

The COVID Strategy – The Future of Fashion

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Abstract

The unprecedented pandemic causes a disruptive effect on fashion industry, all sections are going through a tough stage since early 2020, what's the future of fashion? How can fashion brands deal with the present challenges? Can we still hold a positive attitude towards fashion business? This paper will answer all the concerns and forecast some useful strategies to help fashion industry prosper again.

Keywords

Pandemic; Fashion industry; Forecast; Strategy; Hope.

1. Fashion Trend

1.1. Chill Sunset

In order to provide a better quality of life during our current “stay-at-home” lifestyle, people need to change their mode, from busy to relaxed. “Chill Sunset” delivers the idea about releasing stress. It's the ultimate in comfort. Waking up to the warm tones of sunrise and taking that first morning stretch across a soft bed. Turn on the radio and listen to chill music while enjoying a cup of latte while preparing for online work. Afternoon tea cannot be missed accompanied by a delightful piece of tiramisu. End the day and any weary feelings with a warm bubble bath, followed by some scented lotions and a soft bathrobe. Don't forget the sleeping mask! “Chill Sunset” utilizes the warm tones of brown and beige as its primary color palette to express a relaxed spirit. This trend does not focus on complex patterns, but the simplicity of solids. The textures of the fabric can best be described as cozy, soft and plush. People care more about comfort with oversized, non-clinging silhouettes. The days of tight-fitting clothing are in the past. For now, it's all about comfort and feeling chill.



Figure 1. Chill sunset

1.2. Feel the Ocean

“Feel the Ocean” expresses the idea of nature through the ocean elements. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, isolation has become our new daily lifestyle. Therefore, people have a strong desire to come out of their homes and connect with nature. Taking a deep breath of fresh oxygen in the salty air. Diving deep into the water. Swimming with marine organisms, or picking shells at the beach. The ocean is one of the most natural elements in the world.



Figure 2. Feel the ocean

Scientific evidence shows that the reason the ocean appears blue is because of the reflection off the color of the sky. The primary color of this fashion theme focuses on soft shades of blue. The combination of sky and ocean perfectly illustrate the fresh and clear features. The fabric texture is light, smooth, silky and breathable. It gives an experience that you're already in the water, feeling the waves and cooling down the body temperature. It feels light and airy against the body and brings joy. This trend will also have patterns of ocean organisms and plants, such as fish, turtles, starfish, coral, seaweed, shells...etc. Accessory designs will coordinate and include these kinds of shapes and colors.

Smells also have a special impact on our memories. Many people equate the smell of the beach with suntan lotion and the salty air of the sea. Sea salt scented candles, shampoo, body wash, lotion and perfume are the perfect choice to bring the scent of the ocean to your home.

1.3. Supersheroes Save the World

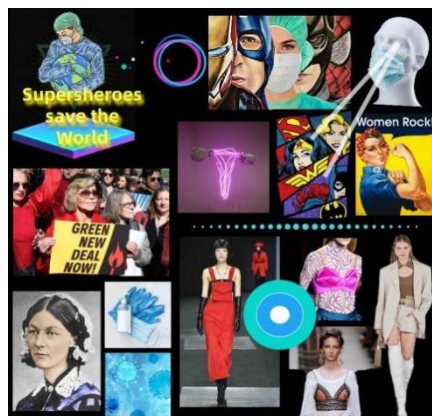


Figure 3. Supersheroes Save the World

Who are the real superheroes of the pandemic? The answer is medical workers. Just like their superhero counterparts, medical workers wear masks and save people's lives. During this turbulent period, we are seeing females step up and take leadership roles in the medical fields as well as women's rights. They promote social processes and change history. Like Florence Nightingale, Rosie the Riveter and Jane Fonda, we can't neglect women's work these days. We need more female superheroes to remind us that women can't be ignored. Women are the creators of life and save lives. They deserve the same as males in society.

Let's look at this from a fashion point of view. If Superman can put his underwear over his pants, then women should be able to wear their bras over their tops. In future days, women will want to emancipate from their outfits but still look stylish. The idea of undergarments as outer garments can solve these problems and perfectly show body curves without other accessories, freeing women's bodies from complex outfits. This fashion trend is all about a woman's strong attitude. Women are tough, independent and can handle leadership roles as well as men, sometimes even better. Men should know women only dress up for themselves instead of cheering them, there is no "social criterion" to tell what garments should women wear, females can't be sexualized by their outfits. Those unreasonable rules that restrict females in society and workplace should be eliminated and broken, no more glass ceilings are supposed to exist in today's life. Sexy uncomfortable dresses are a thing of the past, and replaced with suits, combat boots and overalls. The color palette for this fashion trend will consist of a lot of aqua, white and sky blue. This color represents all medical workers and reminds people to honor our real superheroes.

