

Inditex Beyond Fast Fashion: A New Global Model

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ISSN: 2578-0271



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Submission:  May 28, 2026

Published:  June 12, 2026

Volume 11 - Issue 5

How to cite this article: María Luisa Medrano*. Inditex Beyond Fast Fashion: A New Global Model. Trends Textile Eng Fashion Technol. 11(5). TTEFT. 000774. 2026. DOI: [10.31031/TTEFT.2026.11.000774](https://doi.org/10.31031/TTEFT.2026.11.000774)

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Abstract

This opinion article examines Inditex as a global case study in the transformation of the fashion industry. Although frequently associated with fast fashion, the company's recent evolution reveals a more complex strategic repositioning based on customer centricity, brand experience, design, flexible production, logistics, financial strength and sustainability. The article presents Inditex as an integrated business system capable of combining operational speed, international expansion, technological efficiency and brand elevation.

Special attention is paid to Zara's repositioning under the chairmanship of Marta Ortega, alongside the managerial continuity represented by CEO Óscar García Maceiras. The article discusses Zara's move towards a more aspirational model of accessible fashion, influenced by silent luxury, stronger visual identity, improved store experience and greater emphasis on quality, design and cultural relevance.

The article argues that Inditex embodies a central paradox of contemporary fashion: A company still interpreted through the lens of fast fashion, yet increasingly positioned as one of the most visible global cases of sustainable transition, operational discipline and brand elevation in mass fashion.

Keywords: Inditex; Zara; Fast fashion; Sustainability; Circular fashion; Silent luxury; International expansion; Textile innovation; Brand experience; Business model

Introduction

Inditex is often described through the language of fast fashion. The label is understandable, but increasingly incomplete. The company transformed the global fashion industry by shortening the distance between design, production, logistics, stores and consumers. Today, however, Inditex appears as a more complex global business system built around customer proximity, brand experience, design, flexible production, intelligent logistics, financial strength and sustainability.

According to Inditex, its business model rests on five interconnected pillars: customer centricity, brand experience, design, production processes and logistics [1]. These dimensions form an integrated system in which real-time sales analysis, demand-adapted production, digital architecture and inventory systems allow the company to respond quickly and efficiently to customer needs [1].

The purpose of this opinion article is to examine Inditex as a relevant case in the transformation of global fashion. Its importance lies in the tension between a model historically associated with speed and operational discipline, and its current need to address sustainability, brand elevation, responsible production and cultural relevance. Zara, its most visible brand, illustrates this evolution particularly well: more than a fashion label, it has become a method based on market reading, short decision-making cycles and rigorous execution.

Case Presentation

Amancio Ortega: Discretion, discipline and the logic of execution

Amancio Ortega's legacy cannot be reduced to personal wealth, although his position among the world's richest individuals reflects the scale of the business he created. Forbes España recently estimated his fortune at approximately 148 billion dollars around his 90th birthday, placing him again among the global top ten billionaires and as the only Spaniard in that group [2]. However, from a business perspective, what matters most is the corporate culture associated with his leadership: discretion, discipline, operational focus and long-term vision.

Ortega built Inditex from a practical understanding of textile retail, turning Zara into more than a brand: a system based on speed, customer reading and rigorous execution. That culture continues under Marta Ortega's chairmanship and Óscar García Maceiras's management. Inditex appears to be entering a new phase, but without a dramatic rupture with its origins. Its transformation remains consistent with the founder's discreet, sober and execution-oriented business logic.

Zara under Marta Ortega: From fast fashion to aspirational accessibility

The transformation is especially visible in Zara. Under Marta Ortega's presidency, the brand appears to be moving beyond the traditional perception of fast fashion towards a more elevated and culturally sophisticated positioning. Zara remains accessible, global and highly responsive, but its visual language has become more editorial, experiential and focused on quality, design and timelessness. The logic is no longer only to sell more, but to sell better.

This repositioning can be read through the language of "silent luxury". Zara is not becoming a luxury brand, but it is adopting some contemporary luxury codes: Restraint, quality perception, architectural stores, powerful visual campaigns and collaboration with prestigious creative figures. Inditex itself describes its brand experience as based on high-quality physical and online stores, exclusive commercial locations, technological advances and high-level fashion editorials [1].

The design pillar reinforces this movement. Inditex states that it has more than 700 designers working from sales analysis, store feedback and trend interpretation, while also linking responsible fashion to the design stage, where materials and processes are considered from the outset [1].

