

Which trends offers opportunities or pose threats on the European apparel market?

Multiple trends influence the European apparel market. The main trend currently is sustainability, connected with corporate social responsibility and transparency. The second major current trend is the influence of technology on production processes, sales and the relationships between buyers, suppliers and consumers. Although some trends pose threats, others if properly explored could generate big opportunities for developing country exporters.

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1. Environmental and sustainability concerns are changing the industry

The fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world, largely due to overproduction, the use of synthetic fibres and agricultural crop pollution. As European consumers and governments get more environmentally conscious, sustainability becomes central to the apparel industry's trends and strategies. Producers have been approaching the issue from multiple angles, including climate neutrality, use of sustainable and alternative material mixes, material recycling and upcycling, more sustainable production techniques, chemical management and animal friendliness. The fastest developing country suppliers at adjusting their sourcing and production to these trends will be the first to seize big opportunities in the European market.

Climate neutrality

The fashion industry is responsible for 10% of the carbon footprint of the world, according to [UN Climate Change](#). Some estimates expect the sector's emissions to rise by more than 60 percent by 2030 if the industry does not transform itself towards sustainability. Fibre production, yarn preparation, dyeing and finishing currently account for more than 50% of the emissions in apparel production. Industry players such as H&M Group, Inditex, Kering, Hugo Boss, Adidas and Puma are working together with UN Climate Change on reducing greenhouse emissions. In 2018, these companies signed the [Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action](#), pledging net zero emissions for the fashion industry by 2050. Some companies have even more ambitious goals: H&M is aiming at making its entire value chain climate positive by 2040; Marks & Spencer is working with partners to reduce 13.3 million tonnes of value chain emissions by 2030 and Patagonia aims to eliminate or mitigate all of its carbon emissions by 2025.

Apparel producers plan to reduce emissions through several measures, including more use of materials with low climate impact, focus on energy efficiency, use of renewable energies, commitment to not installing new coal-fired boilers and other coal-fired power sources. As regulation of the fashion industry's emissions is expected to become increasingly stricter in the medium term, apparel companies are expected to set increasingly stricter targets on carbon emissions. This means that suppliers will have to work on reducing their own emissions as soon as within the next three to five years, in addition to having to develop long-term strategies for further emission reductions. Elimination of coal-fired power sources will be of the greatest importance. Suppliers which do not comply with this requirement risk being eliminated from the supply chain. Companies which can demonstrate lower carbon footprints, use of renewable energies and more circular production models will be at an advantage.

Use of more sustainable material mixes and alternative materials

Commonly used fibres such as cotton, virgin polyester, virgin polyamide and cellulosic fibres have a significant negative impact on the environment. The production of cotton requires large amounts of water and pesticides. Virgin polyester and polyamide are made from crude oil, while cellulosic fibres are often linked to deforestation and require a chemically intensive manufacturing process. For their turn, major apparel producers are increasingly committing to using more sustainable materials. For example, H&M aims to only use recycled and sustainably sourced materials by 2030, while Adidas and BESTSELLER have committed to sourcing only sustainably produced cotton and increase the use of recycled polyester in the next three to five years.

Apparel companies are also turning to low-impact, biodegradable fibres from hemp, flax, [banana plants](#) and nettles, in addition to developing alternative fibres from agricultural waste, such as from [corn sugar](#) and [citrus juice byproducts](#), milk and naturally occurring [biopolymers](#). Sustainable man-made alternatives in the form of lyocells such as Tencel, micro modal and EcoVero provide closed loop systems that reuse water and chemicals to manufacture yarns. The focus is on a production process that uses less water and energy, and materials which are biodegradable. Milk-based tissues, for example, need 50 times less water for production of 1 kg of material than cotton.

Another factor in this industry shift is the growing departure from animal materials. For example, ASOS demands that suppliers do not use materials derived from vulnerable, endangered, exotic or wild-caught animal species. H&M and Inditex also have animal welfare policies in place. Leather alternatives are also currently being produced from apples, pineapples and mushrooms.

