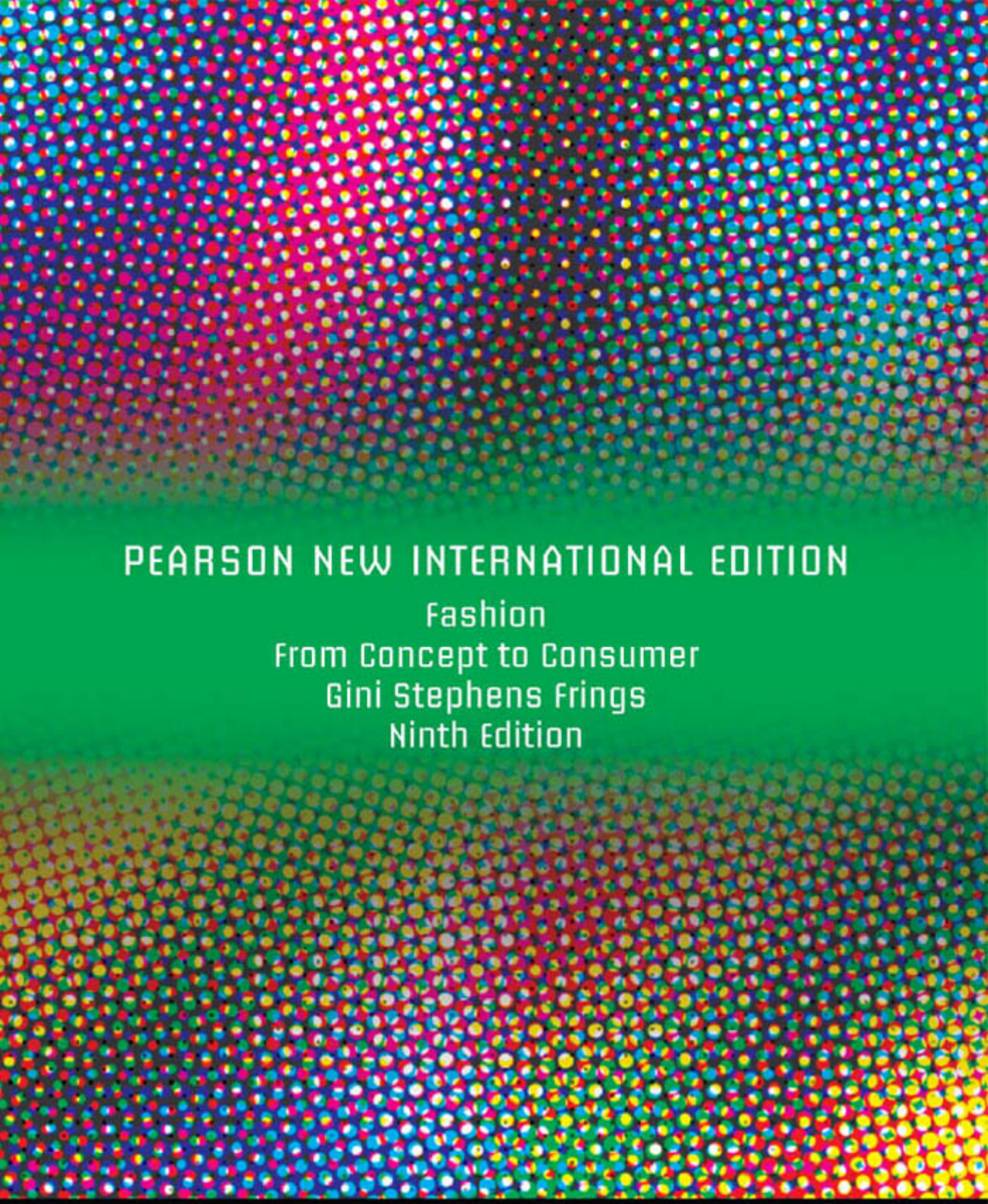

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TEXTILE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING

BEAUTIFUL YARNS AND TEXTILES ARE THE BASIS OF GOOD DESIGN. RALPH LAUREN USES WOOL YARNS TO CREATE LUXURIOUS KNITWEAR. *(COURTESY OF RALPH LAUREN)*

TEXTILE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING

Career Focus

In textile product development, there are career opportunities in research, design, and merchandising. In marketing, positions range from sales assistant to account manager, sales manager, marketing manager, and director of marketing. There are also the support areas of advertising and public relations to consider. Most of these opportunities are in New York City, Los Angeles, or other international textile centers. Because most fabrics are now imported, there are career opportunities for Americans willing to move to Asia to give them an American's perspective on marketing. It is also essential for anyone working in the fashion industry to understand the marketing forces that transform fibers into fabrics and then move these fabrics into the hands of the apparel designers and manufacturers.

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

1. **Discuss the impact of imports on the textile market**
2. **Explain the importance of product development for both fibers and fabrics**
3. **Discuss the marketing strategies of the textile industry**

Textile producers respond to consumer demand through their product development and marketing efforts. Textile consumers include the fabric manufacturers who use fibers, the apparel manufacturers who use fabrics, and the end users who buy apparel. *Product development* covers the trend and market research, merchandising, and styling involved in creating new products and updating existing ones. *Marketing* incorporates the entire process of planning, promoting, and selling goods, in this case, textiles.