Recent brand valuation data confirm Zara's growing strategic relevance. According to Modaes Global, based on Kantar's Brand Z ranking, Zara became the world's most valuable mainstream fashion brand in 2026, overtaking Nike, with a value of 44.088 billion dollars [3]. This suggests that Zara's strength increasingly depends not only on speed and global presence, but also on brand value, cultural relevance and aspirational positioning.

Financial strength and international expansion

Inditex's financial performance gives credibility to its strategic transformation. In 2025, the group reported sales of 39.864 billion euros, a gross margin of 58.3%, EBITDA of 11.267 billion euros and net profit of 6.220 billion euros. It also closed the year with a net cash position of 10.958 billion euros and proposed a dividend of 1.75 euros per share [4]. These figures show that Inditex's evolution is supported not only by brand repositioning, but also by profitability, cash generation and operational strength.

Its international expansion is also becoming more selective. In 2025, Inditex was present in 214 markets, opened stores in 41 markets and operated 5,460 stores at year-end. However, the group is no longer growing simply by increasing the number of stores. Over the last three years, reported sales grew by 22%, while the number of stores decreased by 6% and net space increased by 6% [4]. This reflects a shift towards fewer but better stores, stronger integration between physical and online channels, and a more sophisticated customer experience.

The sustainability paradox

This is where the sustainability paradox appears. Inditex is still interpreted by many observers through the lens of fast fashion, a concept associated with speed, high rotation and environmental pressure. At the same time, the company has become one of the most visible global cases of sustainability transition within mass fashion. In its 2025 consolidated results, Inditex reported that 88% of the textile fibres used in its garments were classified as lower-impact fibres, while 47% of total fibres came from recycled materials. The group also stated that it continues to move towards its objective of using 100% lower-impact textile fibres by 2030 [4].

The environmental dimension goes beyond fibres. Inditex reported a 26% reduction in water consumption across its supply chain compared with 2020 levels, as well as an 11% reduction in total Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions included in its science-based targets compared with the 2018 baseline. This included an 88% reduction in Scope 1 and 2 emissions and a 7% reduction in Scope 3 emissions [4]. Its sustainability section also states that factories involved in cutting, garment manufacturing, washing, dyeing, spinning and weaving are expected to have decarbonisation plans aimed at reducing operational emissions through renewable energy, process optimisation and lower-impact technologies [5].

Discussion

The Inditex case illustrates one of the central tensions of contemporary fashion: whether a company that helped define the speed of modern fashion can also contribute to redefining its sustainability. Its original competitive advantage was based on reducing the time between consumer desire and product availability. Its current challenge is to combine that speed with circularity, traceability and environmental responsibility.

Inditex's own business model offers part of the answer. Customer centricity, brand experience, design, production

processes and logistics can all reinforce consumption, but they can also become levers for a more responsible fashion model. Better demand forecasting may reduce waste; design can integrate lower-impact materials from the beginning; production processes can improve control and flexibility; and logistics, supported by technologies such as RFID and integrated inventory systems, can increase efficiency and reduce surplus stock [1].

The case is especially relevant for textile engineering and fashion technology because sustainability in fashion will not depend only on small niche brands. It will also depend on the transformation of large global operators capable of influencing materials, suppliers, logistics, stores and consumer expectations at scale. Inditex's size makes its contradictions more visible, but also makes its potential impact more significant. Zara's repositioning under Marta Ortega adds another layer to this debate. If the brand continues to move from pure speed towards desirability, quality, cultural relevance and more timeless forms of accessible fashion, it may help redefine the meaning of mass fashion. However, this transformation must go beyond image or communication. Sustainability must be embedded in materials, production, supplier relationships, logistics, store design, consumption patterns and end-of-life solutions.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Inditex is that it does not usually explain itself loudly. It executes. This was true under Amancio Ortega and remains visible today in a leadership model that combines Marta Ortega's cultural and aesthetic sensibility with Óscar García Maceiras's managerial discretion. In a world where companies often compete through narratives, Inditex continues to compete through systems.

Conclusion

The future of Inditex will depend on its ability to use the five pillars of its model - customer centricity, brand experience, design,

production processes and logistics - not only to respond faster, but to respond better. These pillars are also the basis of its sustainability challenge.

Inditex is not simply a story of international expansion, market capitalisation or entrepreneurial success. It is the story of how a company from Galicia changed the rhythm of global fashion and is now being asked to change that rhythm again. The first transformation was about speed. The next one must be about responsibility.

Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the professional commentary of Luis Lara Arias and Coro Saldaña on LinkedIn, particularly regarding Zara's cultural relevance, brand value, speed of execution and ability to translate luxury codes into accessible fashion.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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