Europe is currently the biggest market for sustainable apparel. Production based on innovative, sustainable and biodegradable materials creates an opportunity for developing country suppliers, especially when fibre material can be sourced locally and demonstrate much lower water and energy use than traditional materials. Going forward, expect suppliers which continue to rely on non-organic and non-environmentally friendly materials to be pushed out of the market within the next 10 to 15 years. It is important for suppliers to invest in new materials and material production processes to retain an advantage in the future apparel market.

More sustainable production techniques

Current production techniques, especially in the fast fashion segment have a very negative impact on the environment. For example, textile dyeing is the second largest polluter of clean water globally after agriculture. In Europe, the use of hazardous chemicals in clothes, textiles and footwear is regulated under the [REACH Regulation](#). Many hazardous chemicals are banned and more strictly regulated in Europe than in the US and other countries. The REACH Regulation, societal pressure and voluntary industry campaigns are pushing the fashion industry into removing toxic chemicals from supply chains altogether. Many fashion companies have joined the [ZDHC Roadmap to Zero Programme](#) (ZDHC stands for zero discharge of hazardous chemicals), a coalition of brands which aims to substitute hazardous chemicals for safer ones in apparel production processes. Leading fashion brands have signed the [New Plastics Economy Global Commitment](#), which targets reducing plastic waste. ZDHC is working with the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, which has developed the [Higg Index](#), a set of supply management tools that fashion brands increasingly request their suppliers use.

Leading apparel companies have been implementing more sustainable techniques to reduce water and energy use, in addition to limiting the use of harmful chemicals in production. Some examples of these techniques include:

- waterless dyeing technologies, such as [DyeCoo's](#) CO₂-based technology, which also eliminates the need for processing chemicals and reduces energy consumption;
- digital and laser fabric printing, such as Levi's laser technology in denim finishing, which cuts chemical processing, reduces the finishing time and allows for personalisation;
- use of more environmentally friendly dyes and processes, including aniline-free dyes and new dyeing technologies such as [Colorifix](#), which develops colorants produced by organisms such as microbes, plants, animals and insects.

The trend towards more environmentally friendly apparel production is expected to further intensify in the next three to five years. Suppliers which are early adopters of innovative and sustainable processes, and those with high Higg Index scores will be the first to harness opportunities in the European market as well. Developing country suppliers which do not improve production processes or use hazardous chemicals banned in Europe may not be able to export to Europe in the long term.

Recycling and circular business models

Growing amounts of textile waste are an unintended consequence of fast fashion, since people buy more clothes more frequently and do not keep them for as long as they used to. In 2018, the European Parliament adopted a Europe-wide strategy on plastics and a new legislation on waste and the circular economy to reduce the amount of landfill waste. The circular model reuses materials wherever possible to turn them into new fabrics and garments with help of new recycling technologies. Companies such as [Resyntex](#), [Re:newcell](#) and [Evrnu Technologies](#) produce secondary raw materials from textile waste. [Infinited Fiber](#) turns textile, cardboard and agricultural waste into new cotton. [Worn Again Technologies](#) turns polyester polymers and cellulose from cotton, non-reusable textiles, PET bottles and packaging into new textile raw materials.

Large European apparel companies, such as H&M and C&A, offer incentives for consumers to return their used clothing, but also increasingly use recycled materials in producing their collections. Adidas, Ralph Lauren and Aquafil, for example, have launched collections made of recycled plastic waste. Others have repurposed second-hand trash, unsellable stock and waste to produce high-quality kitchen textiles, home textiles, bedding, packaging, shoes and clothing, for example, [The New Denim Project](#), [MUD Jeans](#), [Salvage+Rivet](#) and Rifo. In another example of material reuse, H&M's Weekday brand releases designs based on remade garments from old collections.

