DESIGNING SUSTAINABLE RESORT-WEAR FOR THE NEW INDIAN MARKET

VEDICA VORA¹ & BHAWANA DUBEY²

¹Student, Knitwear Design Department, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

²Associate Professor, Knitwear Design Department, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India

ABSTRACT

The research aims to understand the changing nature of Fashion, particularly Resort/Cruise wear through its current evolution in the Indian market. It furthermore evaluates its position in the COVID-19 and post COVID-19 Pandemic era. The research seeks to understand trends and forecasts that will dictate the present and post-pandemic fashion scene, particularly focusing on topics of sustainability, like waste generated in the textile industry and fabric waste management. This paper follows a predictive analytical method of research that eventually takes on an experimental route in creating resort-wear for a post-pandemic market that not only eliminates fabric waste, but promotes versatility and capsule wardrobe culture. The research concluded that through the years, Resort fashion has developed into a far more diverse category that goes beyond beach essentials. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on Resort wear collections has been found to be remarkable in a way that changes the entire dynamic for this category. It has even had a significant impact on the buyer's psyche wherein more people are seen to be more conscious of their contribution towards the sustainable fashion movement.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, Resort-Wear, Textile Waste, Sustainability

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1. INTRODUCTION

Beginning in January 2020, the COVID-19 Pandemic was quick to strike more than 200 countries. What was declared a Public Health Emergency by the World Health Organization, ended up severely impacting not just the health sector but also social and economic sectors globally. The Fashion and Textile industry was among the largest and worst hit non-essential sectors with India alone employing 45 million people. Lockdowns were imposed, consumer behavior changed and supply chains were disrupted. Initially, the fashion industry existed in a state of flux. Uncertainty prevailed and no one seemed to be able to predict the future of fashion.

Lockdowns and travel restrictions have majorly influenced consumer behavior with regards to their fashion choices. While loungewear and athleisure saw a massive surge in demand, categories like formal-wear and resort-wear seemed to have taken a hit. The COVID crisis brought a rather abrupt end to tourism and thus seemed to invalidate a lot of what 'Resort-wear' had to offer. The relevance of the once extravagant and exotic resort-wear collections was questioned. With the trade and travel restrictions, designers were forced to re-evaluate their offerings.

The Pandemic in question blurred many lines when it came to fashion, but perhaps the best to come out of it was the smooth transition of resort wear into our everyday wardrobes because at the heart of it, resort-wear goes

beyond its garment offerings, it is a lifestyle, an attitude. It promotes an escape from the routine that has become our 'new normal'.

Although challenging, the unique circumstances seemed to present an opportunity to make some radical changes within the fabric of the fashion industry. McKinsey & Company, along with Business of Fashion were of the view that even pre-pandemic, the fashion industry was overdue for a radical change, the demand for more sustainable approaches and ethical practices to name a few. The advent of these changes was only accelerated by the pandemic.

In an industry that produces over 400 billion square meters of fabric annually with India alone producing approximately 70 billion square meters, we often see an uneasy relationship between fashion and waste. One of the greatest negative impacts that the fashion industry has had on the environment comes from landfills. In a Pulse study conducted in 2017, it was recorded that 57% of discarded garments found themselves in landfills. It was noted that averaging at 35% materials in the supply chain turned into waste before the product even reached its consumer (*Pulse Report, 2017*).

There are a number of solutions that have been presented to deal with this issue, like 3D garment technology, whole-garment knitting, fabric recycling, textile repurposing and zero waste pattern making to name a few. Unless practices like zero waste pattern making are employed, there will always be fabric cut offs that create waste.

Zero waste pattern making is simply the process of discarding nothing in the process of fashioning garments. It is the art of converting 2D fabric pieces into a 3D garment with minimal or no wastage. It can be considered as a jigsaw puzzle of fabric pieces that fit perfectly to ensure no part of the fabric creates negative space. Zero Waste Pattern Making has been embraced by the likes of Madeline Vionnet, Issey Miyake and John Galliano in the past.

