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Sizing up personalized fashion

How fashion retailers can meet the growing demand for customized products

The possibilities of personalization

Fashion brands have long considered the upselling possibilities of personalizing their products for individual consumers. But personalization has never really caught on outside of the luxury segment. Few brands offer such services today, and those that do personalize only a fraction of their assortments.[1]

However, consumers are keen for more personalization. Our global research shows 84% of consumers are interested in personalized products—and many would not hesitate to pay more to get them. At the same time, a combination of new analytics capabilities and advanced design and production technologies are now making product personalization a viable proposition at scale.

So why aren't brands providing more personalization?
Yes, there are operational complexities to overcome and a lack of best practices to follow. But with the technology and the demand now falling into place, the first movers can expect lasting competitive advantage, higher sales, and a significant boost to brand loyalty.
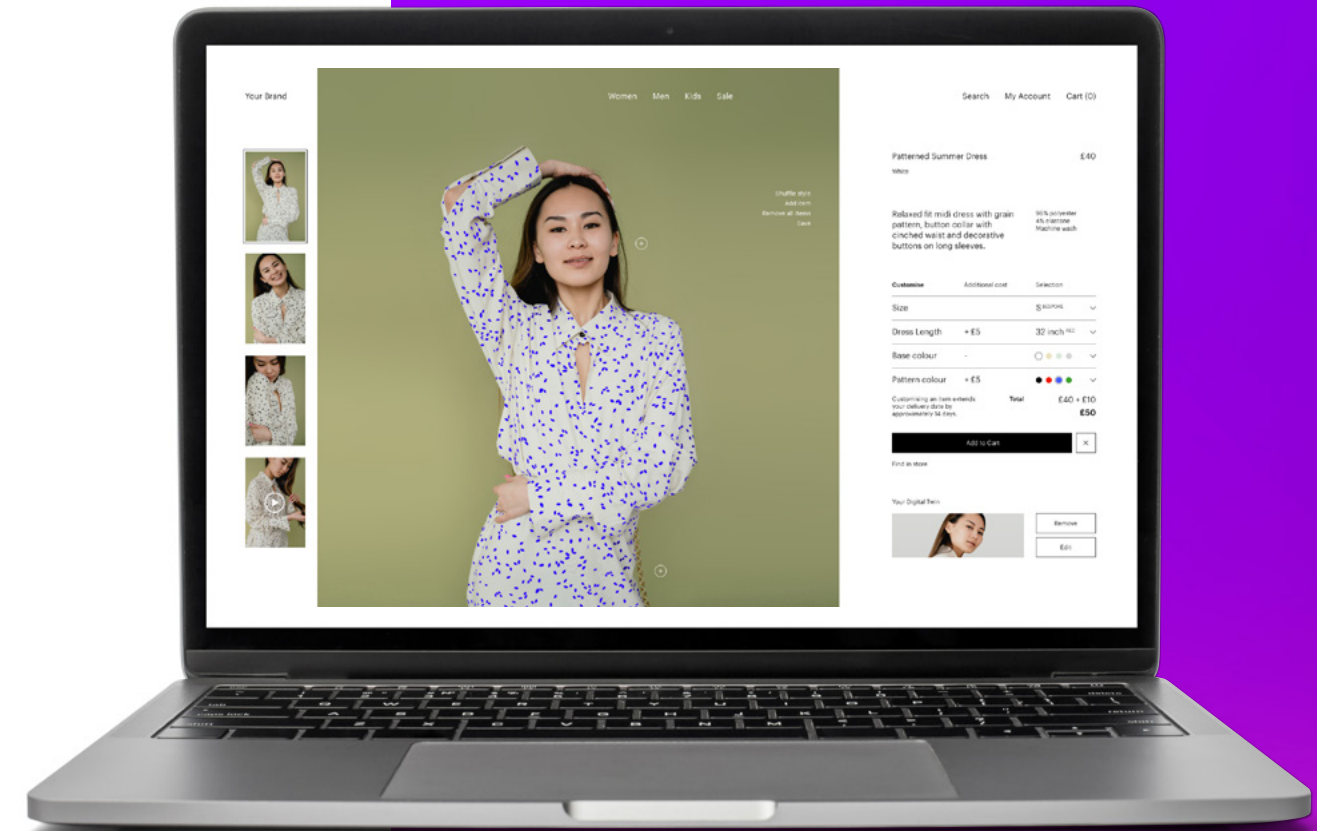
Fashion made for me

