role of fashion designers and assessing their ability to address the challenges in the industry. The results show that fashion designers play an important role in promoting the transformation of the fashion industry to be more sustainable; They are the pioneers in orienting and spreading sustainable fashion to consumers and the community.

Keywords: Fashion designer, role of a designer, sustainable fashion, fashion industry.

Tóm tắt

Thiết kế thời trang là một trong những nghề có lịch sử lâu đời, để trở thành một nhà thiết kế thời trang chuyên nghiệp cần có sự hiểu biết toàn diện trên nhiều lĩnh vực với các kiến thức đa ngành và liên ngành. Đặc biệt, trong bối cảnh toàn cầu hoá và chủ nghĩa tiêu dùng đem đến những thách thức lớn trong ngành công nghiệp thời trang, các nhà thiết kế thế hệ mới cần nâng cao nhận thức và trách nhiệm của họ đối với môi trường và xã hội. Bài viết này tập trung làm rõ vai trò của nhà thiết kế thời trang và đánh giá khả năng của họ trong việc giải quyết những thách thức mà ngành này đang phải đối mặt. Kết quả chỉ ra rằng, nhà thiết kế thời trang giữ vai trò quan trọng trong sự thúc đẩy sự chuyển đổi ngành công nghiệp thời trang theo hướng bền vững hơn; họ là những người tiên phong trong việc định hướng và lan toả thời trang bền vững đến người tiêu dùng và cộng đồng.

Từ khóa: Nhà thiết kế thời trang, vai trò của nhà thiết kế, thời trang bền vững, ngành công nghiệp thời trang.

1. Introduction

*“Without designers,
clothes do not become fashion.”*

Kawamura, 2005 [4]

Fashion designer is a phenomenon of the twentieth century. This kind of professional

career was recognized to take the first step in the mid-nineteenth century [1], [2], [3], [4]. When the designer managed the traditional tailors, it brought a great change in the fashion field, especially, the moment Charles Frederick Worth (1825 - 1905) opened his fashion brand in Paris in 1846. He is considered the father of

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haute couture and also made his mark in fashion history as an early fashion designer. At that time, the Callot sisters, Jeanne Paquin, Jacques Doucet, and Jeanne Lanvin are also considered to be among the first fashion designers. With their creativity in design and professionalism in their work, they have made a difference compared to the previous generation of tailors for clothes and dresses [3], [5].

Along with the development of the fashion industry, the changes and impacts of production processes, technology, and business models require the specialization of a profession. As a result, fashion design has become a creative career [1], [6], [7], [8]. Fashion designers are hierarchical in the fashion system, including many specialties in different fields and levels, such as haute couture or ready-to-wear design. In addition, fashion designers play an important role in leading styles and trends with their talents and vision, as well as contributing to economic, social and cultural development [3], [4].

However, today the fashion industry is facing serious challenges and problems related to environmental pollution and social inequality [9]. Therefore, the role of a fashion designer is gradually changing to fit for new circumstances. A new generation of fashion designers who have the role of a traditional fashion designer, and have another role to play in developing the fashion industry in a sustainable way. This means that the new generation of designers is not only responsible for the functionality and aesthetic of a product as before, but also needs to be aware of their responsibilities towards the environment and society, even with emerging issues, e.g. cultural appropriation in fashion [10]. The question is how fashion designers can play their role in contributing to minimize the negative impacts of the industry and taking advantage of opportunities to accelerate the transformation of the fashion industry in a more sustainable way.

To answer the above question, this study focuses on defining the role of the traditional fashion designers and clarifying the change of this role in the new context. Besides, the study also proposes some solutions to enhance the pioneering position of fashion designers in spreading and diffusing sustainable fashion to the community.

2. Results and dicussion

2.1. *The role of the fashion designer in the fashion industry*

When we talk about fashion, we mean continuously movement and change, associated with novelty, space, time, cultural and political characteristics, as well as personality and identity of wearers [11], [12]. Fashion designers have always played an important role in the history of fashion, even as fashion becomes a modern industry with a deep link to a variety of machines and technologies. The three main reasons below show why a fashion designer has kept an irreplaceable position in this global industry.