1.4. Sports Team of One



Figure 4. Sports Team of One

People are sick of being in quarantine. Interaction with friends and loved ones is limited. Seriously, how long has it been since you've been to a movie theater? People now are looking for a safe way to go outside by doing isolation outdoor sports. Individualized sports that you can do at a safe distance like surfing, mountaineering, skateboarding, tennis and roller skating are trending. With the new uptake in isolation sports, the fashion market has seen an urgent need for comfortable sports outfits. It should be convenient to wear and keep the athlete cool during workouts. Athletic fabrics tend to be made from cotton, nylon and spandex because of their ventilation and stretch properties. Even non-athletes are turning to more athletic inspired garments because of the generosity with the stretch fit. It's no secret that a lot of people have packed on a few extra pounds from being stuck inside. And since people will be wearing these garments outside in place of their usual clothing, we will see more fashion details added to classic garments like hoodies and sweatpants. Customers have also started turning back to nostalgic bike shorts inspired by the days of the 90s aerobics craze. 90s Athleticwear will be a big fashion trend over the next 2 years. In terms of the color, the tint should cheer people up and make people feel vibrant and energetic. We'll be seeing a lot of bright colors like yellow,

orange, green and blue. We will also see coordinating colors appear in the sporting goods industry on products like surfboards, tennis racquets and roller skates.

1.5. DIY Storm

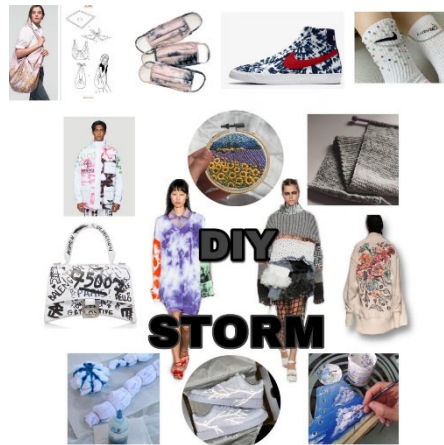


Figure 5. DIY Storm

Being under quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has stimulated the creativity of a lot of at-home artists and designers. Due to extra free time and limited income, people have taken on the challenge to design their own clothes by repurposing old items forgotten about in the back of their closets. It's a great way to kill time and save a lot of money by turning old clothing into something new. There are endless tutorial videos on YouTube showing how to tie dye, sew, knit, draw, embroider and everything else under the sun. In turn, the fashion industry is taking notes and using these same handmade fashion elements in their own designs.

Inspired by the "trickle up theory", where designers seek their inspirations from what people are wearing on the streets, Balenciaga has created hand-drawn looking graffiti bags into their collection. Nike is also chasing this trend by producing a whole new line of sports bras with handmade features. DIY elements go beyond garments and can also be executed in shoes and accessories. Since everyone needs to wear a mask now, this is a unique opportunity for retailers to produce fashion forward mask designs to match their DIY outfits. Fashion businesses need to meet customer's needs by producing masks not only to keep their clients safe, but stylish.

Autumn is in the horizon, tie dyed garments have been a fashion staple over the last few seasons and show no sign of slowing down. Fashion brands now are making an effort to develop their autumn and winter apparels and footwears series. Nike just released a new tie-dye sneaker for cold weather recently. The new DIY lifestyle and commercialization has kept this trend alive and thriving. With clothes becoming heavier and it's time to put our bright tie dye t-shirts away. It won't be as easy for people to dye their own coats and sweaters. It's a great opportunity for fashion retailers to step in and develop new designs to the market that still fill the need and desire of the "Do it Yourself" trend.