2. METHODS

2.1. Problem statement

The COVID-19 Pandemic has brought about a major change in the way we consume fashion. The Lockdowns imposed and subsequent Work-From-Home Culture has forced designers to re-evaluate their product. Resort-wear designers in India have had to respond to the pandemic by going beyond the beachwear that was considered 'resort' attire. Consumers are becoming more aware of the impact they have on the environment and that too has brought about a change in the collections being rolled out.

2.2 Research Objectives

- To analyze the evolution of Resort-wear, especially during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- To study the new consumer consciousness about the environmental impacts of the fashion industry.
- To understand the impact of Zero Waste Pattern Making and textile waste repurposing on the sustainability movement.
- To explore the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on consumer psychology.
- To design and develop zero/minimum waste patterns and sustainable prints for a Resort wear line.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research is of an exploratory nature and involves both Primary and Secondary Data Collection. It undertakes a

predictive analytical approach in its study of trends and forecasts wherein reports from forecasting agencies have been studied and analyzed. Furthermore, a number of journals, articles and reports on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic have been explored for their theoretical perspectives. Secondary Data from books and websites has been compiled and studied to better understand fashion sustainability and the evolution of resort-wear. Design development through exploration of print and pattern contribute to the Primary Data collection wherein a Resort-wear Design Collection is conceptualized.

4. STUDIES

4.1. Evolution of Resort-wear as a Category

Resort-wear dates back to the inter-war period in Europe when the rich would jet-off on fancy vacations to make the most of the summers. What was restricted to bathing suits, maillots and sundresses, evolved into a full-blown clothing category in the 1930's by couture as well as ready-to-wear designers (Summer resort wear: from boaters to bikinis, 2014). Vionnet and Chanel even began retailing at resorts that were frequented by celebrities. By the 1950's, this category saw breezy kaftans, shorts, and sun tops being crafted for the elite, while the style also percolated down to the masses. Lightweight fabrics and flowy silhouettes have since been a key element of resort-wear collections along with energizing colors and beautiful prints.

While the purpose of resort-wear had more or less been the same from the time of its inception, it has only recently undergone a complete shift where the concept has been broken down and re-styled to keep with the times. There has been a re-evaluation of the circumstances wherein beach-appropriate pieces have taken a backseat and the focus is now on lounge-like pieces that balance comfort and aesthetics to provide more versatile collections that can be made functional beyond the beach. The consumer today is actively seeking pieces that provide utility instead of buying impulsively. In fact, higher the wearability quotient greater is the demand for ready-to-wear lines.

Furthermore, the 'Make in India' movement and online campaigns like '#SupportLocalDesigners' that were born out of a need to uplift artisans and promote home grown talent during the COVID-19 pandemic have created a radical shift in the market as both luxury and non-luxury shoppers turn their attention towards up and coming Indian designers that offer to bridge the gap between 'resort' and 'lounge'.

The pandemic has taken Resort-wear towards mainstream fashion. Resort silhouettes are becoming increasingly versatile, with Indian brands like Studio Verandah, Shivan and Narresh, House of Masaba, etc. providing solutions like kaftans, slip dresses, kimonos and pajamas that fit right into the 'new normal' lifestyle. In fact, designers are creating clever prints and patterns that can easily be used even by the post-pandemic traveler when the travel boom hits.

4.2. Zero-Waste Design and Textile Waste Repurposing

According to a survey report by McKinsey and the Business of Fashion (*State of Fashion, 2021*), three in five people said that environmental impact is an important factor in making purchasing decisions. In today's design scenario, there are several ways to keep environmental impact in check; sustainable fabrics, circularity in fashion, zero waste design, repurposing textile waste, upcycling, recycling etc.

10% of all greenhouse gas emissions are directly related to the fashion industry. Clothes that take years to decompose in landfills are responsible for emitting harmful gases like methane while polluting soil and water. (*How Much Waste Does the Fashion Industry Produce, 2019*). The practice of Zero Waste Pattern Making is a key solution in

combatting the landfill problem. Patterns generally include curved seams that tend to create negative space which only means that some part of the fabric gets discarded. This is where Zero Waste Pattern Making comes in creating garments using geometric shapes that reduces wastage almost completely. Today, we see Zero Waste Pattern Making being adopted in order to embrace sustainability, however, it is a practice that has been around for centuries. The Japanese kimono, the Indian saree, the African Tobe and almost half of Ancient Greek fashion all have one thing in common and that is their zero-waste design (*Zero-waste Fashion: Why It Is So Important*, 2020).