Firstly, a fashion designer is a person who designs clothing: they create costumes, including clothes, and other kinds of fashion accessories such as shoes, bags, and jewelry for the majority of consumers worldwide [6], [13]. As Kawamura wrote in his book *Fashionology*: "Designers are and must be portrayed as 'stars' in the production of fashion. With stars, the fashion form shines in all its glory. Designers personify fashion and their designs objectify fashion. Thus designers and clothing are inseparable from the notion of fashion" [4]. Indeed, the first and foremost role of a fashion designer is to design fashion products.

In theory, fashion designers play an important role in creating a fashion product; in practice, creating a final product requires many people involved in various stages from design,

manufacture, distribution, and marketing. In other words, a fashion designer is part of a collective that makes fashion products. However, they are primarily responsible for designing the appearance of a product/ collection, deciding on shapes and colors, as well as materials and methods of expression. A fashion designer will start with an idea, do pre-design research, and develop and realize the idea through sketches. Then they move on to the next steps- working with technical designers and tailors until the product is perfect. Therefore, in Kawamura's opinion, "the designer who personifies fashion" implies that the designer is the one who leaves an impression and breathes spirit into fashion products with his talent and creativity.

Secondly, fashion designers play a role in shaping and spreading fashion: Blumer (1969) argues that the influence of fashion is a process of collective selection, whereby the formation of tastes begins from a group of people who adhered to a monism or the "spirit of the times" [3]. In addition, author Alison Gwilt also asserts that "the designer is often expected to lead the development of the collection from the design stage to the sample-making stage, and will often be accountable for key decisions during the process" [14]. Thus, in the contemporary context, fashion designers, with their strong creativity, are responsible for the continued impact of fashion as a reflection of contemporary culture and can directly influence trends and movements in the fashion industry, and designers are "responsible for creating trends" [3]. Each designer creates his own signature style, whether pursuing avant-garde style or classic style. They are not only creating new trends, but also leading and shaping the style of the brand. From haute couture to ready-to-wear, or from the runways during fashion weeks to street style, they all have their mark as fashion designers.

Thirdly, the fashion designer has a role to play in "lifestyle design": It can be seen that a fashion designer has a special role in relation to the lifestyle, due to the constant change of the era of "mass production, mass consumption, mass communication" [3]. On the one hand, the message conveyed through each product can help designers communicate with customers. On the other hand, the consumers' choices also have an effect back and forth on the designers, which is consistent with the focus already stated in the concept of fashion, and to some extent, the relationship between product and user, or relationship between designer and customer [15], [16]. Indeed, the interaction between designers and customers in modern society is a conversation that is large and wide, as "an exclusive, designer-driven, customer-oriented exchange" [2]. That influence is not limited to what people wear but also influences their lifestyle, in other words, consumer awareness and concern for the environment and society is evoked, driven, and stimulate by fashion.

As such, as a designer, fashion designers should have the best understanding of what they are doing and what is happening in the industry. They need to be the pioneers in giving ideas and initiatives that bring innovation in fashion, not only related to creative perspectives but also solving existing problems. These embody the spirit of the times and provide a force for the development of fashion. We will discuss another important role of fashion designers in the next section, which is to create innovation through theory and practice to figure out alternatives for the future of the fashion industry.

2.2. The role of new generation of fashion designers in sustainable fashion

"The scope of design must change. We can't continue creating garments that simply look

and feel good, we need to create smart solutions fit for a new fashion system, where resources can be utilised over and over again. This means that our roles as designers will shift hugely, which requires new skills and learning. If we recognise this and support new mindsets and design practices, we can truly take the lead in a systematic change for the fashion industry."

Tobias Harboe [17]

The fashion system has many problems that need paying attention such as excessive use of resources, environmental pollution, unsafe working conditions, lack of transparency in trade, and overconsumption, due to the influence of mass media and pragmatic lifestyle [18]. Therefore, a change is needed to align with the sustainable development goals around the world today.

Based on the role and influence of a fashion designer through the stages of the design and production process, authors Gwilt and Rissanen discuss how designers can be involved in sustainable activities. The authors argue that designers need to rethink their roles and behaviors in sustainable design strategies [19]. Besides, fashion designers are involved in most of the production process, and without designers and their creative ideas, there would be no fashion. However, it is difficult to make fashion products by only designers, especially in industrial production, nor to maintain a fashion system since that requires cooperation with others. "The fashion system employs designers, buyers, pattern makers, machinists, knitters, textile designers, finishers and dyers, production managers and so on, and each brings specialist skills and knowledge" [14]. Therefore, working with stakeholders, fashion designers will take a leading role in creating "fashion culture" and at the same time "creating the ideology of fashion" [4]. This is necessary

in the context that the fashion industry must transformation, reducing environmental footprints and developing a fashion industry to be more sustainable.

