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Globalisation Versus Deglobalisation in the Fashion Industry

Gordon Bowen and Richard Bowen

Introduction

Globalisation has influenced many industries, but one could argue that it has had a profound impact on the fashion industry and has given rise to a new industry 'fast fashion'. However, the exponential growth in fast fashion products and activities has slowed due to geopolitical factors, which has led to speculation whether changes in the fashion industry will be 'permanent'. Schlossberg (2019) suggested that globalisation has changed the face of fashion for ever. Furthermore, Schlossberg (2019) posited that as the social and economic lines between upper and middle classes began to be erased, the same happened to fashion. Consequently, the fashion industry moved to ready-to-wear garments, standardisation and mass production. He also suggested that fast fashion items are

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cheaper than haute couture fashion but still expensive. Globalisation opened untapped fashion markets by speeding up production, thus improving productivity, which improved economies of scale that reduced costs and increased profit margins. In addition, retailers also gained because faster production enabled them to sell inexpensive and affordable fashion garments. Consumers could update their wardrobe to always stay in trend with fashion cycles. Nearly everyone could afford the latest trend.

The benefits of fashion globalisation have bestowed advantages to manufacturers, retailers and consumers (Ozuem et al., 2021a). Nevertheless, can these outcomes continue despite a geopolitical, environmental, governmental and consumer-led (Gen Z in particular) offensive against globalisation, which will impact fast fashion adversely? Can deglobalisation reset globalisation to make outcomes fairer? These are some of the issues that will be discussed in this chapter.

This chapter discusses globalisation themes, models and economics of globalisation, globalisation in the fashion industry, ethics and globalisation, and implications.

Globalisation Themes

Edwards (1995: 244) posited that globalisation is the ‘compression of the world and intensification of the consciousness of the world so that people, services and goods are available to each other across the globe through a variety of means... and ways’. Globalisation is also expressed as a form of global contemporary change (O’Byrne & Hensby, 2011). Some authors discussed globalisation as evolving over periods such as (1) archaic globalisation, (2) early globalisation and (3) modern globalisation (Hopkins, 2002). Friedman (2005) categorised the history of globalisation into three periods: Globalisation 1 (1492–1800), Globalisation 2 (1800–2000) and Globalisation 3 (2000–present). Friedman (2005) stated that the first stage of globalisation is the globalisation of countries, the next globalisation stage is the globalisation of companies and the last stage is the globalisation of individuals.

Globalisation can be viewed from three perspectives: (1) as a cultural process, (2) as global capitalist development and (3) as a consequence of

the growth of information systems (Olssen et al., 2004; Brine, 1999; Ozuem et al., 2008). From the authors' perspective, globalisation in the context of the fashion industry is a capitalist development sustained by information systems. Robinson (2011) suggested that globalisation is a combination of economic and technological features. Rana (2012) proposed that globalisation promotes consumerist values, materialistic aspirations and competitive individualism. Markets can react much faster than previously due to information systems; 'huge sums of capital can be moved at a moment's notice' (Keohane & Nye, 2000: 114). The innovations of information systems and communications systems have led to a shrinking of the world; thus, eliminating space through time. The Internet has spurred growth in mass communications, leading to all parts of the globe being accessible (Olssen et al., 2004).

Globalisation has significance influence on migration, diversity and education. Migration to the Western parts of the world has implications for diversity, multiculturalism and social equality (Castles, 2004). The authors argued that migration and aspirant individuals will impact the global fashion industry negatively. Improvement in productivity and reduction in costs will require not only operating in low-cost economies but also the application of Industry 4.0 technologies, which require skilled and educated individuals. Globalisation has resulted in education becoming a valuable resource in the shift to knowledge-based industries (Rana, 2012). The impact of globalisation on education may not be interpreted homogeneously but through the lens of local cultures; thus, globalisation will be interpreted differently. Different versions of globalisation will coexist globally (Duhn, 2008). Pearson and Degotardi (2009) identified evidence that globalisation has enabled governments to decouple education government funding, which has promoted decentralisation and privatisation.