All brands are searching for hyper-relevance just as consumer desires are changing rapidly and customer journeys are becoming more fragmented. Fashion brands must have exactly the right product at the right moment to capture a consumer's attention.
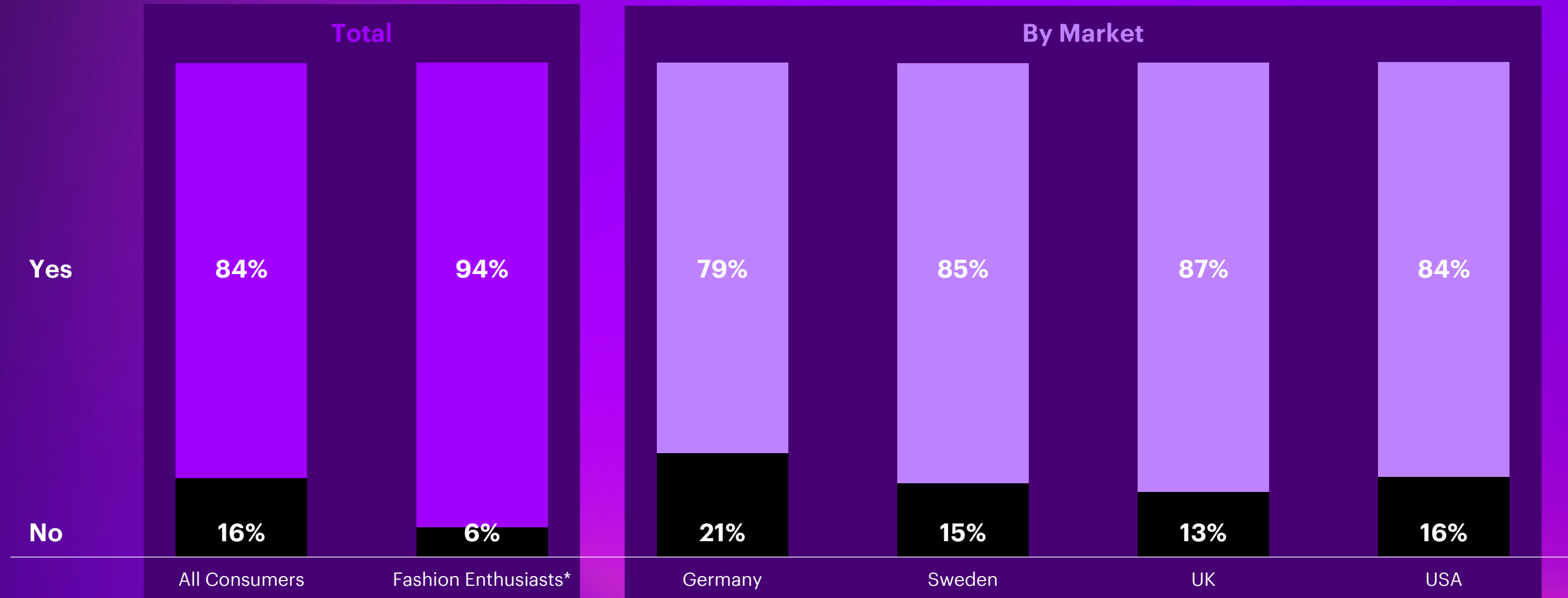
Personalized products, created on-demand, can be an important way of achieving this, while also meeting consumer needs for greater sustainability. Because they're manufactured only when needed, personalized products prevent over-production. And because they're tailored to individual tastes and preferences, they potentially increase their longevity in the consumer wardrobe.

This is an attractive segment for brands and retailers. Our survey of 2,000 European and North American fashion consumers found that 84% are interested in purchasing personalized fashion products.

Importantly, this is even higher (94%) among high-spending fashion enthusiasts (see Figure 1). Indeed, fashion consumers who are interested in personalization on average spend considerably more each year than those who aren't (500 Euro/610 USD per year vs. 340 Euro/420 USD).

Would you be interested in getting your favorite products (t-shirts, pants, jackets etc.) personalized specifically for you?

Total

	All Consumers	Fashion Enthusiasts*
Yes	84%	94%
No	16%	6%

By Market

	Germany	Sweden	UK	USA
Yes	79%	85%	87%	84%
No	21%	15%	13%	16%

* Consumers spending more than 100 Euro/120 USD per month

Total number of surveyed consumers: 2.159; Germany: 544; Sweden: 534; UK: 539; USA: 542

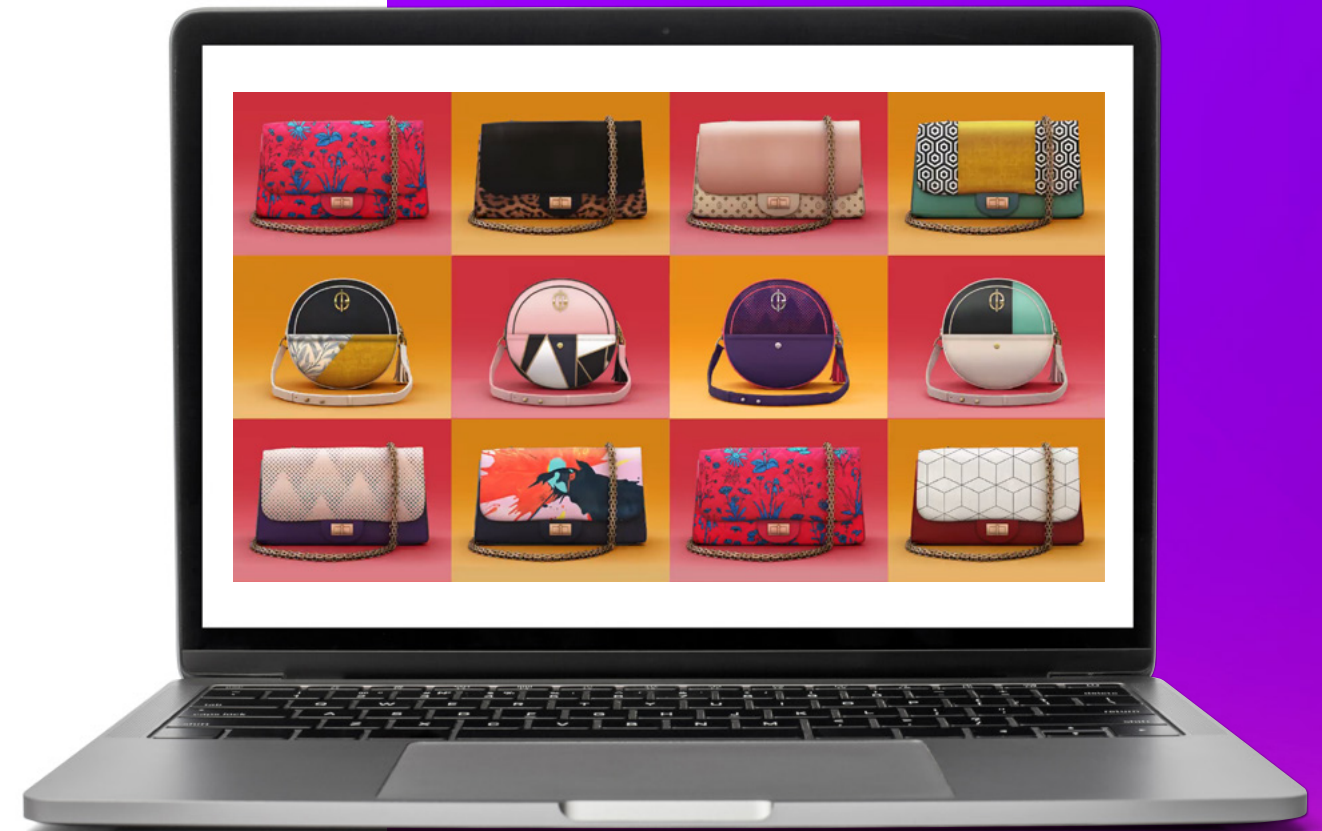**Figure 1: Consumer interest in personalized products**