Companies are also increasingly exploring circular sale models, such as clothing rental, resale and upcycling, which lengthen product life cycle and improve sustainability. Companies such as Rent the Runway, MUD Jeans and Tchibo, for example, offer clothing rental. Analysts forecast clothing resale to have tremendous growth potential, so it is unsurprising that large players, such as & Other Stories, Patagonia, R.E.I and French luxury department store Galeries Lafayette are all entering the fashion resale market. In terms of lengthening product life cycle, consumers can use online platforms and mobiles apps, such as eBay and Kleiderkreisel, to sell used clothing peer to peer, while in retail, H&M recently launched repair and customisation facilities in stores in France, Germany and Norway.

The recycling trend creates opportunities for companies which can find ways of designing more circular fashion production and those which produce better quality, longer-lasting garments. This trend currently makes up a small share of the fashion market, which is expected to continue in the short term. However, it is estimated to accelerate in the next 10 to 15 years to effectively threaten fast fashion. Evolving recycling technology could, for instance, result in greater nearshoring as it would make fibre material available at production sites located closer to consumer markets. Resale, refurbishment and upcycling of used apparel could also result in declining demand for new apparel. Developing country suppliers should therefore think about diversifying production between fast and slow fashion, as well as explore upcycling and recycling strategies.

Environmental and sustainability practices of apparel players are expected to grow into major purchasing criteria for European consumers in the future. For more details on sustainable apparel, see the CBI study [Exporting sustainable apparel to Europe](#).

Tips:

Innovate your production processes to reduce water, energy and chemical use. Give up coal as an energy source and, if possible, switch to renewable energy sources. Inform yourself about new production technologies that are more environmentally friendly, innovative and sustainable. Refer to [this guide for information on ethical and sustainable fashion trade shows](#). Invest in wastewater treatment plants which can recycle water.

Adjust your production processes to provide cleaner products by using nontoxic dyes, employing better dyeing techniques and improving wastewater treatment. Consider using natural dye options for your products, such as [Ecofoot](#) and [SpinDye](#). Keep yourself informed about new textile dyeing methods and partner with companies that use sustainable technologies.

Inform yourself about the source, carbon footprint and renewability of the fibres used in your production and start working primarily with ecofriendly fibres and fibres that are sustainable and functional. Align your supply chain accordingly, including researching whether you can leverage the use of any local raw materials. Try not to use material blends, as they are more difficult to recycle than one-material textiles.

If you produce ecoapparel, apply for internationally recognised certifications, such as the [EU Ecolabel](#), [Nordic Swan Ecolabel](#), [ÖkoTex](#), [GOTS](#) and [BSCI](#), then clearly promote your certifications through your labelling. For more information about labelling, refer to the [CBI buyer requirements in apparel](#).

Join platform organisations which support sustainability and help apparel manufacturers with innovation, such as [Fashion for Good](#), ZDHC and Sustainable Apparel Coalition. Use assessment tools like the Higgs Index and the Textile Exchange's [Corporate Fiber & Materials Benchmark](#). Participate in related trainings, audits and assessments.

Minimise waste and explore waste management solutions. A strong, innovative waste management performance can significantly improve your market position and competitiveness.

2. Corporate social responsibility and transparency gain importance

Corporate social responsibility is a big trend in the European apparel industry. Together with transparency, they are slowly turning into key sourcing criteria for European buyers. Consumers increasingly want to know more about how, where and by whom their clothes are made. Surveys show that approximately 37.5% of consumers in Europe's biggest apparel markets (Germany, France, Italy, Spain and the UK) say they consider environmental and social impacts when buying clothes. Consumers are also interested in learning what fashion companies are doing to address social and environmental issues. Brands in turn are increasingly sourcing from contractors that can ensure manufacturing is performed under proper working conditions, for example, in safe facilities, by workers wearing protective gear and not exposed to hazardous, life-threatening production processes that are outlawed in Europe.