Models and Economics of Globalisation

Globalisation is an uneven process and there will be winners and losers economically. Consequently, there is polarisation of countries between those that benefit and those that gain less (Obadan, 2001). Put simply,

the economic benefits are unevenly spread between developed and developing countries. This does not mean that globalisation is all bad. Why would a developing country embrace globalisation? We can use the situation in Nigeria to make the case for why it would embrace globalisation. First, Nigeria is economically weak and has poor living standards and social infrastructure, which lead to weak productivity, growth and competitiveness (Hassan, 2013). Second, Nigeria is dependent on a monocultural economy, its terms of trade are unfavourable and it services a high level of debt (Majekodunmi & Adejuwon, 2012). Finally, in 1986, Nigeria's economy changed from a regulated economy to a liberalised economy, and the country pursued expansionary fiscal and monetary policies in its development effort (Obadan, 1998). Political instability and corruption exacerbated the problems. However, although Nigeria has been liberalising its economy, sectors function under unstable micro-management and infrastructure, and inadequate technology (Adediran et al., 2015). The situation that Nigeria finds itself in is not unusual for developing countries; hence, foreign direct investment (FDI) is attractive to the recipient country and the donor country. Globalisation is an attractor for industries from developed countries, including the fashion industry.

Baldwin (2006) opined that globalisation is the geographical unbundling of manufacturing and people leading to reductions in transportation costs of goods, people and ideas. FDI facilitates this process. Does the process benefit human rights, which is an issue of hot debate? This requires shared objectives to extend and promote human welfare (Bürgi et al., 2005). Goldman Sachs at the UN Global Compact Leaders Summit (United Nations Global Impact, 2007) stated that companies that are viewed as socially responsible outperformed their peers. Responsible globalisation benefits companies by giving them a tangible competitive advantage.

The economic development of China has lessons for developing countries and the fashion industry. Modern growth theory proposes that inherent processes are required for developing countries to develop (Gill & Homi, 2007; Nelson & Pack, 1999). Li (2016) stated that improved labour standards and an increase in wages are necessary conditions for the process of growth to take root. These conditions are interactive and

endogenous in the economic growth process. Gordon (2020) stated that this process is the dominant reason for China's unprecedented rise in gross domestic product/per capita and its rise in average yearly incomes from US\$775 (1995) to US\$19,000 (2022), according to Trading Economics (2022). The issue for developing economies that are dependent on the fashion industry is the economic and political clout of the government to put in place conditions that facilitate economic growth. Disruption in the global economy will make progress slow and indeterminate.

The low wages in low-cost economies raise concerns for developing countries' labour structures and job security (Gordon, 2020). The reduction in security has impacted blue-collar jobs more than white-collar jobs (Fort et al., 2018). According to Gill and Homi (2007), the cost advantage of low-cost economies leads to the middle-income trap (MIT); thus, the major advantage a country has is to produce low-value-added manufacturing due to low labour costs (Distelhorst & Fu, 2017). The phenomenon of MIT in China is a problem for all developing countries where the dominant production sector is fashion products. The economics of MIT could lead to labour excesses, such as child labour and no safeguarding of human rights. Meyer (1996) stated that although governments and individuals have a responsibility and an obligation to safeguard human rights, these requirements are not directed to multinational companies (MNCs).

Hiscox and Smyth (2011) found that consumers want to have a fair labour standard. Their research suggests that if brands increase their prices by 10–20% accompanied by a statement on fair labour standards, then the brands could increase their market share by 20–41%. Consumers want to support fair and safe work practices (Gordon, 2020). Interestingly, Goldman Sachs' (United Nations Global Impact, 2007) presentation suggests that firms that are viewed as socially responsible outperform the competition. There is room for all global actors (MNCs, governments and individuals) to improve working practices in developing countries if the motivation, commitment and desire are there. This is an opportunity for MNCs to improve their ethics code and adopt an ethical leadership style. Barrientos and Smith (2007) investigated the Ethical Trade Initiative (ETI) on labour standards at different levels of a supply chain. Although

