Foreword

As I write the foreword for this book, I am reminded, (perhaps somewhat strangely, I admit), of a seemingly universal yet highly particular fixation that appears to exist among most of the fashion companies that I research, advise and support in the UK and internationally. The particular fixation is with the “athleisure market”. As the name may suggest, the athleisure market is a hybrid of two existing product categories: sports and leisurewear. It typically represents the fusion of the technical performance fabrics and garment styles of the sports sector into the realm of the everyday, casualwear clothing market. The emergence of this new market represents something of a product use-shift from the track run, to the school run; on four wheels rather than two legs, we might say.

For some consumers, this new way of dressing represents a sartorial public demonstration of a healthy way of living. For others, the reasons for selecting athleisure goods are much less clear.

Within a global context, the athleisure market is now the fastest growing fashion product category, as measured in both value and volume terms. But setting aside any economic considerations, this vital new product market serves as a contemporary outcome of a confluence of factors and influences that shape the global fashion sector.

The rise in athleisure consumption is inextricably connected to rapid advances in the development of low-cost, high-performance fabrics, as well as the low price gains made possible by investments in global lean manufacturing in this specialist product area. Commercial viability has been made possible by a convergence in consumer demand across divergent markets. This convergence has been facilitated largely by the power of digital communications and omni-channel distribution platforms which have been established by many of the world’s leading fashion brands. Inevitably, this rising product sector is also affected by concerns relevant to environmental and social impact. Regrettably, as yet, there is no compelling evidence to suggest that business behaviour within this new sector as a whole demonstrates a coherently better approach to responsible management within the fashion sector.

Within the context of usefulness for the examination of a new and important fashion business area, it seems to me that The Research Handbook of Global Fashion Management and Merchandising is published at an apposite time. Not only does this valuable new research resource confidently and competently address the essential dimensions that are integral to the analysis of contemporary fashion systems, (dimensions such as those that I have identified above), but it also has a reach that extends broadly and deeply to include all of the critical facets relevant to the fashion value chain.
Through a close reading of the scope, coverage and content of this book, I personally was better able to better interrogate, understand and explain the dynamics that affect the athleisure market. From my perspective, the ability to transfer learning and understanding from what I have read to a particular case or situation, is a sign of an excellent text. I am pleased that this Research Handbook has enabled me to do just that both comprehensively and meaningfully.

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