

Nadzeya Kalbaska · Teresa Sádaba ·
Francesca Cominelli · Lorenzo Cantoni
Editors

Fashion Communication in the Digital Age

FACTUM 19 Fashion Communication
Conference, Ascona, Switzerland,
July 21–26, 2019



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Springer

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FACTUM 19 Conference Preface

The conference “FACTUM 19—Fashion Communication: between tradition and future digital developments” is a major academic event, which takes place in Monte Verità (Ascona, Switzerland), July 21–26, 2019.

Its aim is to promote theoretical and empirical interdisciplinary work on the impact that various communication practices have on the fashion industry and on societal fashion-related customs and values.

The conference has been organized by USI – Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano, Switzerland, in collaboration with Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, France, and ISEM Fashion Business School—Universidad de Navarra (Madrid, Spain).

Through this conference, which is a first in its genre, the organizers aim at consolidating Fashion Communication as an academic field and establishing an international and interdisciplinary network of related scholars.

We have received 53 submissions, 26 of which were accepted for the presentation at the event and are collected in these conference proceedings. Each research paper—both *Full papers* and *Research notes*—went through a rigorous double-blind review process by the members of FACTUM 19 Program Committee. These papers cover a diverse variety of subjects within Fashion Communication. Five main areas were identified, according to which research papers in these proceedings have been organized: “Digital Fashion Communication”; “Country-Specific Studies”; “Socio-Demographic and Cultural Issues”; “Sustainability”; and “Fashion Communication: History and Other Issues”.

We are sure that these proceedings will serve as a valuable source of information on the state of the art in Fashion Communication research.

Several posters, methodological workshops, and presentations from five keynote speakers enrich the program of the FACTUM 19 conference:

- Zhimin Chen, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK
- Dominique Jacomet, Institut Français de la Mode, France
- Agnès Rocamora, London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, UK

- Thomaï Serdari, NYU, Leonard N. Stern School of Business, USA
- Jochen Strähle, Reutlingen University, Germany.

We are grateful to the prestigious *Congressi Stefano Franscini*, conference platform of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology of Zurich, for supporting and hosting the event.

We greatly appreciate the considerable time put into the organization of the conference by all the members of FACTUM 19 Program Committee, who helped us to ensure high quality of all accepted contributions.

We would also like to thank Branislava Trifkovic for supporting smooth organization of the event.

We hope you enjoy FACTUM 19 together with us in Switzerland!

Your FACTUM 19 Conference Chairs

Lorenzo Cantoni

Francesca Cominelli

Nadzeya Kalbaska

Teresa Sádaba

FACTUM 19 – Fashion Communication Conference

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Dominique Jacomet	Institut Français de la Mode, France
Agnès Rocamora	London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, UK
Thomai Serdari	NYU Leonard N. Stern School of Business, USA
Jochen Strähle	Reutlingen University, Germany

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Digital Fashion Communication



Understanding Fashion Consumption in the Networked Society: A Multidisciplinary Approach

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Abstract. Fashion consumption is changing rapidly due to the digital transformation of our society that affects both the market and with-it brands' behaviors, and most importantly consumers' practices: users/audience/consumers are involved at different levels, as knowledge and content producers and as seekers thereof.

Customers move seamlessly among different devices, contents and media channels. While searching for information, purchasing products and sharing band related experiences and in so doing creating content, they also entertain themselves. In each stage, customers experience multiple touch points: in part brand owned, and in part the result of the mediated imagery storytelling and consumers generated content.

This level of complexity requires a multidisciplinary perspective that combines together quantitative and qualitative approaches, as well as different disciplines such as sociology, branding and semiotics. In this paper we will be discussing some data of our survey commenting on the transformation of the consumption experience.