ETI code enabled labour outcome standards, such as minimum wage, hours worked and safety, it did not improve employment rights, such as the ability to negotiate and freedom of association. The findings suggest that corporate social responsibility (CSR) is ‘window dressing’, which is supported by a substantial amount of literature (e.g., Sum & Ngai, 2005; Lin, 2010). Window dressing suggests that MNCs do not intend to deal with social issues such as labour rights, but instead follow CSR trends that lead to increased financial gains and legitimise global reputational benefits to a MNC and its brands (Lopez & Fornes, 2015).

Globalisation Builds a Better Global World

The term ‘globalisation’ entered dictionaries in the 1960s and the word ‘global’ entered in the 1890s (Scholte, 1999). Globalisation has three processes: social, political and economic. However, globalisation is overwhelmingly defined in economic terms. Social globalisation, which includes sociocultural homogeneous trends such as birthdays, marriage and Valentine’s Day, is permanent and deeper compared to economic globalisation (Sandbrook, 2003). Political globalisation can manifest itself in the imposition or recommendation of Western practices and concepts, such as freedom, human rights and democracy (Öztürk & Özek, 2019).

Öztürk and Özek (2019: 154–155) stated: ‘inequalities, imbalances, cultural erosion, environmental pollution, climate change, production, income, employment, and social eruption occur in many different societies and geographies which may be addressed at the cost of globalisation’. There are obvious benefits but significant drawbacks to globalisation that manifest themselves in many industries, including the fashion industry. Was globalisation due to a reset before the geopolitical situation and COVID-19 occurred? Although there is mention of deglobalisation to redress the current global situation, deglobalisation could also be a way to rectify some of the drawbacks identified with globalisation. Öztürk and Özek (2019) suggested that neoliberal advocates of globalisation view globalisation as a driver to reach economic potential quickly, whereas opponents consider globalisation unfair and argue that it widens the gap

between the north and the south. Heshmati and Lee (2010) carried out research using regression analysis on data from 61 countries from 1995 to 2001. Their results showed that globalisation had a positive relation with economic growth and a negative effect on income equality. Correspondingly, Titalessy (2018) found that economic and political globalisation had a positive impact on economic growth while social globalisation had a negative impact. The globalisation process has been a process of change, metamorphosis for almost two decades, and it has led to the integration of people, societies, economies and states throughout the world (Öztürk & Özek, 2019; Naeem & Ozuem, 2021). Şenses (2004) argued that globalisation should be supported not opposed because of the benefits suggested above. However, Şenses (2004) further suggested that the globalisation process needs to be cleansed of some elements and negativities, because it is not possible to state categorically if the globalisation process is fair or not. Does deglobalisation have a role to play in removing the imperfections in globalisation? Deglobalisation is the antithesis of globalisation and is a political process. However, globalisation has given rise to populism, conflicts between superpowers and protectionist nationalism; the stark possibility of a global recession is the enemy of globalisation. The mechanism that replaces globalisation needs to be a more cohesive and social instrument, and people need to be at its centre (Islam, 2020). Is deglobalisation an opportunity to create a more cohesive and social globalisation process? With global economic storms stirring, which could lead to a global recession, this is a chance to reset globalisation.

Globalisation in the Fashion Industry: Past and Current

The European textile industry has undergone profound changes due to globalisation and the economic crisis. The competitiveness of European textile companies is linked to innovation and technological progress. The emergence of new major international competitors and the elimination of import tariffs required new strategies to be developed to maintain European competitiveness. However, research and continuous

innovation may not be enough to maintain competitiveness due to the falling number of employees (Girneata & Dobrin, 2015). The number of employees decreased by over 55% in Spain, France, Germany and the Czech Republic, but the largest decrease (67%) was recorded in the UK (Adinolfi & Andersen, 2011). The reasons for the competitive pressure on the European textile and fashion industry are aptly stated by Girneata and Dobrin (2015: 1102):

The globalization of markets, international outsourcing and development of the Internet had a major impact on the structure and dynamics of the textile and clothing industry in Europe, and in particular on small and medium enterprises. Also, relocation, subcontracting and outsourcing of large brands in this domain have contributed significantly to the increase of imports from low-cost countries. A growing number of apparel retailers have emerged on the market, organizing supply chains globally. At the same time, producers have transferred part of their activities to low-cost countries in order to maintain market competitiveness.

