the next 12 years India will overtake China as the largest population country in the world. This shift in demographics also is significant because as the average age of the Chinese population increases dramatically, buying patterns are changing. In 2000, the 15-34 year old demographic represented 35 percent of the population, whereas in 2030, the same demographic is forecast to represent 23 percent of the population. The 65 plus group represented 7 percent in 2000 and is forecast to represent 17 percent in 2030. Buying patterns could well shift from fast fashion to comfort and senior care.

In contrast, the Indian demographic changes only slightly with the 30 and under group growing in absolute numbers, but losing share of the total population as life expectancy increases.

North America

MMF mill consumption in North America — the United States and Canada — peaked in 1999 at a total of 4.7 million tons. The acceptance of China into the World Trade Organization in 2001 and the increased global structure of the supply chain using MMF led to a severe decline in mill consumption in North America, which reached a low in the recession year 2009 at 3 million tons. Slow recovery from this point has seen growth to an estimated 3.25 million tons in 2014, according to the latest PCI Fibres Red Book.

The dominant application for MMF in the region is carpet and rugs. Nylon, polyester and polypropylene all see significant volumes consumed in this sector. It is also an industry sector which, as carpet rather than rugs, is relatively unaffected by import competition. In 2005, the carpet and rug industry in the United States reached a MMF consumption peak level of 1.62 million tons. It is reckoned that total MMF consumption into this sector in 2014 will slightly exceed 1 million tons. The potential for solid growth has been expected over the past three years as the economy has generally improved, but the housing market remains stubbornly depressed. The carpet industry has anticipated a return to better times and invested heavily in changing its product mix, with an increasing focus on filament yarns, polyester seeing most of the investment. Capacity for BCF in polyester, including polytrimethylene terephthalate (PTT), has grown from 85,000 tons in 2008 to a forecast 400,000 tons in 2015. As polyester BCF has gained market share, nylon and polyester staple as well as polypropylene BCF have all lost market share. Since 2005, the share of nylon staple into carpet has dropped from 16 percent to less than 1 percent, and polypropylene BCF has dropped from 24 to 10 percent, while polyester BCF has increased from 3 to 36 percent (See Figure 3).

Carpet is not the only sector that has made investments. There are a number of nonwoven expansions and investments, as well as announcements of increases in polyester staple capacity. Perhaps the most surprising development is the level of investment in cotton and blended fiber spinning with eight new or expanded plants with a total investment of more than $800 million. At the time of the TW Innovation Forum, the potential impact of increased oil production from innovative drilling techniques was discussed with the possibility of lower oil prices and therefore cheaper raw materials for MMFs. The speed and the scale of price reductions has taken the industry by surprise, and 2015 holds the promise that MMFs will be at a lower average price level than in 2014.