

Fandom Markets

by Paul Lefrere



Fandom of TV, film, or games offers huge potential for themed clothing, but narrow windows of opportunity impose digital production.

According to Fashionista, [pink it and shrink it] is still the most-used tactic for designing clothes for women sports fans. But far better approaches exist, which simultaneously satisfy two types of deeply-held needs that are shared by people in groups: the need to show that they belong to their favoured social group, such as a fan group, and their need within that group to differentiate themselves, such as through some degree of personalisation.

The market for group-linked clothing (like sports fans) is huge. For example, the 2015 Superbowl had more female viewers than the total viewers of the top three non-sports events in the USA. As Fashionista explains, having alternatives to a [pink-and-shrink] approach, that also appeal to non-sports fans, can create vastly more opportunities for designers; this can enlarge the market for clothes for fans of all kinds of activities, not just sports; this is appreciated better by women and men customers; and it can lead to much higher profits.

In recent years it has become possible to personalise textiles and clothing, at reasonable cost and in short runs. This can help designers to personalise apparel of all kinds, and so tap into new trends in fashion and enjoyment.

The risk with new trends is that they may be short-lived, like a fad: for a short time, everyone wants the new thing; and soon afterwards, the market dries up.

Fads and sudden market shifts become easier, less costly and less risky to exploit for designers and manufacturers who have access to business labs with digital technologies such as for rapid prototyping or point-of-sale personalisation. This can help designers to fully exploit even "narrow-window" opportunities.

For suppliers to take advantage of those innovations, they may need to increase their agility by developing new capabilities using digital technologies; they may need to scale up their operations fast by finding new subcontractors and new partners; and they may need to reduce their risks, manage their cash flow, and increase their profits, by finding new capital and adopting or creating new business models.

"Narrow-window" opportunities that could be explored in the context of TCBL include collaborations between professionals in media industries and in textiles and fabrics. An example is a major TV or cable series such as Game of Thrones. Through "product placement", the furnishings and wardrobes of the main characters can be turned into buyable objects and collections that can be collected by fans and installed in appropriate surroundings such as homes, or worn in appropriate contexts such as parties.

Some of the licensed versions of TV-related or film-related garments have production runs in the hundreds of thousands; such garments will be copies of the clothes worn on screen by actors and will be bought from official outlets like HBO and associated merchandising shows like Collectormania.

There are also unofficial designs that are made locally in shorter runs; they are unofficial in the sense that they are inspired by the original shows but are not authorised by the original designers and are not direct copies. They may be sufficiently different from "official" designs to avoid risk of infringing design rights.

Also typically "unofficial" are hacked versions of clothes, which modify a licensed design in ways not approved by the original designer, such as different colour-ways and fabrics, or the incorporation of wearable devices or other innovative technologies.

This can conclude in an academic way, e.g. to relate to a discussion of how to track opportunities within a local ecosystem and relate them to market-shaping changes in an overlapping ecosystem (e.g. preparing merchandise for a new version of a major film or game). The discussion can focus on a theme such as scouting. For example: how to bridge across the lifecycle from: reporting on trends or other forms of scouting, to knowledge repository, to awareness raising, to practical use using business model innovation.

Alternatively, all of the above can be scene-setting for a group discussion on how attendees could use the various TCBL facilities to participate in building the capacity to respond fast and profitably to short-notice market opportunities.