2. Intelligent Fabric Technology

Many consumers choose eco-friendly sustainable fabric when picking apparel in an effort to help the environment. But during the pandemic, consumers are looking for garments that not only protect us from the usual elements, but also from the transmission route for viruses. Nowadays companies are turning to "virus fighting" antiviral fabrics to lure anxious shoppers back by giving them a sense of security to tackle their fear of catching Coronavirus. According to the data provided by Nielsen, sales of health and beauty care commodities rose 9% year-over-year for the ten-week period ended May 9. A supplier of antimicrobial fabric from Noble

Biomaterials firm claimed that sales of its healthcare and personal protective equipment segment are up 356% from 2019 to 2020. The huge striking number shows fashion industry buyers' urgent need for secure equipment. This phenomenon should catch the attention of the textile industry. There is no doubt antibacterial fabric will be trending in the future. Albini CEO stated "The antiviral protection may become a regular feature on clothing in the coming decade". Albini is famous as the fabric provider for designer brands including Armani, Ermenegildo Zegna, Prada and Kering. Albini also started to collaborate with Textile company HeiQ that tested on another virus similar to Covid-19. HeiQ created a treated fabric that destroys the virus on the surface. This is implicitly a great movement in luxury brands that will cause a serial chain reaction in the textile market. More fashion brands will follow the trend and seek virus fighting elements in their apparel.

There are generally two types of antimicrobial fibers: natural antimicrobial fiber and artificial antimicrobial fiber. The common natural types of fibers are bamboo, hemp, chitin, chitosan and seaweed. Once turned into fabric, they are mostly used in bedding and towels. Chinese athletic brands such

Albini Group is best known as a dress shirt fabric supplier, but is now producing antiviral fabric as LiNing and Tread have released hemp sportswear for outdoor clothing and footwear products. Artificial antibacterial fibers are achieved by adding antibacterial agents in the fiber. A technique where silver is woven into the cloth is found to be effective at combating the coronavirus. The company who produces these fabrics has partnered with notable brands like Athleta, Mack Weldon and Outdoor Voices. Mack Weldon has been their key customer for a long time and just announced to begin selling masks adding a new waterproof technology. In fact, more textile companies joined in the business. Priotex, a company that has manufactured and designed smart woven fabrics for over 40 years has started blending silver into the finest form and mixing it with fiber while manufacturing to break down viruses on contact.

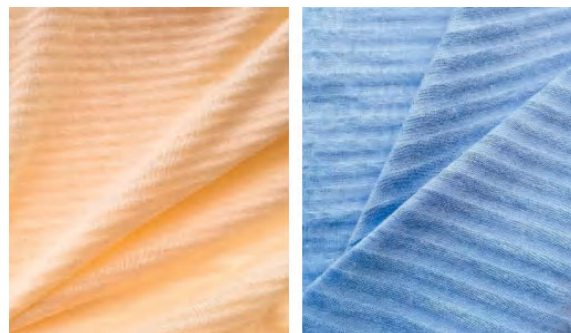


Figure 6. Antibacterial fabric



Figure 7. Hemp fiber

It's clear that we need a material revolution in the fashion industry since the demand in the market for antibacterial properties is already there. It will keep growing in the short term. Textile manufacturers and retailers must fully prepare for this new trend to meet more requirements from customers. Today, fabrics aren't just limited to aesthetic purposes, but to keep the wearer safe.

3. Fashion Retail Strategies

3.1. Usage of E-Commerce

Will brick-and-mortar shops ever make a comeback? The answer is still uncertain, as people currently aren't as concerned with dressing up during the pandemic. Things have been looking down for the fashion industry for the early part of 2020, but rebounding sales show there is still hope.

Quarantine subverts the traditional retail method by switching to whole digital transactions. Customers can order their products on-line to achieve zero contagium. The growth usage of e-commerce saves the retailer from the pandemic, though the goal is to return to in-person shopping. Online shopping will play a big part in the short term. In fact, fashion brands are trying to make great effort to update their website page to lure customers back.

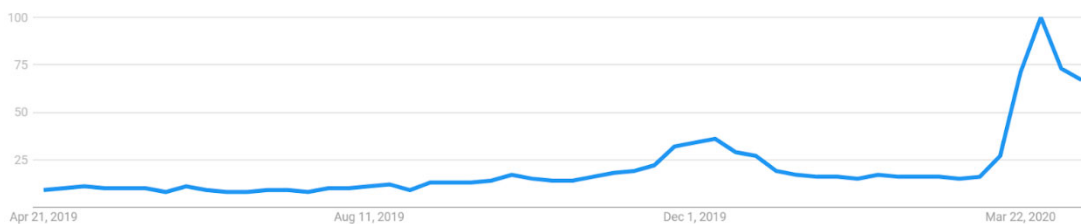


Figure 8. Google Trends analysis shows searches of 'loungewear' continue to escalate worldwide

3.1.1. Purchasable Ads on Social Media

Have you noticed more pop-up ads arise when you surf on the internet? You can literally buy products through third-party websites. This social media propaganda smartly gains the profit by aiming their advertisements to a certain group of people. Shoppers just book their orders without noticing their initial aims on the internet. It's an intellectual trick beyond dispute.