Apparel companies and their suppliers are also increasingly pressured to pay fair wages to their workers. These brands are also increasingly required to provide supply chain transparency, like listing all the factories and suppliers they use. H&M, for example, has launched a transparency initiative providing data production on its website, including details such as production country, supplier names, factory names and addresses, number of workers in factories and materials used to make each garment.

Different initiatives rate apparel companies according to their transparency practices, like Fashion Revolution's [Fashion Transparency Index](#), which ranked Adidas, Reebok and Patagonia as the most transparent fashion brands. The social fairness and transparency trend creates opportunities for fashion producers focusing on social responsibility, whose production is organised in a way that benefits local communities. Companies that are transparent about their practices and the practices of their partners along the supply chain will have more opportunities in the European market. On the other hand, working with suppliers which do not follow social responsibility standards and do not respect social fairness may jeopardise contracts with fashion brands.

Tips:

Ensure that your factories are safe places to work and do not offer preventable risks of fire, electrical and structural safety.

Eliminate hazardous and outlawed production processes, such as sandblasting and PP spraying, replacing them with alternatives, such as using machines that eliminate manual spraying.

Create a corporate social responsibility (CSR) policy for your company, including introducing and observing proper workplace safety guidelines as well. Use [this document](#) from the International Institute of Sustainable Development to learn how to create a CSR strategy.

Train your employees on occupational safety and chemical management, for example through ZDHC. Provide protective clothing for your employees, including training on how to use it and explain the risks of working without it. Make one person or department responsible for personal protective equipment and safety issues. Be aware that buyers may want to inspect your factories and your suppliers' factories.

Make sure that all the companies in your supply chain comply with sustainable practices and workplace safety. Prepare and publish a list for your buyers, listing all the companies you work with in the sourcing and production cycle, including sewing, washing, printing, etc. See [H&M's supplier list](#) for guidance.

Pay all your employees fair living wages and capture this in your CSR strategy.

3. Technology's influence grows

Textile production has traditionally been considered a labour-intensive industry, but it is now increasingly driven and influenced by technology. Developments in digital technologies, automation, artificial intelligence, data analytics and IT platforms make product development, production and sales faster and more efficient. Technological innovation also changes the power dynamics between consumers, brands and retailers. In the future, there will be mass market opportunities for companies that can ensure faster production but opportunities for high profit margins for slow fashion suppliers that can ensure quality, design and uniqueness.

Digital technologies

Digital transformation initiatives in textiles are increasingly more widespread. Digital technologies such as 3D design, digital prototyping, digital sampling and digital showrooms are increasingly used by apparel companies in product development. They help companies shorten design times, visualise products and samples, increase the speed to market and cut costs. Hugo Boss, for example, has fully digitised product development for parts of its brand, while Nike is using digital samples, Tommy Hilfiger introduced a digital showroom for wholesalers and Holy Fashion Group has digitised its entire value chain.

European buyers expect to receive digital data and presentations from their suppliers. Transforming towards a digital company is an intensive process and the ultimate challenge for suppliers will be to conduct digital transformation in every aspect of their organisations. It will require supply chain visibility, strong partner collaboration and strong capacities in predictive information and analysis. Companies which successfully digitalise their production will outperform industry standards and will be better suited to manage customer expectations, increase speed to market, implement sustainable innovation, adopt transparent value chains and will be able to better identify and target the most profitable customer segments.

Artificial intelligence (AI) and data analytics

Data analytics and machine learning algorithms use historical shopping and search data to understand consumer preferences and predict consumer demand. This helps companies improve inventory management

and accuracy. AI-powered tools can help retailers reduce forecasting errors by up to 50% while reducing inventory by 20–50%. AI technologies can also play a role in textile manufacturing, streamlining quality assurance processes, like spotting defects in fabric and ensuring colour match between a produced textile and its original design.