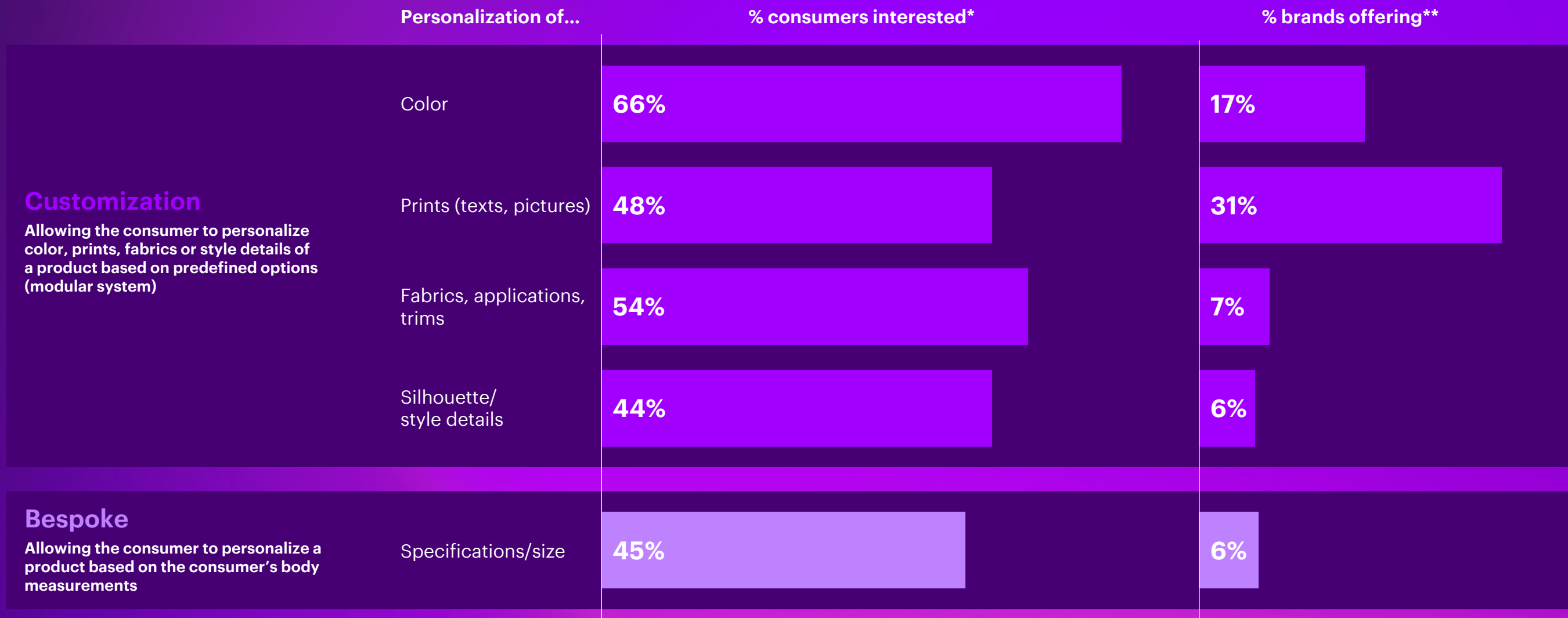Source: Accenture Fashion Consumer Survey 2021

Consumers as creators—adding the personal touch

In fashion, personalization takes two essential forms: customizing the style, and tailoring to body shape.

Customization means enabling consumers to co-create a piece—choosing colors, prints, fabrics, and style details from a predefined set of options. This can be brought to life in real-time with a digital 3D configurator tool that simulates the look and feel of the final product. Such tools can be made available both online and in store, and can be facilitated by real or virtual assistants to lead the consumer step by step through the process.

Our survey shows color is by far the most popular customization option for consumers. However, a review of 70 global fashion brands and retailers suggests that only 17% are offering this option today.[2] Nearly a third (31%) of brands do offer individualized prints, but very few enable the customization of fabrics, applications and trims, or styles and silhouettes, despite these being just as popular with consumers (see Figure 2).

Personalization of...	% consumers interested*	% brands offering**

Customization

Allowing the consumer to personalize color, prints, fabrics or style details of a product based on predefined options (modular system)

	% consumers interested*	% brands offering**
Color	66%	17%
Prints (texts, pictures)	48%	31%
Fabrics, applications, trims	54%	7%
Silhouette/ style details	44%	6%

Bespoke

Allowing the consumer to personalize a product based on the consumer's body measurements

	% consumers interested*	% brands offering**
Specifications/size	45%	6%

 * In relation to total consumers interested in personalization

** In relation to total of surveyed brands

Figure 2: Consumers interested by type of personalization compared to brand offerings

Source: Accenture Fashion Consumer Survey 2021; Accenture Web Shop Screening 2021

Tailoring products to an individual

Almost half of consumers (45%) interested in personalization would like brands and retailers to offer products personally tailored to their measurements. This doesn't simply mean providing different fits (such as slim fit vs. skinny fit jeans), but rather bespoke products truly tailored to an individual's body shape.

