

# ANALYSIS

What have been the top trends of 2016? And which factors have been turning fashion companies off? Dedicated follower of fashion, **Gemma Goldfingle**, finds out

# 2016: What's HOT

## ATHLEISURE

Athleisure was undoubtedly the product trend of 2016. Inspired by sporty supermodels such as Gigi Hadid, women embraced wearing yoga pants and off-shoulder sweatshirts outside of the gym. Retailers have been quick to capitalise. Topshop, River Island, and even Sainsbury's have launched their own athleisure ranges while Selfridges opened the Body Studio at its London store.

## SEE NOW, BUY NOW

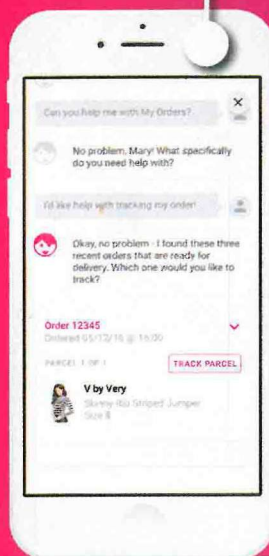
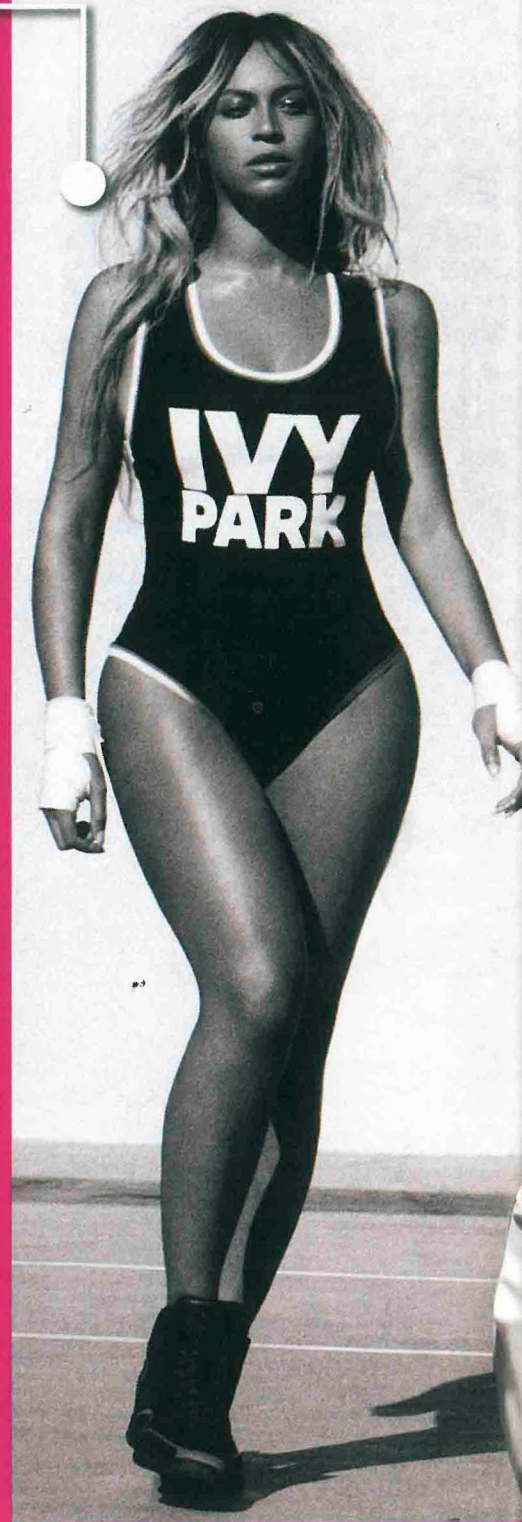
The hottest trend on the catwalk this season has been instant shopping. Fashion fans no longer have to wait months to be able to buy the clothes they see on the runway. Brands including Burberry, Tommy Hilfger, Topshop Unique and Ralph Lauren staged their first shoppable shows this year. Early signs show this move is stimulating more sales.

## CONVERSATIONAL COMMERCE

Retailers have attempted to take advantage of the amount of time we all spend on messaging apps such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp by talking to shoppers on these platforms. Consumers can now chat with retailers, get personalised recommendations and even buy products. Retailers such as Very.co.uk, H&M and eBay have invested in artificial-intelligence powered chatbots to take conversational commerce to the next level.

## SOCIAL SHOPPING

Social media is no longer nice to have for fashion retailers: it's must have. According to John Lewis, social networks are now more influential than celebrities or the catwalk in terms of style inspiration. Social is fast becoming more than a marketing channel as it's driving sales too. That's why retailers, from River Island, to Burberry, to Topshop, are spending big on these platforms. With the likes of Instagram and Snapchat adding ecommerce functionality to their platform, social's power only looks set to grow for fashion retailers.



# and what's NOT



## BLACK FRIDAY

Fashion retailers are turning against the event in their droves. Jigsaw and Fat Face were just two of the retailers that have shunned the event, which has proved a drag on margins.

Fat Face boss Anthony Thompson claimed that Black Friday is "a discounting drug in pantomime disguise" and even guaranteed that its prices would remain the same until Christmas. Meanwhile, Jigsaw boss Peter Ruis said that those that participate in Black Friday look like "traders peddling cheap stuff on a market stall".

## WAREHOUSE WORKERS' CONDITIONS

Workers' rights have come under the spotlight this year and fashion retailers have not covered themselves in glory.

Sports Direct's warehouse was compared to a Victorian workhouse and boss Mike Ashley was hauled in front of MPs to answer questions about working conditions.

Meanwhile, Asos is also facing an investigation by MPs after BuzzFeed revealed that workers at its Barnsley warehouse said they were "treated like machines".



## THE WEATHER

The weather has not been kind to fashion retailers this year. A mild winter and cold spring gave way to a wet and windy start to summer followed by one of the warmest autumns on record.

All of this has played havoc with retailers' seasonal offer and led to markdown across the high street.

Some of retail's biggest names, including Next, Primark and John Lewis, have been hit by the weather and this has led many to rethink the traditional clothing seasons.



## THE WEAK POUND

The devaluation of the pound in the wake of the EU referendum has increased the cost price of goods and raw materials for fashion retailers.

Retail bosses now have a tough decision to make – whether to raise prices for consumers or absorb the additional costs themselves.

Next boss Lord Wolfson has warned that its prices could rise up to 5% next year while M&S chief executive Steve Rowe has vowed to keep prices down. Both strategies have their risks and set the scene for a turbulent year in fashion retail in 2017.