The characteristics of the European textile and fashion industry include high voidability and low predictability (Bruce & Daly, 2006), leading to generally low profit margins. Further pressure is added to the industry because of outsourcing to lower production costs; intermediaries reduce the time and cost to make the product, thus lowering overall production costs (Rossi, 2013; Masson, 2007). Brands and retailers will be forced to accept lower margins (Kenneally, 2014), exit the market or reduce their operations (Girneata & Dobrin, 2015).

Fashion trends signify change and are of global significance. Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s fashion borrowed the oriental style from Asia. The influence of Asian style on fashion contributed to the opening of the China market in the 1980s. Fashion events enabled a greater diffusion of Chinese cultural traditions (Paulicelli & Clark, 2008). Countries and cultures seek to form an identity in the technology and information age in the global context. Fashion weeks became global, and Kazakhstan had its first fashion week in 2014, which caught the attention of fashion and lifestyle bloggers (Nagle, 2015). Arora (2014) opined that fashion weeks are enablers of cultural identity and personal style despite their Western

origins. Indian fashion styles are unique and non-Western and could be seen as an anti-colonial statement; fashion weeks allow countries to control the narrative and the representation of their culture in relation to fashion.

Fast fashion refers to clothing items that copy the latest style of garments in fashion weeks; they are produced and priced cheaply and distributed quickly to retail stores to maximise current fashion trends (Maiti, 2022; Ozuem et al., 2021a). Globalisation is a facilitator of fast fashion because it makes optimal use of supply chains. Large fast fashion retailers purchase clothing from several manufacturers around the globe and they do the marketing. Keeping the fast trend moving requires the application of information systems that allows retailers to gain intelligence on what is selling and what is not and relaying the information to corporate headquarters. The relayed information is not only about what is selling and what is not, but also about what customers want and cannot find. In-house fashion designers have access to information that enables them to design the next fashion trend and outsource to fashion manufacturers (Bhutia, 2020). Fast fashion retailers such as Zara, Forever 21 and H&M produce cheap fashion clothing to appeal to young consumers.

According to the UN Environment Programme (2019), the fashion industry is responsible for 8–10% of global carbon emissions. The fashion industry contributes to carbon emissions more than maritime shipping and international flights. Fast fashion impacts the environment in many ways, for example, 700 gallons of water are required to produce one cotton shirt and 2000 gallons to produce a pair of jeans. When garments are washed, the material produces microplastics (tiny particles that are not biodegradable) that end up in the oceans. The production process to produce the garments and the ‘embedded’ plastics fibres require energy produced from petroleum, which then affects the atmosphere and environment. Fast fashion also impacts social cohesion because young people are forced to work in unacceptable conditions and child labour is used. These practices affect developing countries disproportionately (Maiti, 2022). Sustainable development goals (SDGs) that are related to the fashion industry are reduced inequalities (SDG 10), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) and sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12) (UN Environment Programme, 2019).

Ethics and Globalisation in the Fashion Industry

Globalisation is the fusing of cultures from the developing and the developed world. Tangwa (1996) stated that the Westernisation (Europeanisation) of people from different cultures is viewed as humanisation and civilisation in the eyes of the West. The motive behind the process is altruistic and egoistic. Western culture tends to monopolise, patent and commercialise cultural discoveries and promote them. The West's superior technology and innovativeness aids its discoveries.