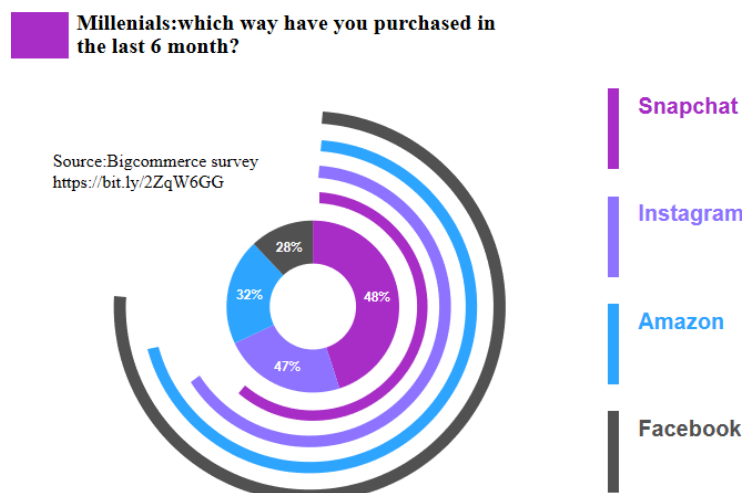


Figure 9. Purchasable Ads on Social Media

3.1.2. Improvement of Review Pages and Usage of Chatbox

As a buyer, do you prefer to listen to the seller's recommendation or another buyer's review? The answer is obvious. If you have faith in your products, then encouraging customers to write reviews is the way to go. It's the equivalent to free advertising for your brand. What's more, you may also obtain some helpful and high-qualified advice to perfect your brand image. To keep your employees happy and not overworked, arrange a chatbox on your shopping page. Let the robots answer the basic and repetitive questions from customers, while your physical employees can focus on the harder tasks while dealing with customers.

3.1.3. AR Dressing and Video Display

Not everyone trusts on-line shopping, and with good reason. Garments tend to look better on the models and in still-life photographs than they do in person. Model photographs can sometimes fool customers. Not everyone wears a sample size like a model does. Things look better on them than the average person. And let's not forget that photographs are retouched as well. Some consumers don't want to take the risk of something not fitting right and having to return the item. It's a big hassle and inconvenience. The newest technology in AR "Augmented Reality" dressing rooms resolves this problem. AR helps show the customer how the garment fits without leaving the home. If this advanced method costs too much for a small company, another option is to display more videos about the clothes and details to let customers make smart choices.

3.1.4. Secure Your Customers

The whole reason brands are taking extra precautions is because of the Coronavirus. Adding extra copy online and hang-tags on the clothing about the effort made against the virus and keeping the shipment safe to gain the support from customers by showing empathy. Fashion brands can do it by disinfecting commodities and letting workers wear gloves during the whole shipment. Let society see responsibility from fashion business. Shoppers want to receive such information to feel safe and confident.

4. Materials & Manufacturing Strategies

Pandemic harms the manufacturers deeply. Some companies have had to cut the budget through layoffs, while others have declared bankruptcy. Since the supply of fabrics has slowed down. How can the fashion industry deal with the shortage of garment materials?

4.1. Sustainable Fashion Revolution

This disaster makes people start to reflect their shopping habits. Redundant clothing and waste created by the fast-fashion business caught the young generation's attention recently. With less financial income, consumers' attitudes may shift from fast-fashion to durable apparels. Fashion brands should cater to this tendency by designing high-quality designs with more classic fabrics. Customers want to buy better quality instead of buying more frivolous items.

4.2. Promote Accessories Market

Focusing on the accessories market is another solution for the fashion industry to help revive itself. On-line social contact stimulates people's creativity. Individuals want to stand out in their online meetings. Accessories can achieve that in the easiest way. They are also a popular gift option to commune relationships during the quarantine time.

4.3. Develop Beauty Line

When people have to study or work at home, they still have to communicate with their work peers or classmates through virtual conferencing like Zoom. Since everyone's face is close-up, makeup and good skincare matter even more. People will try harder on their looks. They don't

want their sloppy faces to remain on the internet. Consumers need more lipsticks and bright highlights to feel good about themselves. The economic term “lipstick effect” is actually emerging. More fashion brands will branch into the beauty market and beauty lines will help make up for the lost profit in the garment market.