Machine learning technologies are also being used to make supply chains more efficient. Many brands use AI for communicating with clients and offer styling and sizing recommendations, like Zalando and ASOS.

Advancements in AI and machine learning technology are expected to shape the future of the fashion industry. Apparel suppliers should adopt AI technologies as soon as possible to gain advantage in the market.

Automation

Application of automation and robotics allows for faster production and more focused demand. Extensively used in the footwear industry, automation is now also increasingly incorporated in apparel production. Key automation technologies include sewing automation, 3D knitting and finishing technologies, such as digital and laser printing. Other areas that may benefit from automation include fabric inspection, spreading, cutting, sewing, pressing and material handling. Sewbot technologies such as Softwear Automation's Sewbot and [Sewbo](#) cut production time and labour costs.

Automation technology can also create new business models, such as in-store factories and micro factories that could further drive the trend towards apparel customisation. For example, [Adidas launched a pop-up store in Berlin in 2017, which scanned customers and within four hours knitted a custom sweater for them](#); Levi's is also launching a new feature on its website to allow users to customise their jeans using laser finishing technology. Manufacturing entire garments with sewbots is not commercially viable yet, mostly due to the fabric flexibility, but analysts believe sewbot production will be a reality in the future. As a result, production may move closer to Europe in the mid to long term, while developing country suppliers may lose the advantage of low-cost labour.

IT platforms

Investment in management platforms and data monitoring tools has been growing in the apparel industry. Apparel companies and their suppliers will be increasingly expected to network over integrated IT platforms in the future. These platforms will be able to provide automatic information on free production capacity and possible efficiency improvement potential, allowing buyers and suppliers to react faster to changes in demand. Google, for instance, is working on a cloud data analytics and machine learning service that will give brands a more comprehensive view into their supply chain, initially targeting tier 4 production of cotton and viscose. Google partnered with Stella McCartney for the pilot programme of this initiative. Suppliers which invest in management platforms and provide their clients with the option of integration will have a competitive advantage over those which do not. In the mid to long term, buyers may expect this kind of integration from suppliers.

For more detail on data analytics, AI and other technologies affecting the apparel industry, see the [CBI study Technology trends in the apparel industry](#).

Tips:

Have a digital transformation strategy in place with a clear mission and specific objectives. This should include an outline of your expectations, laying out the scope and volume of your digital transition, including changes to the design process, legacy system updates, costbenefit analyses and supply chain partnerships. Learn from peers which successfully implemented such transformation, such as [Pacific Textiles](#) and [Getzner Textiles](#).

Update your IT to accelerate your communication with buyers and streamline ordering processes. Investigate different IT management platforms and systems to find out which platforms your clients work with and would allow for best integration. Consult [this article](#) for an overview of apparel management platforms.

Start systematically collecting data focusing on market and internal company data, including fabric data, production times, pricing, lead times, shipping, ecological footprint and sales. Internal data analysis can help improve efficiency and sustainability of your business. Data collection and management can be done through enterprise resource planning software and online analytics.

Diversify your product range to include items that have less nearshoring potential, such as labourintensive, complex products that cannot be made by robots.

Provide digital data for your products including photos and videos, find out whether your buyer needs different kinds of packaging and logistics solutions for ecommerce.

4. Slow population growth and ageing society

The pace of population expansion in the European Union has slowed down considerably. Europe's current population of 512 million accounts for less than 7% of the world's total, more than half of which (54%) live in Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy. Eurostat's forecast the European population to grow to 529 million by 2045, then stagnate and decline, which will intensify competition in the apparel industry.

The EU is the second fastest ageing society in the world. People aged 65 years and older make 19% of the population (98 million people) now, but this share is expected to grow to 30% by 2060. The share of people who are 80 years and older is expected to increase from 5% to 12% in the same period. Europeans may be getting older, but the boundaries of old age are also shifting. Older Europeans increasingly remain active professionally, travel, use the internet and do not want to 'dress old'.