As discussed previously, culture is one characteristic of globalisation and this brings into play morality. For globalisation to adopt the Western model we need to look to the Universalisability Principle suggested by Kant and other Western moralists. However, moral rules are not always applicable and there may be exceptions (Wiredu, 1995). Moral relativism occurs because laws, practices and customs are confused or conflated with morality. Morality should and can overrule laws, customs and practices; morality should overrule everything except its own principles (Tangwa, 1999). Globalisation needs to recognise interdependence and peaceful coexistence between the earth, plants, animals and human beings. The West views globalisation through a cultural prism that is individualistic and anthropocentric (Tangwa, 1999).

Wiredu (1997: 41) made the following suppositions:

- (1) While technology in itself is a good thing, the USES to which it may be put is an entirely different matter over which even the technologically innocent may have useful contributions to make;
- (2) Globalisation implies and is impossible without interaction and dialogue between the different components of the globe;
- (3) Dialogue further implies both talking and listening between the various dialoguing groups, each with its own peculiar modes, manner and style of expression;
- (4) In any genuine dialogue there must be the readiness and willingness on all sides, not only to teach but also to learn, even from the most taciturn of interlocutors.

The above debate is an issue for the fashion industry. Climate change is not just about reducing emissions but about how to make the fashion

industry sustainable. Sustainable fashion needs to embrace equity, which puts into play morality and ethics. Although there is talk on sustainable fashion, little progress has been made. However, issues such as garment dyeing are now becoming part of the ethical fashion discussion. Not only the sustainability of the product is under discussion but also the appropriateness of packaging. Decarbonising the fashion supply chain, over-production and waste are now on the fashion industry agenda. However, social progress is mixed and the fashion industry needs to place this at the heart of the debate (Cernansky, 2022); this is a necessity for ethical responsibility and morality in the fashion industry.

Implications

The fashion industry has benefitted from globalisation tremendously. It has enabled Western countries to treat some fashion brands as a commodity that is available to the entire Western population. The benefits of globalisation for the fashion industry cannot be accumulated indefinitely because there are inequalities that characterise globalisation (Öztürk & Özek, 2019). Globalisation has accelerated fast fashion opportunities, but the importance of inequalities and human's well-being are not really taken into consideration. The driver of globalisation is profitability at all costs and the impact on the societies of developing countries is ignored. This cannot go on indefinitely; the fashion industry is approaching the straw that broke the camel's back scenario.

How does globalisation need to change? Changes to globalisation are multidimensional and include social aspects, inequality, working conditions, greater acceptance of CSR and sustainability, and the model itself.

Globalisation integrates developing countries with Western countries with the view that the synergy will benefit both. However, this is not the reality because of the dominance of the Western economy which trumps economic benefits over social equality. The fashion industry needs to change the suppositions that underpin globalisation so that cultural and social attributes are interwoven in the implementation of the concept. To develop a truly integrated approach, globalisation needs to be multinational-centric so that it takes account of all the different cultures

and social well-being. This could be described as a form of deglobalisation. Thus, deglobalisation incorporates morality as the sole arbitrator of fairness and, consequently, it is more acceptable to all the actors.

The Western perspective of globalisation is focused entirely on the economic benefits. Economic benefits are not shared equally, which signals unfairness and is a moral issue for the fashion industry. The current Western approach to globalisation is essentially about economic exploitation (i.e., the use of cheap labour in low-cost economies). True, the fashion industry brings much needed jobs but at what cost to developing economies. Although the hourly rate is lower than in the West, suppliers will want to improve their margins and so poor working conditions and a lack of rights are methods to depress wages further. Only by using the lens of social and moral responsibility will working conditions change. Raising social benefits and living conditions will win friends from the governments of developing countries, and employees would be more motivated and committed (the same construct that applies to Western employees). Why do MNCs from the West not want to apply this construct? Raising wages, rights and working conditions will have a 'trickle down' effect; so, more people in the communities will benefit from rising living standards and governments will have more to fund the country (assuming corruption can be reduced or controlled). One day more people in developing countries will be able to buy the goods they make for Western economies. Rising inequality could cause disruption to production due to geopolitical tensions, strikes and general unrest arising from inflationary pressures that feed into a cost of living crisis.