Keywords: Fashion · Consumption · Digital media · Customer journey experience · Audience · Producer

1 Fashion Consumption in the Networked Society

Fashion consumption is changing rapidly due to the digital transformation of our society, where networked individuals are constantly 24/7 connected to each other and to the brands mostly through their smartphones and the Internet is heavily embedded in everyday life activities [1]. Within this scenario the fashion consumers act at the same time as users of digital devices and audiences of media content and are involved at two different levels: as knowledge and content seekers and as producers thereof. On the one hand, fashion brands are providing multiple “touch points” to make the content accessible, thereby focusing on multi-platform and transmedia storytelling [2] and audience/consumer engagement strategies. On the other hand, consumers manage and improve the circulation of content by appropriating and sharing online information, meanings and pleasures connected to the consumption experience, and by expanding

the consumption experience itself beyond its pre-defined boundaries (i.e. the purchasing activity). Even when consumers do not directly produce original content, their searching activities often result in information sharing and in the consequent multiplication of valuable touch points with content. In this hybrid media system [3] searchability is improved by a continuous merging between officially produced and user generated content (UGC) and consumers can take advantage of a permanently accessible media system that becomes a new experiential environment.

Starting from these very premises, being a customer nowadays means experiencing a dynamic and unpredictable flow that moves from pre-purchase, to purchase, to post-purchase phases, most of all occurring within digital media. As a matter of fact, each stage of the consumption process is characterized by audience practices that enhance and expand the consumption experience itself, making it more meaningful and entertaining at the same time. Customers move seamlessly from one screen to another, one content to the next, among different media channels, moving from needs/wants, searching for information, purchasing and sharing all of their experiences related to brand/product. Media consumption, then, overlaps fashion consumption (and vice versa), since on the one hand fashion brands are gaining an increasing visibility in terms of media content [4], becoming more and more prominent in the media storytelling and simultaneously spreadable within digital platforms thanks to audience engagement and participation [5]. On the other hand, fashion consumers definitely are media audiences who take advantage of a permanently accessible media system based on the digital circulation of content, where to appropriate brands and fashion related items, both symbolically and/or materially and to engage in fandom-like activities such as detection, searching and poaching [6].

In other words, if transmedia storytelling is designed to adapt to social-connected multi-platform world where stories are shared, co-created and relational, adapting and evolving through the audience, then the consumers behave as fans: from recognizing brands seen on TV shows and cinema, searching for fashion items on line, to sharing picture and reviews of purchasing activities, to finally imitating outfit and producing tutorial videos. “Online branding is based on the interactive experience of the user” [2] and provide the consumers with symbolic universe endowed with meaning. that consumers may experience through an authentic, dynamic and integrated relationship with the brands.

We may, then, conceptualize the consumer experience as a dynamic process, as a customer’s “journey” with a brand/product over time during the purchase cycle across multiple touch points, only some of which are brand owned. Instead of looking at just a part of a transaction or experience, the customer journey documents the full experience of being a customer as the complete sum of experiences that consumers go through when interacting with a company or a brand and incorporates past experiences (including previous purchases) [7] as well as the mediated imagery storytelling and consumers generated content.

The first stage—pre-purchase—encompasses all aspects of the customer’s interaction with the brand and environment before a purchase transaction. In some moments, consumers are very open to the influence of brands, in particular when they want help informing their choices or making decisions. Even if, traditional marketing

literature has considered pre-purchase as need recognition, search, and consideration, in theory, we may include in this stage the customer's entire experience before purchase.

The second stage — purchase — covers all customer interactions with the brand and its environment during the purchase event itself. It is characterized by behaviors such as choice, ordering, and payment. This stage is clearly the most temporally compressed of the three stages, but it has strongly been investigated by the marketing literature, which has focused on how marketing activities and the environment influence the purchase decision. For instance, in retailing and consumer products research, much emphasis has been placed on the shopping experience, as we may confirm through our research results.

The third stage — post-purchase — encompasses customer interactions with the brand and its environment following the actual purchase. This stage includes behaviors such as usage and consumption, post-purchase engagement, sharing comments and reviews and service requests. This stage, then, covers aspects of the customer's experience after purchase that actually relate in some way to the brand or product/service itself.

2 The Research: Methodology, First Data and Main Findings

In order to understand and better analyze the contemporary enhanced experience of fashion consumption we have to apply a multidisciplinary approach that includes sociology, semiotic and branding as well as the application of quantitative and qualitative research analysis.

The first step of our research presented in this paper is the quantitative online survey (for which we are still collecting data) aimed at finding out what are the attitudes, practices, opinions and behaviors of contemporary fashion consumers. The attempt is understanding the consumers' personalized path, through the multiple interactions with brands and other consumers throughout the different touch points.