When we talk about the concept of "sustainable fashion", we are referring to a "megatrend" and "slow fashion movement" that is going strong in the fashion industry in recent years [20], [21]. Sustainable fashion has attracted increasing attention from researchers and communities interested in global issues such as pollution and depletion of natural resources; garbage overload; issues related to human and labor rights, cultural issues and cultural appropriation in fashion. To address the existing problems, scenarios and strategies to shift this industry have been proposed in research on theory and practice of sustainable fashion.

Although the concept of sustainable fashion is still unclear for some consumers, the concept is spreading more and more widely in the community. If in the past, the concept of sustainable fashion was often narrowed to the use of natural or recycled materials, now sustainable fashion has been understood fully. That is when designers apply sustainability principles to design product or service design to create fashion products/services that minimize harmful impacts on human and the planet, while achieving economic benefits. In other words, sustainable fashion is the process of applying design principles and methods based on the three main pillars of sustainable development: Environment - Society - Economy. For example, designers can approach sustainable fashion by using resources efficiently such as reducing input materials/reducing waste (zero-waste), optimizing life cycle by prolonging the life cycle (long-lasting) and prepare options for the second or subsequent life cycle such as

reuse/recycle/upcycle. Theoretically, designers are the key to choosing design methods for fashion products/services to achieve sustainability goals, minimizing negative impacts on the environment and society, and enhancing competition in the market.

Therefore, *fashion designers need to take the role of initiating changes and disseminating these perceptions through their designs*, contributing to the development of sustainable fashion. This is a change at system levels towards sustainability, it must somehow not contradict "a progressive and irreversible path" of fashion [4] but "it is about producing garments that start a debate, invoke a deep sense of meaning or require the user to 'finish' them with skill, imagination or flair" [22]. As Professor Kate Fletcher argues in her book: "It is about designing confidence- and capability-inducing pieces that encourage versatility, inventiveness, personalization and individual participation" [22]. To achieve this, in addition to basic knowledge and skills, new generation of designers need to be equipped with new knowledge and skills suitable for the new roles of a modern fashion designer (see more in Figure 1).

Firstly, *fashion designers need to inspire those who work closely with them during the design phase*, such as pattern cutters and craftsmen or technical and pattern designers [23], [24]. Since awareness of sustainability can also be spread by fashion designers and positively influence stakeholders in the process of input materials production, distribution and marketing [22], [23]. Moreover, a story is told between the fashion designer and the client through the design and the stories behind each product, and/or using guidelines. This might help customers participate in the process of optimizing the sustainability of the product during the using period [19].

Following that, *a fashion designer needs to take on the role of a problem solver*, effectively applying the acquired knowledge and skills regarding how to achieve sustainability goals in the fashion industry. To understand and find design solutions, design thinking is considered as a potential approach for innovation and development of sustainable solutions in fashion design. Therefore, fashion designers, first and foremost, need to do their part to support the sustainable fashion movement. Every designer needs to be equipped with the knowledge and skills of sustainable design, and have a deep understanding of where they stand to address the existing challenges. Then, fashion designers also need to raise awareness of potential sustainability strategies, finding ways to apply them to product/service and system design. According to Professor Alba Cappellieri (2019), to achieve sustainable innovation, contemporary fashion designers need to be able to innovate in design thinking and practice on more levels. A fashion designer needs to have an evolving vision of technology to be able to make breakthroughs in the design process. They also need to share with a high degree of flexibility, combine different types of knowledge and skills, and experiences to assert their new role in the sustainability context. Finally, it should be emphasized that, in order to solve the current problems, the fashion industry cannot only solve it locally but needs a new vision to have a change, involving the whole fashion system [19], [22]. Designers need to realize that, to bring sustainable change, they should have a better understanding of the relationship between clothing and fashion. Although these two concepts sometimes overlap, they are essentially different concepts, carrying different material and spiritual values.