The ageing of European society creates opportunities in apparel targeting consumers above 65, especially in adaptive clothing, which are designed for people with disabilities and people who experience difficulty dressing themselves, as well as apparel that supports medical functions, such as compression garments, fabric orthoses, orthopaedic shoes, etc. The high activity level of ageing Europeans also creates opportunities for activewear styles for older consumers buyers. This growing age group is currently underserved, as most companies target younger consumers. Some brands which successfully target seniors include Ulla Popken, Gerry Weber and Taifun.

Tips:

Inform yourself about demographics when deciding on which clothing segments you want to enter. Research and understand the forecasted size for each segment, including growth, demand and the fashion taste and buying habits of the targeted consumers.

Senior consumers will be increasingly more important, especially in the long term. You should consider and research different clothing niches for seniors, such as activewear, workwear, leisure wear and adaptive apparel. Research senior styles popular in Europe by checking the assortment of the main market players. Conversely, baby and children's apparel are expected to grow at much slower pace.

Focus your exports on Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy, four of the biggest European apparel markets. Research opportunities to subcontract for big brands and retailers which are successful in one or more of these countries, such as H&M, ASOS, BESTSELLER and Inditex.

5. Fast-fashion industry is growing

Fast fashion is growing in Europe because of changing consumer behaviour and expectations. The segment currently accounts for approximately 66% of online fashion traffic, having grown 21% in the past three years. Extremely fast and frequent fashion cycles are the norm in the current apparel market. Consumer appetite for novelty remains high, while convenience, immediacy and personalisation have turned into normal expectations in apparel purchases. Many producers release new designs on a rotating basis with 12 releases per year instead of four, but some manufacturers can have as many as one micro collection per week, year round. Some companies that offer new styles at extremely short cycles include ASOS, Boohoo and Misguided. The number and speed of collection launches result in increasingly shortened lead times, requiring flexibility, agility in production and closer collaboration between apparel companies and their suppliers.

In the mass-market segment, the supply-focused sourcing model is being reorganised and price is no longer the main decisive factor in choosing suppliers. Going forward, smaller batch sizes and individualised orders will be requested more often by apparel brands because the one-size-fits-all strategy no longer works. H&M, for example, now launches collections designed for smaller markets, such as the Berlin Collection offered exclusively in Berlin stores.

According to a [McKinsey whitepaper on nearshoring and automation in the apparel industry](#), 80% of international chief procurement officers say that speed to market and reactivity are their top priorities. The speed to market buyers require varies depending on the product line — faster for trending in-season items than for basic items, for instance. Suppliers that can demonstrate flexibility and reactivity may seize growing opportunities in the European market.

Tips:

Offer flexibility to your clients in responding to quick fashion cycles, including flexibility in ordering, like accommodating small orders, the possibility of quick turnaround on reorders, and trying new patterns and colourways on models.

Offer short lead times to your clients: at the minimum five to seven days for samples and three to four weeks for delivery. If possible, shorten lead times even more. Examine your production for possible speed improvements and find alternatives in your supply chain to prevent reliance on single suppliers.

Have a roadmap for acting as a partner of your buyers rather than just a contractor. Start engaging in cocreation and problem solving for your buyers.

Use an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system to accelerate ordering and communication.

6. Growth of the omnichannel approach

Most large European apparel retailers sell through an omnichannel approach. This includes physical stores, online sales, mobile sales and in some cases, such as Zalando and Amazon, platform sales channels. Online and mobile sales channels have grown over the last decade and are expected to grow further in the short to midterm. Online and mobile sales get more sophisticated by the day, guided by technology that suggest personalised choices and items similar to the ones previously searched by clients. H&M, ASOS and Farfetch, for example, are experimenting with offering visual search and other AI features.