An approach to tackling inequality is to use technology to improve work-life balance and well-being. Industry 4.0 technologies give the fashion industry tangible opportunities to improve the lot of all the actors. Two that spring to mind immediately are three-dimensional printing and artificial intelligence (AI) technologies; these could be deployed in supply chains to optimise their performance, which would reduce operational costs and improve margins for fashion retailers and the manufacturing suppliers (Ozuem et al., 2021b). This would require a shared partnership in the deployment of the equipment in the developing country so that both parties share the fruits of the technology (they might not be equally dependent on the investment strategy). An additional benefit

will be the upskilling of people in the developing countries which, over time, would percolate through the population. The deployment of AI predictive tools, for example, would enable manufacturers' production departments and retailers to become proactive to changes in the global environment and to manage black swan events proactively, such as pandemics and geopolitical tensions that could disrupt supply chains.

Deglobalisation has become a popular word because of the pandemic and geopolitical tensions around the world that have impacted the movement of goods from developing countries to Western countries. The debate is always about the economics of globalisation and how to reduce disruption. One strategy is the bringing of suppliers and production closer to home markets, thus regionalising manufacturing production, which has also been referred to as deglobalisation. It is doubtful that regionalising fashion production will overcome some of the inherent problems experienced by supply chains, such as input shortages. It will more greatly control for the fashion retailers because of proximity. Will people want to work in the fashion industry which has been declining (Adinolfi & Andersen, 2011)? Deglobalisation without a social conscience is lacking in morality and fairness. What will become of the former employees in the developing countries? The political consequence of globalisation will set their economies back many years. Will developing economies want to engage with Western governments less and how will that impact political engagement for global problems? Western economies will have less leverage over the political, economic and social decisions taken by developing countries. Developing countries will look for and engage with other partners. A short-term to medium-term solution may lead to long-term problems that are challenging to resolve or even insurmountable.

A redeeming result from the debate is the stance of Gen Z—they want a fairer world where morality is a centrist construct. Gen Z consumers and others are willing to pay more or a premium for fashion clothing that is produced in a responsible manner. The argument from fashion retailers that margins will be under pressure if wages go up does not bear scrutiny. What is missing from the fashion industry is a greater acceptance of CSR principles and actions to demonstrate active engagement and not greenwashing (a pretence this is not good for business). Consumers are willing

to pay more for brands that are responsible, but the fashion industry needs to adopt ethical leadership in theory and practice. Supplanting or modifying the current culture of the fashion industry with a culture of ethics and morality will be a massive cultural change for an industry that predominantly views globalisation through the lens of economics. There are stirrings that change is afoot, but the cultural and social change required is mixed. Wider understanding and acceptance of the UN Environment Programme (2019) and the significance of SDGs (identified earlier) for the fashion industry would be a welcomed start. Major economic shifts (such as recessions and significant inflationary pressures) are an opportunity for businesses and industries to rethink their business model and this opportunity is available to the fashion industry to reset what globalisation means and its implementation. With the impetus of consumers, positive tangible changes to the fashion industry can be accomplished. It requires the fashion industry to realise the globalisation construct needs to be changed and for it to regard change as an opportunity.

Conclusion

The globalisation construct needs to be modified to include social and morality outcomes, to embrace fairness and morality, and to be applicable to any part of the globe. Geopolitical actions and the economic consequence of them (probably a global recession) is an opportunity for the fashion industry to rethink what globalisation means, to incorporate social and cultural constructs, and reduce the focus on the economic construct; thus, sharing the benefits of deglobalisation fairly and morally, and giving developing countries rights in the deglobalisation process. Fusing different cultures leads to a diversity of cultures and ideas in which interdependence is tempered by coexistence and diversity. Although change is coming, the momentum is slow; responsible consumers, especially Gen Z, need to become more active in changing the fashion industry, which will help to change the mindset of the fashion industry positively.

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