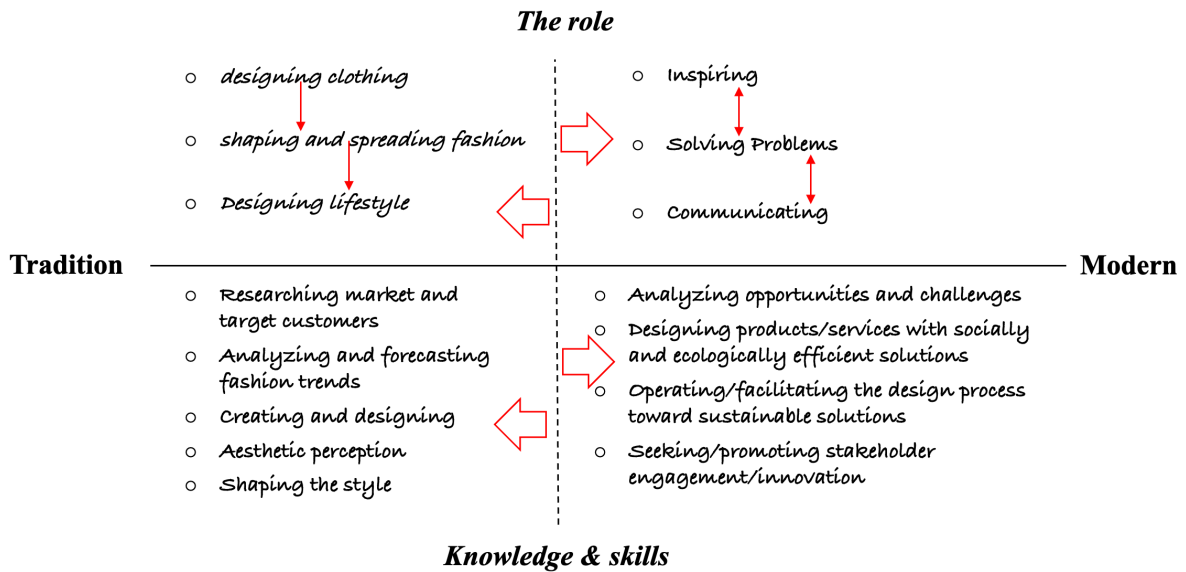


Figure 1. Roles and knowledge/skill requirements of the new generation of fashion designers

Finally, *fashion designers need to raise their role in guiding and promoting consumers paying their attention to sustainable fashion.* This means that designers need to concern about the relationship between clothing and customers, and they need to find ways to approach their customers closer through product design and convey messages with sustainable goals. As Kawamura has observed, “Female fashion constitutes novelty and change, two important characteristics of fashion” [4], in a society whereby “consumerism” is driven and met by a system of “mass production” and “mass media”, customers are addicted to shopping for clothes and they are even falling in trapped by credit card debt [3], [22]. As a result, an important consideration in efforts to reduce the pressure of fashion production and consumption on the environment and society also needs to take into account consumer behavior [21], [24]. This has impacted the new role of fashion designers in promoting sustainable fashion through consumers' behaviors who directly use the products. The stories behind a design/fashion product might bring value and meaning to customers since they do not only buy a product

with material meaning but it also has spiritual meaning.

3. Conclusion

As discussed in the previous sections, the fashion designers play a pioneering and inspiring role in designing a lifestyle. In the current context, that means that designers need to take a leading role in promoting and spreading a “sustainable lifestyle” to the community. Through designs that embedded sustainability principles, designers can tell their stories and engage stakeholders on commitment related to ecology or fair trade. According to author Kawamura, fashion communication theories will involve individuals or organizations. Thus, the approach depends on the small scale - based on the influence of individuals; or the large scale and systems approach - based on the influence of organizations. In addition, this can take into account both psychological and sociological factors in the influence of fashion. Indeed, fashion acceptance and popularity can also be the result of individual aspirations and needs, shaped by the social system to which the individual is exposed [4]. This emphasizes the

importance of the interaction between individuals in a system or a community, i.e. the role of the designer is connected with the behavior of the customer, the relationship between the designer and the customer; and products with customers. Therefore, fashion designers, especially the new generation of designers, must be aware of their responsibility in carrying out sustainable practices that impact the fashion industry. They should understand the importance of a fashion designer as an individual and his ability to make an impact on the system and the community. The new generation of fashion designers also needs to understand how to operate to contribute to innovation throughout the system to achieve the highest efficiency, towards the long-term goal of the fashion industry, that is Sustainability.

4. References

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