This has been commonplace in the luxury segment for a long time. But the technological and operational complexity involved has prevented its expansion into mainstream fashion. And while new technologies and automation capabilities are starting to change this, bespoke fashion is still lacking a scalable technology to adapt products to consumer measurements and display them in real-time on an individual avatar.

There are several challenges to overcome. For example, consumers can find taking their own measurements an overwhelming process. H&M Lab's "H&M YOURS" collaboration with start-up ZyseMe tackles this by using an algorithm to estimate body measurements combined with a product configurator for choosing different styling options and simulating the results.[3] Similarly, denim brand unspun uses a smartphone camera, via the in3D app, to create an individual avatar which is translated to a bespoke pattern and garment.[4]
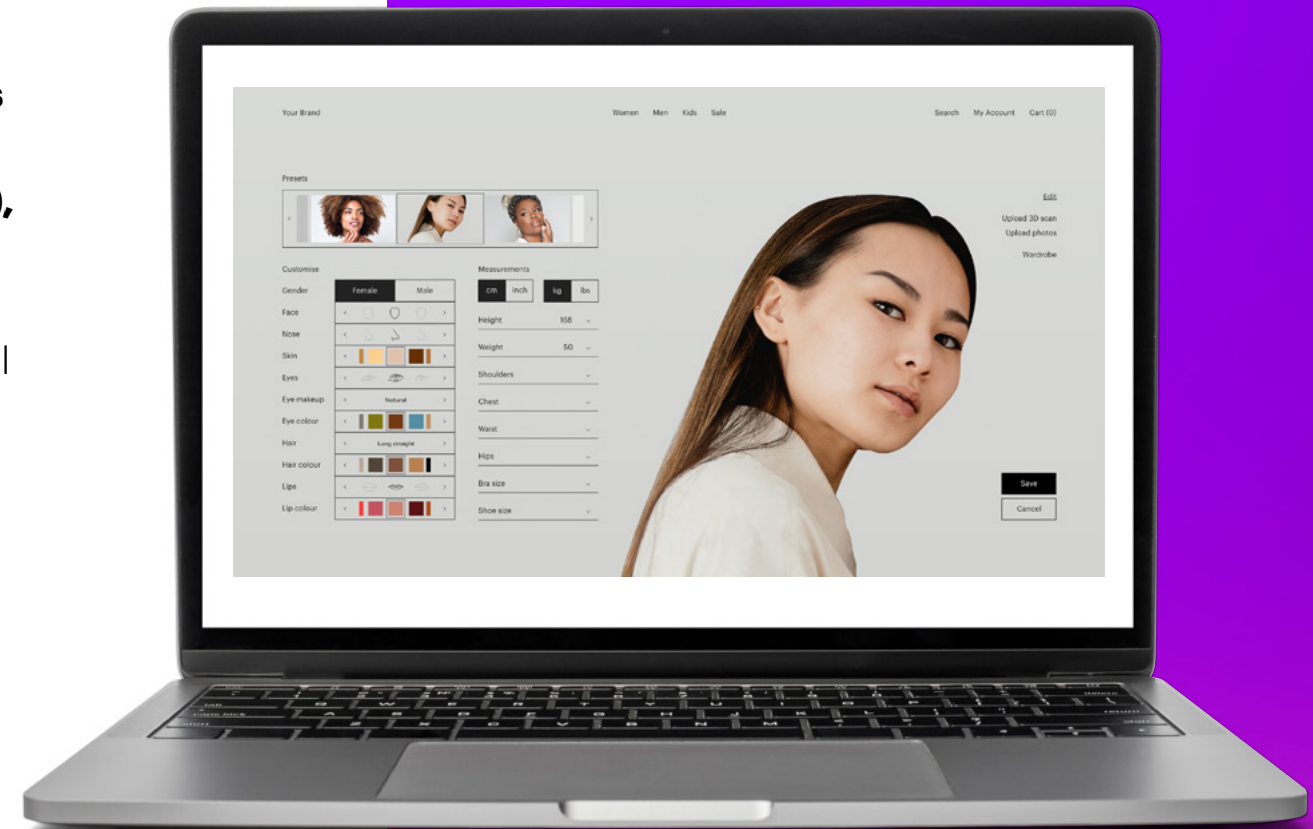
A lack of photo-realistic avatars is another challenge. These are needed to bring a human touch to the digital shopping experience of creating a bespoke product. But consumers are often reluctant to provide the necessary data. For example, only a third of surveyed consumers said they'd be willing to share full 3D scans of their bodies to allow fashion brands to tailor their products (although two-thirds would be prepared to share their body measurements).
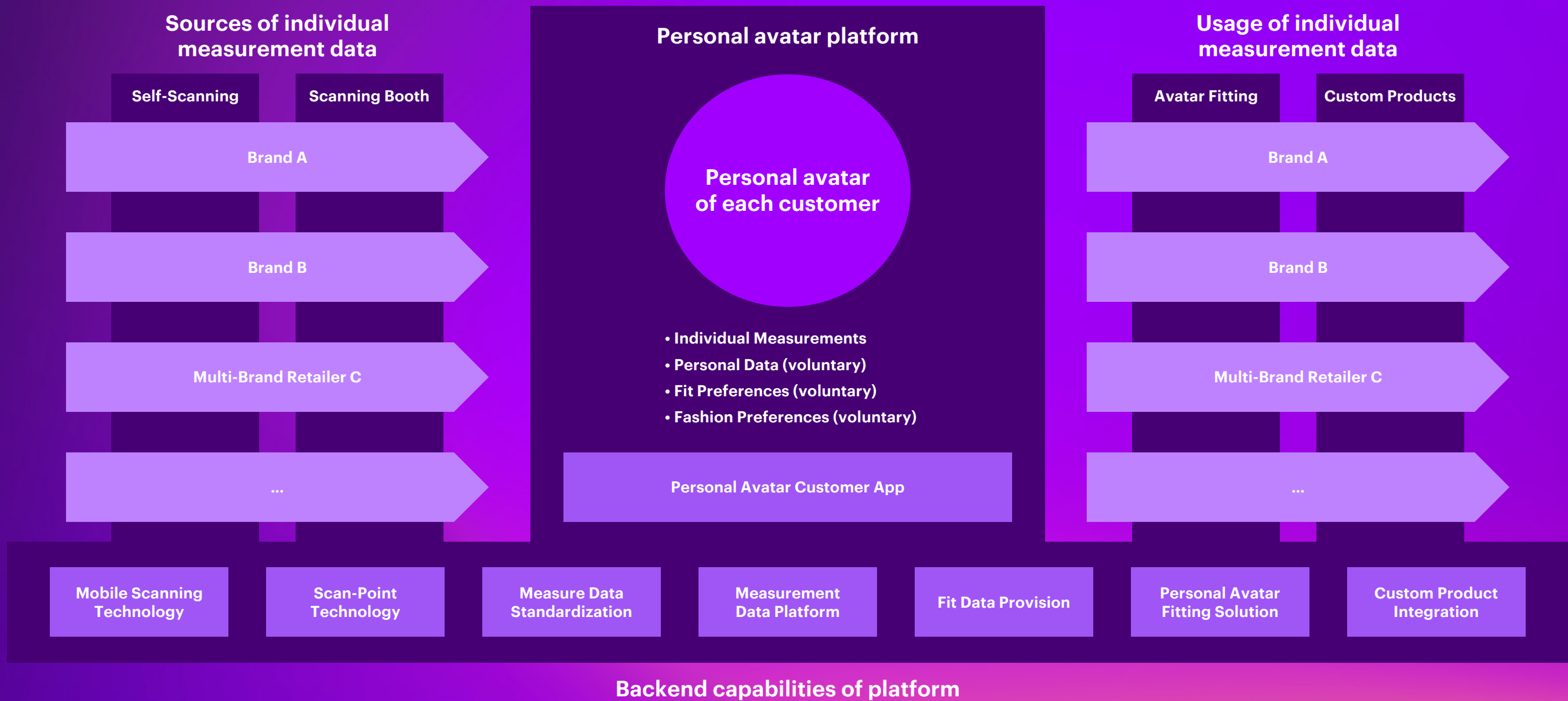
One solution may lie in a cross-brand personal avatar platform (see Figure 3). This could store consumer body measurement data securely in a single place, giving access to brands and retailers only when triggered by the individual concerned (for example by a QR code) to maintain complete privacy during the discovery phase. It could also improve customer experience since the scan or manual body measurement would only need to be performed once for use across a range of brands.