This chapter discusses the impact that foreign competition and consumer demand have on the industry. It also describes how the industry is reacting with product development, new technologies, and new marketing strategies for fibers and fabrics. Product development, design, and marketing activities are centered in textile and fashion capitals such as Paris, Milan, Como, Lyon, London, New York, and Los Angeles.

The Global Textile Market

Globalization has made a huge impact on the textile industry.

Imports

Globalization is the focus of the textile market today. Ever-increasing numbers of textile products are being imported into the United States because of the availability of cheaper labor abroad. American textile producers compete with labor rates of as little as $2.17 per hour in Mexico, 60 cents or less in India, and 69 to 75 cents in China.[1] As a result, imported fabrics are much cheaper than domestically produced fabrics.

Fierce competition from imports has caused the U.S. textile industry to lose more than 50 percent of its domestic market and has resulted in buyouts, takeovers, and consolidations to salvage the business that was left. Today there are only about 200,00 domestic textile employees, compared to 847,700 in 1980. Thousands of domestic plants have closed, more in the past 20 years than at any time since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Italy, too, has lost over 6000 textile companies since 2001.[2] Both the North American and European textile manufacturing bases are disappearing. These losses correspond to the enormous growth of the textile industries of China, Mexico, Canada, Pakistan, South Korea, India, Taiwan, Indonesia, Honduras, Thailand, and Turkey.[3] China

is the leading supplier of imported textiles to the United States and Europe. They have developed a reputation for low-cost, quality production and have an almost inexhaustible pool of unemployed people moving to the cities in search of jobs.

To compete, U.S. and European textile companies have joined the stampede to import, because they find that fabrics produced and finished overseas are often 50 percent cheaper than those produced domestically. American textile companies may complete styling domestically, but most often buy goods from China, Korea, or India. American and European apparel manufacturers often buy textiles in a particular country because apparel production will also be done there.

Even with quotas phased out, tariffs (taxes) on certain goods of 12 percent on imports to Europe and 20 percent to the United States help to restrict imports somewhat. Special restrictions on imports from China are currently in place to help prevent China from completely taking over the global textile market. However, most manufacturers and retailers use alternative production in other countries as a safety measure.

Overseas Investment

Because labor and facilities are so much cheaper in Asia, many U.S. and European textile companies are forming joint ventures with Asian companies to produce fabrics there. Invista, International Textile Group (ITG), and Malden Mills, for example, have established production in China. Italian mills are also participating in joint ventures in China for both fiber and fabric production. In addition, some U.S. textile companies, such as Burlington, Cone Mills, and Guilford Mills, are among those that have built facilities in Mexico, the Caribbean countries, and other areas of Central and South America.

New Marketing Strategies

To compete with imports, U.S. textile producers have developed new marketing strategies.

The American textile industry was built on producing large volume, streamlining the product to be efficient, and offering quality at a reasonable price. In the past, companies were able to dictate products, prices, minimums, and production schedules. Now, with fierce competition from imports,

oversupply, and so many market niches, textile firms realize that they have to be market driven (responding to market or consumer needs), rather than manufacturing driven. In response to consumer demand for a variety of fibers and fabrics, textile producers have had to overhaul their marketing strategies completely.

The new strategies are difficult and expensive. Textile manufacturers are trying to provide innovative styling, improve quality, offer flexibility, and respond more quickly to the market. To be fashionable and flexible, however, it is necessary to produce smaller quantities, which costs more per yard.

Innovation

Innovation, which requires creativity, research, and new technology, has become an important part of the business. Textile companies strive to stay in the forefront of the market with new products. They invest heavily in research to develop new fibers, fabrics, and finishes.

High-Tech Fibers and Nanotechnology Textile manufacturers have developed new fibers such as spider silk, casein, and PLA that are applicable to fashion fabrics.

Nanotechnology, the science of precisely controlling the structure of matter at the molecular level, is used by the textile industry to develop high-strength, lightweight fibers that are 10 to 100 times smaller in diameter than synthetic fibers made by conventional methods. Nanotechnology allows the textile industry to create fibers with multifunctional properties. New thermal, heat-resistant, antibacterial, and antimicrobial fibers are being created for military or fire-fighting uniforms as well as athletic and recreational wear.

Performance Fabrics In response to consumer demand for specific fabric properties, textile producers developed "performance" fabrics, especially for activewear for competing athletes, recreational sports, and exercise. Nanotechnology has created special finishes or treatments that can alter the hand or characteristics of fabrics or improve their performance. Intrinsic fabric properties might include muscle compression or moisture management, whatever is needed for each individual use. These fabrics must withstand vigorous activity and frequent washings.

Fabric Special Effects Some designers and textile mills are experimenting with new fabric treatments. In Paris, Viktor and Rolf, for example, achieved a metallic look with a 47-hour process that includes applying electromagnetic paint and coating the fabric with silver. London's Giles Deacon and textile designer Fleet Bigwood applied glue to a fabric's surface, covered it with holographic foil, and placed it under a heat-transfer machine for another metallic