5. Market & Sales Research

5.1. Figure your Customers' Preference

Something as simple as filling out private information for a company to get a coupon, is one way brands gather their consumers' information. They can in turn recommend certain products to customers by their preference. If companies want to know their customers' better, the quickest way will be to poll a survey on the internet by giving respondents a good discount or incentive. It doesn't cost a lot, but wins potential customers. Especially in this specific time, people are more willing to accept these win-win events due to the limited income and more home time.

5.2. Personalize Your Products

The DIY “Do-It-Yourself” storm is a big trend that inflects individuals' identifications. Apparel is one of the most obvious ways to indicate a person's personalization. Fashion brands should grasp the enormous influx of demand and develop their personalization service to capture the innovative market field. Fashion industry needs more diverse and fresh blood to rebound the yield.

5.3. Elevate Logistics and After-Sales Service

Not every customer has the patience to wait a week or more for their shipment to arrive. The retail industry should make more options and flexibility for customers to choose delivery service. Let customers decide if they want to pay extra money for quicker delivery. Also improve your after-sales guarantee to gain faithful consumers that help enforce your company image and integrity.

New York Fashion Week “2020”

With our current reality of social distancing, New York Fashion Week Spring / Summer 2021 is adapting for a new generation. A digital version of the runway has emerged and takes the place of a traditional live runway. In fact, no celebrities sat in the front row and no crowds of fashionably dressed spectators filled the streets. The Council of Fashion Designers of America, Steven Kolb said, “fashion is a business, and fashion week is a platform for designers, this is about jobs, it's about people's livelihoods. It's about moving forward, but cautiously, with safety in mind”.

6. Outdoor Runway Show

Many brand organizers scheduled outdoor runway shows and limited audiences with social distancing. These events had restrictions like wearing a mask and COVID tests. Designer Jason Wu opened NYFW with his fashion show on the rooftop of Spring Studios in Manhattan. Wu sets his collection of Tulum, the Mexican beach town where he got married five years ago. His collection featured chic, breezy daywear, vibrant sleep dress, and airy kaftans. His collection was viewed live by a mere audience of only 30 people which allowed space for social distancing. More importantly, everyone in the audience wore a mask during the show, including Wu himself. The intelligent method gives crowds enough fresh air and open space to prevent people from spreading COVID-19. And also, And the famous designer Christian Siriano, held his spring 2021 collection, “Collection 37” at his Connecticut house. All guests who enter his house must get temperature-check and will provide alcohol for safety priority. Guests seated six feet apart

and the chairs were placed on individual rattan mats, cream pillows which was a very lovely setup. All the models at the runway wearing masks that were coordinated with their outfit. Pregnant Coco Rocha dresses a red gown and closes the show by stepping into the pool.



Figure 10. Digital format runway

7. Digital Format Runway

Interesting fact is that Moschino released his Spring 2021 collection by exhibiting a puppet show, and a salon-style fashion show. He enlisted The Jim Henson Creative Shop to create marionette dolls wearing his new collections. Scott not only scaled-down the size of the garment, but also refined his design. The company named trompeta l'oeil trench coats, mini dresses made by plush teddy bears. For spring 2021, ballet-inspired knee-length dresses, corset tops, and floating down, soft color toned-down golds and fairytale blues there's a feeling of a youthful princess on the runway. And also, those puppets sitting in the first row are completely recognizable, Anna Wintour, Hamlich Bowles, other industry leaders and even a faux Jeremy Scott in a moschino-branded T-shirt and crown. The brand states that: "it's a moschino wink-and-nod to the fact that in order to begin anew, you have to start small".

We also saw some designers opt to show their collections in a digital format at New York Fashion Week to avoid any exposure to the virus. The creation of videos also helped new American fashion brands like Dur Doux, Oak & Acorn attract a larger audience. Over 70 designers offered a digital runway experience with a 360 degree view of fashion never seen before. This allowed viewers to see more details of the collections. This also allowed designers to connect with customers in a way they never could before. Compared to traditional live runway shows, people who sit in the back of the show normally have a harder time seeing the full collection because it's either too far away or an obstructed view. In a digital format everyone has a front row seat. Some designers chose to edit their digital shows long before fashion week even started. Brands like Collina Strada designer Hillary Taymour posts his shows by demonstrating a joyful and creative video, contains his inspiration of climate catastrophe that offers interesting effects as the background, and promotes a great desire to watch, it is not only just a virtual runway, but also an entertainment for audiences. The spring collection named "Change is Cute" is featured by bright color, cheerful DIY and Tie-Dye, and graffitied elements. The video Taymour collaborated with artist Charlie Engman, artist Sean-Kierre Lyons, Alicia Mersy infuse the video in a rapidly sideways-growing green shoots. In the video, contains happy rock music with lyrics about climate change, "the world is not the same ever since climate change...").