What type of products would consumers like to personalize in the future?
Our survey shows that 41% would like to personalize items of everyday usage, e.g. socks, t-shirts, or underwear, 31% wish to have the capability to personalize seasonal fashion items, and roughly a quarter of consumers (26%) ask for personalization of something special such as a product with an edgy silhouette or fancy pattern.

This confirms the direction most brands have taken with their emerging personalization initiatives where most start with basic garments and accessories and then extend into seasonal fashion items. Highly fashionable products are rarely offered for personalization, in comparison.[5]

Sources of individual measurement data

Self-Scanning | Scanning Booth

Brand A

Brand B

Multi-Brand Retailer C

...

Personal avatar platform

Personal avatar of each customer

• Individual Measurements
• Personal Data (voluntary)
• Fit Preferences (voluntary)
• Fashion Preferences (voluntary)

Personal Avatar Customer App

Usage of individual measurement data

Avatar Fitting | Custom Products

Brand A

Brand B

Multi-Brand Retailer C

...

Mobile Scanning Technology | Scan-Point Technology | Measure Data Standardization | Measurement Data Platform | Fit Data Provision | Personal Avatar Fitting Solution | Custom Product Integration

Backend capabilities of platform

Figure 3: Personal avatar platform enabling the sharing of body measurements with fashion brands

Source: Accenture

Personalization priority #1
Harnessing the data

The most important enabler for product personalization? Ultimately, it's having data on consumer behavior, preferences, and tastes. Gathering data and strengthening analytical capabilities is fundamental to the ability to match personalized offerings with consumer desires and expectations.

The good news is that consumers interested in product personalization generally show a high willingness to share data (92%). Most are prepared to share body measurements (66%) and more than half say they'd share product feedback (55%). In contrast, sharing historical purchase data (36%) or 3D body scans (31%) is less popular.

Brands must strike the right balance between personalization and data privacy. Over-requesting consumer data could quickly irritate consumers and topple even the best planned personalization efforts. The key is to create exemplary product experiences through relevant data on consumer preferences while still being rigorous about data security and sensitive to data privacy concerns.

Getting the data is only half the challenge, of course. While leading brands and retailers are able to use data analytics, social listening, and commerciality predictions to capture behavioral patterns and emerging trends, many others still struggle to translate their data into intelligent and actionable insights.

92% of consumers are willing to share personal data to allow fashion brands to tailor and personalize the product offering

