

## Haute Couture as Fast Fashion

ANNAMMA JOY, FULL PROFESSOR, MARKETING

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Annamma Joy's approach to marketing isn't typical. An anthropologist working in the Faculty of Management, Joy's love for art, matched with her academic career in business and management, has resulted in tremendously interesting research topics in art, design and fashion.

"I am interested in questioning some of the taken-for-granted assumptions, theories and definitions in my discipline," she says. "Art has always been something that is central to my life. The domains of fashion and design are deeply tied to art; they encapsulate the notion of aesthetics."

Art, fashion and design are traditionally seen as peripheral in the context of marketing and consumerism. According to Joy, studying the outliers of a discipline leads one to ask very important questions about the heart of the discipline.

Studying the world of fashion and design has landed Joy in the international board rooms of haute couture designers, where she teaches fashion merchandising, with particular regard for Chinese aesthetics and the role of luxury brands in the larger cultural context.

"China has suddenly catalyzed into an economic centre. Everything is being produced in China, and businesses are dying to operate in China." Alongside China's emerging super-power economy is what Joy labels Asia's "love affair with luxury brands."

The brand, a key component in marketing and consumer behaviour, is uncharted territory in Asia, particularly in high-end fashion.

"All of the luxury brands you can think of are suddenly setting up flagship operations all across Asia," she explains. "I question the significance of this trend

and the larger rationale: how does it fit into Chinese culture and lifestyle? The typical explanation has been that people are now rich and want to display wealth. You can explain maybe 50 per cent of the variance with ideas about keeping up with the Joneses, or the Li's, but there are also factors in Asian culture that can explain how luxury fits into peoples lives and the role that aesthetics play."

In tandem with these emerging trends, the global marketplace of the 21st century has led to drastic changes in production. Products are designed in one country, produced in another and sold worldwide—all at top speed. This trend is something Joy sees as being particularly evident in fashion brands. For Joy, this concept of fast fashion raises ethical issues surrounding how fashion and luxury brands are defined.

"The place of production—Milan, Paris, London—gives an item a certain cachet," says Joy, who is presently writing a book exploring this phenomenon and its consequences. "What happens when this luxury brand is produced in Shanghai, Beijing or Hangzhou?"

In future research projects Joy will expand to other countries following in China's super-power footsteps, particularly in terms of brands and luxury brands.

"Many of the theories on consumerism were developed in North America or Western Europe," she says. "Suddenly we have become aware of the need to look at other parts of the world, which necessarily leads to questions surrounding significance and definition."