Madeleine Vionnet, considered one of the greats in the history of fashion, used the philosophy of minimizing work and maximizing results. Her garments were known to have very few seams and cuts, but excellent drapes and an unmatched aesthetic; all while working with minimal or zero-waste silhouettes.

Zero-waste designs have not been explored much in the resort-wear category so far, but the shifting dynamic that focuses on flowy, comfortable clothing gives designers the opportunity to innovate with elimination of fabric waste in mind.

Another essential element of resort wear clothing is its surface development and embellishments. Laces, tassels, 2D and 3D embroidery, etc. are often seen adorning resort wear garments from swimwear to evening wear depending on the purpose and occasion. However, the real winners are brands that use fabric waste to create the same. The practice of repurposing fabric waste into the same garment or even a different garment is a small step that goes a long way. 'Rasleela', a Gujrat based label uses scraps of fabric to create beautiful hand appliquéd designs. Mumbai based label 'DohTakKeh' sources fabric scraps in order to create luxury streetwear pieces and garment embellishments (*Here's how young Indian brands are adopting sustainability*, 2020)

4.3. Changing Consumer Psychology As A Result of COVID-19

4.3.1 Changes in Buying Behavior

The practice of impulse buying has shifted towards a mindful indulgence and general environmental consciousness. Contrary to countries like China where 'Revenge Buying' became associated with COVID-19 restrictions, Indian consumers seem to have found the time and opportunity to educate themselves on fashion sustainability. Several organizations, magazines, and fashion forums were quick to organize online seminars and conduct talks on the impact of COVID-19 on fashion, which helped raise awareness among an entire population that owing to the digital nature of the events, now had access to these platforms. For today's consumer, how a product is made is as important as the product itself. Details like hand-braided macramé, smocking, ruching, etc. is considered an added personal touch that taps into the relationship that designers and crafts-persons share with the consumer. Along with this comes the newly developed consumer sensibility about the environmental impact of their purchases. Many consumers have even vowed to buy less due to which designers will be required to roll out collections that are trans-seasonal and will last longer both in terms of durability and style. Sustainable fabrics, zero waste garments, textile waste repurposing etc. are all important considerations in the upcoming lines.

4.3.2. Changes in Consumer Aesthetics

It is often said that one of the functions of fashion is to allow the wearer an escape from the mundane. Now more than ever, escapism has become a highly sought after concept. The idea is to experience a sense of adventure and relief whether or not one is stepping out. Mood-boosting designs are at the core of upcoming collections. Joy and exhilaration will be considered necessary and even radical. In fact, the theme of emotional response will be a powerful driver of consumer

demand (WGSN, 2020). People are looking for bright, optimistic tones and dramatic print clashes that champion outrageous and frivolous expressions. Color can be used to energize design and combined with psychedelic inspirations that offer a mind-altering take on reality. Since color plays a significant role in the look and feel of the garment, it is important to consider the aspect of balance that consumers are seen to crave in these times. Warm tones balanced by cooler hues and brights balanced by more familiar shades will create a mid-level color impact. It is also important to consider the wearability and versatility factor of the silhouette and create pieces that can be styled in a number of ways that look different in different settings. Comfort is now a globally realized need and hence will directly affect garment aesthetics.

5. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

Here, the researcher explores silhouettes that employ Zero Waste Pattern Making and prints that use sustainable printing methods to create a design collection that embodies versatility, joy and creativity. The theme of the collection is centered around escape; whether it is outdoors, or within.