For personalized fashion to function at scale, this needs to be addressed. Detailed attribute information is required, and not only for the sub-category or product group. High-quality data is needed for all product parts and attributes (such as consumer's preferred trims, craftsmanship, or collar versions). Brands also need to consider purchase journeys and consumer feedback on products to provide cutting-edge, individualized curation and tailoring. Analytics models need to be embedded behind the scenes to drive this personalization.
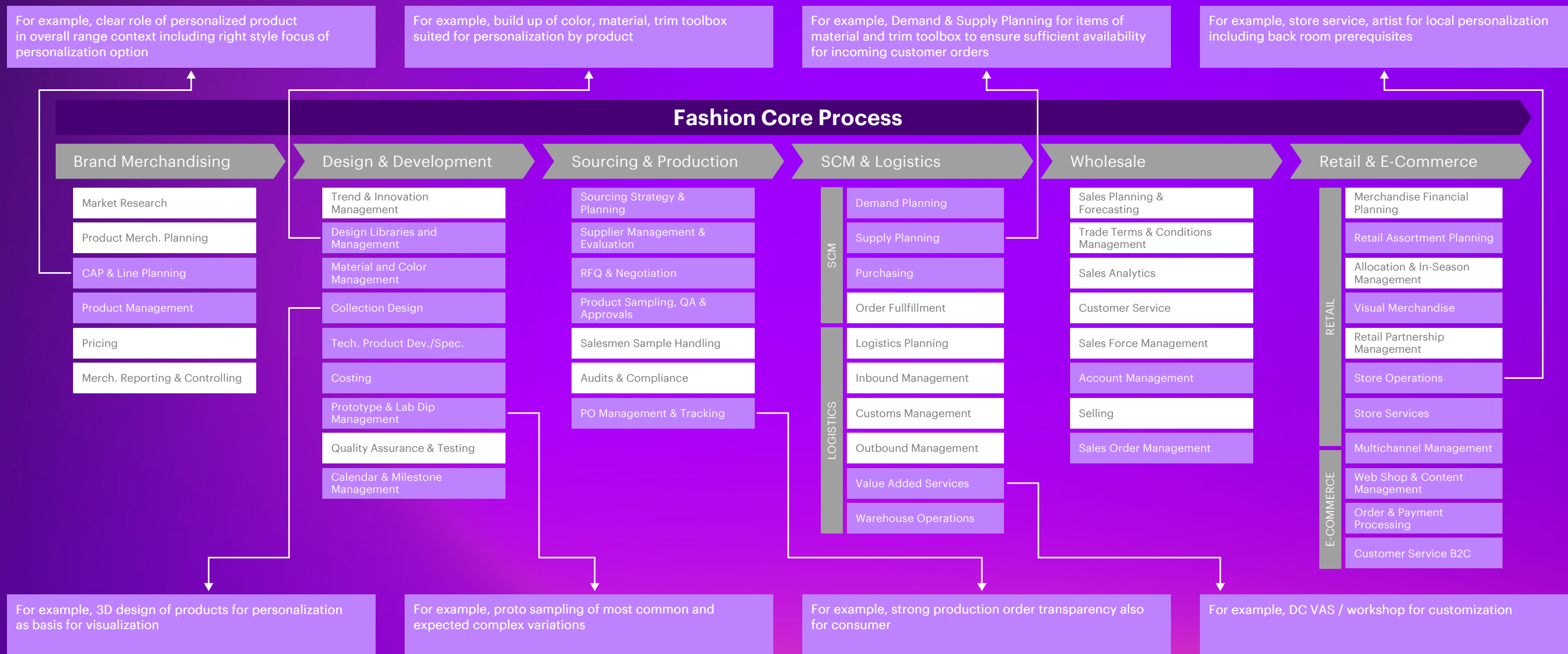
Personalization priority #2
Rethink operations

Aside from getting data-driven insights into consumer needs, brands also need to consider the operational capabilities and tools required to implement product personalization at scale. To be able to offer this across a broad product portfolio, brands need to embed standardized but flexible personalization capabilities across the full value chain (see Figure 4).

The first step is to plan the assortment framework and define the role of personalized products within the overall range. This provides the focus which is key to ensuring consumer relevance and ultimate commercial success. In addition, brands should ensure a consistent brand and design identity across all potential personalization options. Proto-samples for the most common expected variations should be considered, and graded 2D designs and 3D visuals prepared.

For example, clear role of personalized product in overall range context including right style focus of personalization option

For example, build up of color, material, trim toolbox suited for personalization by product

For example, Demand & Supply Planning for items of material and trim toolbox to ensure sufficient availability for incoming customer orders

For example, store service, artist for local personalization including back room prerequisites

Fashion Core Process

Brand Merchandising	Design & Development	Sourcing & Production	SCM & Logistics	Wholesale	Retail & E-Commerce
Market Research	Trend & Innovation Management	Sourcing Strategy & Planning	Demand Planning	Sales Planning & Forecasting	Merchandise Financial Planning
Product Merch. Planning	Design Libraries and Management	Supplier Management & Evaluation	Supply Planning	Trade Terms & Conditions Management	Retail Assortment Planning
CAP & Line Planning	Material and Color Management	RFQ & Negotiation	Purchasing	Sales Analytics	Allocation & In-Season Management
Product Management	Collection Design	Product Sampling, QA & Approvals	Order Fullfillment	Customer Service	Visual Merchandise
Pricing	Tech. Product Dev./Spec.	Salesmen Sample Handling	Logistics Planning	Sales Force Management	Retail Partnership Management
Merch. Reporting & Controlling	Costing	Audits & Compliance	Inbound Management	Account Management	Store Operations
	Prototype & Lab Dip Management	PO Management & Tracking	Customs Management	Selling	Store Services
	Quality Assurance & Testing		Outbound Management	Sales Order Management	Multichannel Management
	Calendar & Milestone Management		Value Added Services		Web Shop & Content Management
			Warehouse Operations		Order & Payment Processing
					Customer Service B2C

SCM / LOGISTICS

RETAIL / E-COMMERCE

For example, 3D design of products for personalization as basis for visualization

For example, proto sampling of most common and expected complex variations

For example, strong production order transparency also for consumer

For example, DC VAS / workshop for customization

The processes in purple boxes are impacted when retailers offer product personalization.

Abbreviations: *CRM: Customer Relationship Management; CAP: Conceptual Assortment Plan; RFQ: Request for Quotation; QA: Quality Assurance; PO: Product Order; SCM: Supply Chain Management; DC: Distribution Center; VAS: Value Added Service*

Figure 4: Personalization's impact on a fashion brand´s value chain

Source: Accenture

Sourcing vendors who can quickly turn a concept into a product is clearly also important. In some cases, this could require investments in small-scale near-shore manufacturing facilities. Brands must also build up sourcing analytics capabilities so they can properly determine the cost increases that personalization will bring.