Physical stores are expected to remain important for apparel producers as part of their direct-to-consumers (D2C) sales strategies, allowing for consumer data gathering and helping to retain more control over the brands. These stores are expected to act as interaction points with consumers and as fulfilment centres, but in the future physical locations may need to offer consumers more to remain relevant. It is likely that stores will start

offering technologies such as augmented reality and digital mirrors for more convenient shopping experiences, like the Tommy Hilfiger store in Amsterdam.

Online D2C sales present another strong opportunity in this segment. Sales platforms such as Amazon, eBay, AliExpress and Alibaba allow consumers to buy directly from brands and factories in Asia at cheap prices. In 2017, in the Netherlands alone, consumers ordered €817 million worth of products from e-commerce stores outside of Europe. D2C sales from China are expected to grow after the country secured reduced cost delivery service agreements with several parcel delivery services and after Alibaba opened a warehouse in Belgium.

Sales platforms make it easier for developing country suppliers to enter the European market with their own products, providing the necessary infrastructure for clients and access to customers. Cupshe, for example, a fast-growing Chinese swimwear brand, is experiencing strong growth due to a mix of rapid launches, fashion trend knowledge and good quality marketing. The increased access to the European market, on the other hand, may result in increased competition and the potential for cheap, low-quality products to flood the market, thus reducing trust in developing country suppliers.

Tips:

Experiment doing direct-to-consumer (D2C) sales alongside your business-to-business (B2B) activities. You can sell through your own web shop, existing online platforms and through social media. Look up this [case study of how Cupshe used D2C to grow its business](#).

Determine your product and business strengths and what fashion segment would be the easiest for you to enter at a good level of quality. Determine your production focus: speed, innovation or quality. Align your product offering accordingly and communicate your focus to your buyers.

Understand your buyers and their priorities. Adjust your supply chain to cater to the buyer needs.

7. Social media's growing role

Consumer attitude is shifting from passive buying to exerting more influence, co-creating and interacting with fashion brands. Apparel companies have lost much of their power in trendsetting to celebrities, individual influencers and consumers themselves. Gaining more insight into consumer profiles and buying behaviour is essential for brands to provide more personalised and predictive shopping choice.

The role of social media in marketing is growing more important by the day, as Instagram and Facebook replace traditional media as the leading channels for consumers to discover new styles. This means most brands must adopt digital-savvy strategies to successfully compete in the market.

Social media marketing creates an opportunity for companies to strengthen their brands, drive traffic to their websites, gain marketplace insights and sell. Instagram has recently turned into a sales channel itself after introducing a checkout tool allowing users to shop within its app. Several apparel brands, such as Adidas, H&M and Zara, participated in the launch of Instagram's new feature. Apparel companies which have successful social media strategies and presence include Missguided, Nike, Reebok, Everlane and Zara.

Other strategies for creating successful social media presence and customer involvement include using stories and emotion, using visually appealing and stylised imagery, generating referrals and word of mouth, creating surprising and viral content and promoting sustainability and social responsibility. In the next three to five years, social media is expected to gain even more in importance. Companies with successful social media presence, including a targeted and inclusive strategy will have more opportunities in the market.

Tips:

Familiarise yourself with the latest fashion trends on social media by following fashion influencers and leading European apparel players in your product segment. Check [Harper's Bazaar selection](#) of top fashion influencers on Instagram.

Develop strong design and production competencies in your selected fashion segments. Follow online trends and developments to stay on top of current and future trends in Europe, and to master the look and feel of the European market.


Design a social media strategy. Decide which channels you want to be present on — Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, Snapchat, Twitter — and which will work the best with your brand. Focus on the two channels most used by the demographic you are trying to reach. Draw inspiration from brands that already have successful strategies and large followings. [Cupshe's Instagram account](#) is an example of a company that is very successful in marketing its brand via social media.

Update your social media channels regularly and interact with your consumers. Have a dedicated person for answering questions and comment. Create a positive exchange to create trust and brand following.


This study has been carried out on behalf of CBI by [M-Brain GmbH](#).

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