5.1. Print Design

The pandemic and post-pandemic markets are forecasted to have one thing in common: joy inducing, mood boosting designs. With prints that seek to energize and colors that refresh, the collections rolled out will enable escape from the mundane (WGSN, 2020). The prints developed for this collection are made keeping the sustainability factor in mind and thus are suitable for digital printing. Digital printing is known for lesser power and water consumption compared to other methods. It creates lesser wastage and has a much higher design resolution.

Print 1

This print (Fig. 1) seeks to create a sense of colorful escape using bright, abstract florals that is coming together. It speaks to the adventurer in every soul. The inspiration behind this print was a wilderness where one can find joy and creative energy.

Figure 1: Print Development

Figure 2: Print 1 in two color-ways

Print 2

This print is a breezy interpretation of wild flowers that often grow on sand beaches and seashores. Placed over a cloudy white background, it seeks to depict the sense of calm that comes with escape and also the joys of nature.

Figure 3: Print Development

Figure 4: Print 2

Print 3

This print represents the energy and vastness of the mountains while honoring the life that thrives on them. Stories are often told about magical plants and herbs that are found on mountains and this print seeks to bring those stories to life on fabric.

Figure 5: Print Development

Figure 6: Print 3

Print 4

As per WGSN's print forecast for the upcoming seasons, bright print clashes are bound to create interesting mixes. As an ode to the classic pinstripe, this print plays with stripes of different colors and sizes that create a fun and energetic graphic.

Figure 7: Print Development

Figure 8: Print 4

Print 5

Inspired by polaroids that one often bring back from vacation, this print in the resort-wear collection combines multiple prints to tell a story of escape, energy and hope. Phrases of self-love and adventure add to the storytelling quality of the print.

Figure 9: Print Development

Figure 10: Print 5

5.2. Zero Waste Pattern Making

Zero Waste Design is all about creativity despite restraints. These garments are modern offerings that have taken inspiration from zero-waste designers like Madeleine Vionnet, who broke all the rules to create revolutionary fashion statements. They are smart silhouettes that can be positioned as a capsule collection thereby giving consumers added utility. Some of them, are even convertible.

Figure 11: Zero-waste kimono pattern

Figure 12: Zero-waste bandeau pattern

Figure 13: Wrap pants with fabric for repurposing

Figure 14: Zero-waste handkerchief dress

Figure 15: Zero-waste Paper-bag skirt pattern

Figure 16: Zero-waste crop kaftan pattern

Figure 17: Lounge Pants With Fabric for Repurposing

Figure 18: Zero-waste tiered skirt pattern

5.3. Textile Waste Repurposing

Repurposing textile waste is a powerful tool in managing fabric cut-offs. Cut-offs or waste textiles have plenty of scope to be turned into tassels, surface embellishments, trims and much more. Here, we tend to focus on solutions that the wearer can connect to (WGSN, 2020).

Figure 19: Tassel and Flowers Made from Repurposed Fabric

Figure 20: Bustier Created using Repurposed Textiles

5.4. Proposed Range Plan

Combining the sustainable prints and zero-waste patterns, the researcher proposes the following range plan for a Resort-wear Collection:

Figure 21: Range Plan

6. CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic has been a wake-up call to the fashion industry and the industry does seem to be responding. The smooth evolution of resort-wear has made its way into our wardrobes from airy kaftans to easy jumpsuits. Consumers are now looking at smart collections that promote versatility and provide maximum utility. Resort-wear has become that escape-essential whether or not one is physically travelling. The breezy silhouettes adapted to everyday wear and colorful mood boosting prints have become the respite people are looking for from everyday stressors.

Consumers have realized that with great (purchasing) power comes great responsibility to the environment. If the COVID-19 Pandemic has taught us one thing, it is that change needs to happen on an individual as well as collective level. On the consumer's part, this change is only possible through a conscious effort to educate themselves on what they buy, how much they buy and where they buy it from. For the designer, change will stem out of innovation and research towards making a product that will create real utility and last long.

Waste has been a massive issue in our environment for far too long with big corporations often limiting their solutions to the landfills. This is an issue that needs to be tackled together by environmentalists, designers, educators and consumers. Only when Zero-wastage policies are made an essential part of every designers' design process will there be a visible change.

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