The extent to which production is impacted depends on the type and level of personalization implemented (see Figure 5). While simpler customizations, such as prints or applications, are primarily ex-post on finished goods, more complex personalization involving colors, materials, trims, or style details might require a make-to-order production if no pre-production is possible. In this scenario, using predefined color/material/trim/pattern toolboxes (including, for example, a pre-set of different sleeve lengths) and stock on hand is key. Bespoke items will require a make-to-order approach based on individual consumer measurements.

Consumers recognize that personalization has an impact on production lead times. Our survey shows, for example, that more than half of consumers are willing to wait longer for a personalized product. However, brands will need value chain transparency to communicate lead times to their customers, and suppliers should be selected on their ability to meet specific transparency KPIs. To support on-time production, supply chain management must also include demand and supply planning for items in pre-defined toolboxes to ensure availability for incoming consumer orders.

More than 50% of consumers interested in personalization are willing to wait longer for a personalized fashion product
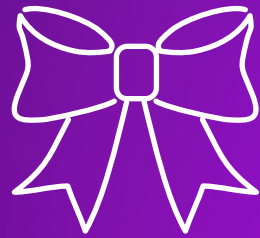
Personalized prints & applications

- Ex-post on finished goods as value added service at warehouse
- Ex-post on finished goods at (selected) stores
- Ex-post at local partner company, e.g. screen-printing provider
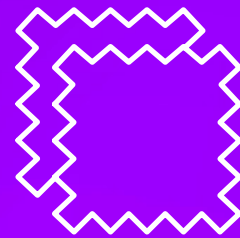
Personalized colors, materials, trims, style details

- Pre-produced variation (if limited variations)
- Hybrid-model pre-produced variations and make to order finalization
- Make to order production using predefined toolboxes for:
  – Color
  – Material
  – Trim
  – Pattern
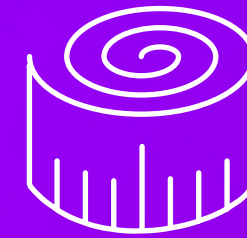
Personalized measurements

- Make to order production based on a few predefined options for variation in addition to standard size (made-to-measure)
- Make to order production based on individual customer measurements (bespoke)

Figure 5: Impact on production based on personalization type

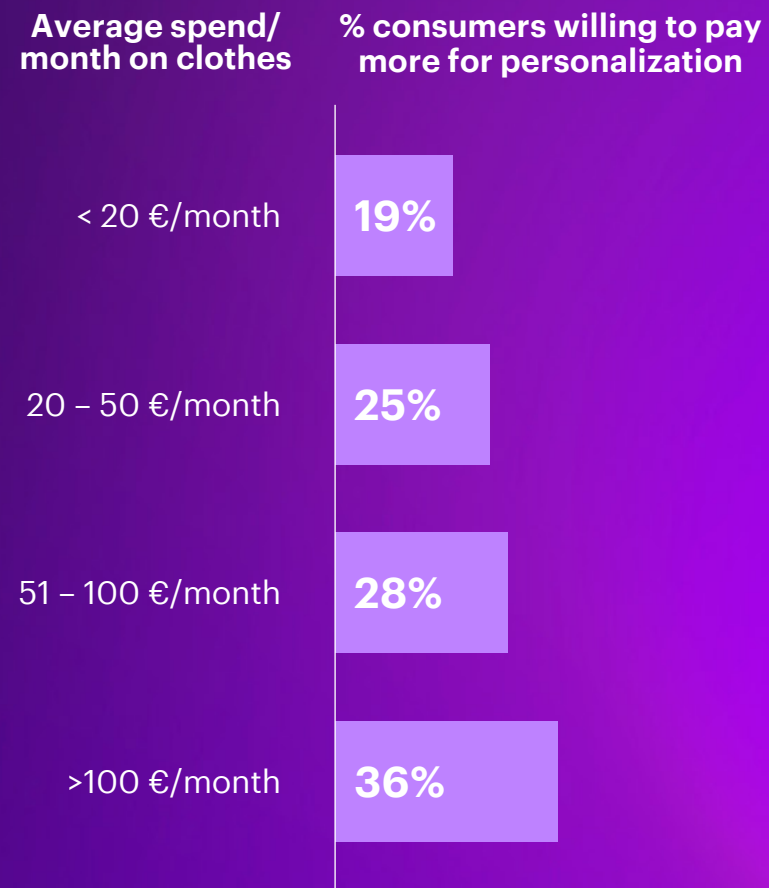Source: Accenture

Sizing up the personalization opportunity

Why is personalization so important to brands and retailers?

Because consumers are not just interested, they are willing to pay more for a personalized product than a standard item. And this willingness to pay increases in line with a consumer's average annual spending on fashion (see Figure 6).