Figure 11. Seek to hopeful future

2020 has been an unusual year to say the least. People all over the world have come together against the COVID-19 crisis, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement and the violent law enforcement of American policy. In order to inspire some optimism in a world that feels like it's falling apart, Condé Nast has assembled 26 editions of Vogue from all over the world for Vogue 'Hope'. A singular editorial theme for the September and October issues. This global collaboration is the first historical event of Vogue's 128 years to exhibit a hopeful future for 245 million readers around the world. The primary goal of "Vogue Hope" is to keep people optimistic about our future with a positive mindset. This part of Vogue's issue project contributed a portfolio of artwork, photography and reportage from all Vogue editors-in-chief, which represented their meaning by using illustrations and young and creative artists highlighted in Vogue's Hope issue. Additionally, these 26 Vogue Hope editions are printed in 19 languages, and published in multiple platforms.



Figure 12. Vogue Hope editions

Behind the making of Vogue's Hope issue September 2020 editions, two contemporary artists, Marshall and Casteel were invited to make paintings for Vogue issue September covers. For Marshall's work, he utilized three different shades — carbon blacks, iron oxide black and ivory black to illustrate "at the edge of visibility", he said: "the point is to show that blackness is rich and complex, within the blackness alone" (Marshall). Meant recently, our world is trapped into a darkness situation, but people should understand that black is more beautiful than you imagine, and it has an unpredictable future. The figure stands in the room which opens onto a penthouse terrace and the black woman is viewing sky and high-rise buildings. She is not a part of the decor, but has her own presence and psychology. People don't exactly know what she

thinks about, but know that there's something on her mind. In the paintings of Casteel, Aurora, the figure wearing a Pher Moss blue silk dress, sits on a high stool on the rooftop of Brooklyn, it is a baroque style that refers to Renaissance's Pontormo. Casteel thinks the sky contains a lot of hope and endless possibilities. Aurora's foot pressed to the ground is an action of propelling herself up to the sky, revealing that to reach the brighter future, real possibilities and everything that people can imagine of our future. Casteel also said: "I see her as a light in a lot of darkness, and a potential for hope, a representative of change across all creative industries" (Casteel). All the ideas about the paintings are worth to deeply think about.

Through the covers of British Vogue Hope editions September 2020 issue, designed as a fold-out cover shows 20 inspirational activists dedicated to making a change. Marcus Rashford, international football athlete and child poverty campaigner, convinced the government to fund free meals for vulnerable children. Adwoa Aboah, a model and an activist who changed perceptions around mental health by using her visibility through GurlsTalk and tackled systemic resist to disability discrimination and domestic abuse, gender inequality to the climate crisis. These activists are the world's hero, they dedicate themselves, distribute a lot to make our world better. Nevertheless, In Vogue Arabia' cover, the issue features Mila Abouchalbak, a child affected by the devastating explosion in Beirut, she is full of courage and hope, even though her home was destroyed, because she believes that Lebanon will rise again with the help of the hopeful citizens. Furthermore, in the cover of Vogue China, the cover feature, Zhang Ziyi, an actor, she acts as Nuwa, the goddess of creation in Chinese mythology, Nuwa represents all the hopeful and energetic power of humans, cheers everyone up with love and courage under the attack by the COVID-19 pandemic, and driving toward a bright future. Through the covers of the Vogue Hope editions, we see images of people from every type of race and color with inspiring messages of hope. Even though several covers of the Vogue Hope editions are in black and white, we can still feel the warmth from those celebrities' eyes or actions. Their words and images represent desires of a bright future and the courage to face unpredictable changes.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we all need hope in our lives, now more than ever. So at this tumultuous time, Vogue decided to bring all the global editions together around this optimistic, humane, forward-looking theme. Hope may be hard to find at this moment of crisis, but it also feels more essential than ever. It's part of our shared humanity, as a source of delight and inspiration, and keeps us focused on a brighter future," says Vogue's US Editor-in-chief, Anna Wintour. Furthermore, keeping an optimistic spirit is the most essential way to let us move forward. The virus can not beat us down. These are hard times where we will come out stronger on the other side. A turning point of starting our new generation. Covid-19 will only let us become stronger than before.

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