Personalization is not only relevant for higher priced brands, however. Our survey shows consumers who buy mainly fast fashion brands are just as interested in personalized products as those who opt for premium/ luxury brands (see Figure 7). But unlike luxury consumers,fast fashion shoppers' desire for personalization is largely unsatisfied today. Little more than two out of five fast fashion brands surveyed offer personalization options (vs. four out of five luxury brands).[6]
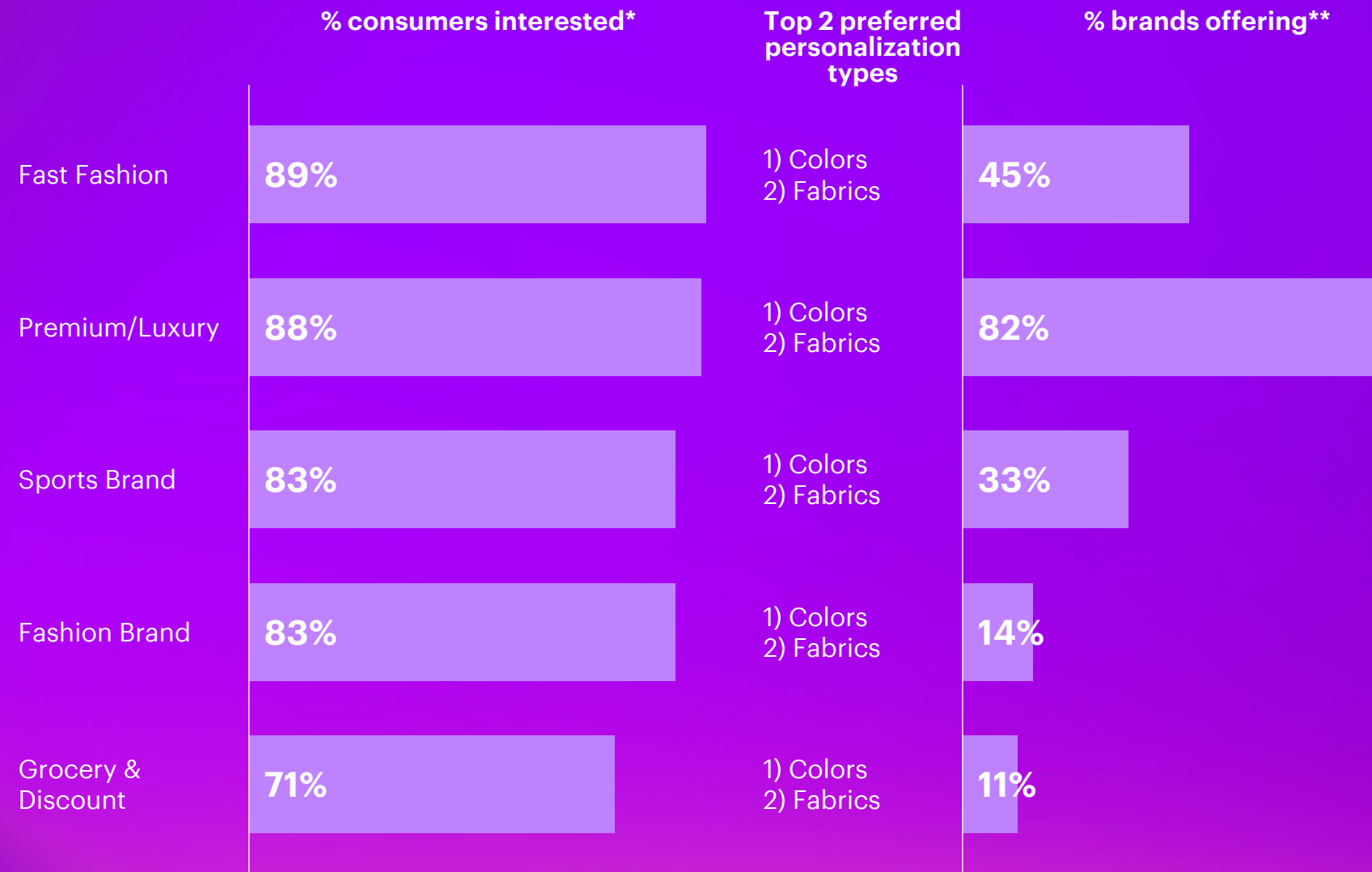
Average spend/ month on clothes	% consumers willing to pay more for personalization
< 20 €/month	**19%**
20 – 50 €/month	**25%**
51 – 100 €/month	**28%**
>100 €/month	**36%**

	% consumers interested*	Top 2 preferred personalization types	% brands offering**
Fast Fashion	**89%**	1) Colors 2) Fabrics	**45%**
Premium/Luxury	**88%**	1) Colors 2) Fabrics	**82%**
Sports Brand	**83%**	1) Colors 2) Fabrics	**33%**
Fashion Brand	**83%**	1) Colors 2) Fabrics	**14%**
Grocery & Discount	**71%**	1) Colors 2) Fabrics	**11%**

* In relation to total consumers interested in personalization within brand segment   ** In relation to total of surveyed brands within brand segment

Figure 6: Consumer spend on fashion and personalization

Source: Accenture Fashion Consumer Survey 2021

Figure 7: Consumer demand vs. brand offering by brand segment

Source: Accenture Fashion Consumer Survey 2021; Accenture Web Shop Screening 2021

Time for fashion to get personal— at scale

Personalization is not easy to implement at scale. But our findings show there is enormous potential for fashion brands who can crack the code. To do so, they need to focus on two key areas: increasing their analytics capabilities and rethinking their core operations with greater digitalization.

Those who manage it successfully will be positioned to drive future growth through increased sales, enhanced customer loyalty, and price premiums for personalized items. They will have better insights into consumer preferences that can be applied far beyond their portfolio of personalized products. They may even eventually be able to help fashion consumers make more informed sustainability choices, showing how opting for sustainable fabrics, for example, affects the price of the product.

Consumer demand and technological feasibility are aligning. Now's the time to seize the moment, scale up the capabilities, and capture first-mover advantage in the personalization revolution.

About the Research

Accenture Fashion Consumer Survey 2021
Online survey of 2,159 fashion consumers between 18–50 years in May 2021 (Germany 544 consumers, Sweden 534 consumers, UK 539 consumers, USA 542 consumers). All data points refer to this research unless otherwise stated.

Accenture Web Shop Screening 2021
Web shop screening of 70 large global fashion brands and retailers across segments such as Fast Fashion, Premium/Luxury, Sportswear, Fashion as well as Grocery and Discount in May 2021.

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References
All data points refer to the Accenture Fashion Consumer Survey 2021 unless otherwise stated.
1   Accenture Web Shop Screening 2021
2   Ibid
3   https://www.hmlab.de/
4   https://unspun.io/
5   Accenture Web Shop Screening 2021
6   Ibid

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