The questionnaire, 57 questions in total, is made of close-ended, open-ended, multiple choice and Likert scale questions, is structured in five different sections: Socio-Demographic Data (3 questions); Media Consumption Practices (7 questions); Fashion and Media Consumption Practices (6 questions); Fashion Consumption stages such as pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase (33 questions); Fashion and Sustainability (8 questions). The survey was distributed throughout the world by digital platforms and we have collected so far 366 answers. Respondents are prevalently aged between 18 and 28 (78% of them) and as for the geographical distribution the majority of them are from Europe (52%), Asia (21%) and America (11%). For this paper we are going to focus on a small data set about the transformation of consumption practices.

To briefly summarize, the digital consumer we are faced with is defined by the fact that spends more time online across multiple screens; has more choices for how, where and when accessing content; has more opportunities to search (and find) information; has more opportunities to interact with others, as well as to engage with the content. Therefore, the shopping experience expands itself beyond the act of purchasing.

As we can see in Fig. 1 the majority of the respondents declare to regularly shop online through multiple platforms, and more importantly only the 10% of them affirm not to shop online.

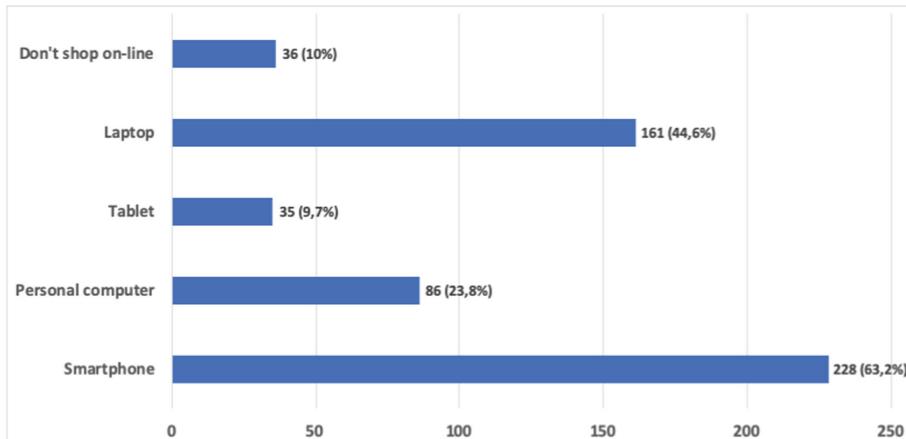


Fig. 1. Devices regularly used for shopping (361 respondents in total)

This is a clear indication of the importance of this retail channel. At the same time, it is also interesting to highlight that smartphones are the main devices using for shopping on-line. In fact, this datum exemplifies a transformation from e-shopping to m-shopping where the initial ‘m’ stands not only for mobile phones, but also for mobility. This data must be read in conjunction with the fact that the 83% of our respondents have (and use) applications for shopping on-line even if the most of them (52%) only use them when they already know what to buy.

Online searchability seems to be very important for our respondents, in fact, the most of them (118) search for the best option prior to purchasing, they do not do that impulsively. They search for information on prices, quality, materials, also brand values and they always more and more relay on other consumers ‘opinion. As we have already affirmed the act of purchase is just one phase of a longer journey, that doesn’t even stop there.

In spite of the fact that the 83% of the respondents still prefer to buy fashion items in stores instead that online (17%), the pros of buying online mentioned mainly linked to saving time (53%), making comparisons among different brands (47%), and having access to further discounts (33%). At the same time, it is interesting to note that the 52.5% of the respondent have bought something on-line after trying it first offline. An additional proof of the consistency between online and offline environments.

As for the decision-making process, in terms of who or what is more likely to affect purchasing choices, we can observe in Fig. 2 that respondents tend to credit for the majority (35.9%) regular people with no specific expertise other than taste. While only the 14.7% declare the importance of fashion magazines and bloggers that have been considered the traditional and modern gatekeepers of fashion taste, there is a growing

importance of celebrity endorsements (8.8%) and much more significantly fashion influencers (16.8%). Again, it is worth to restate that more than anything the decision-making process is now diluted into multiple experiences made available in the many different touchpoints that as we can see from the chart below connects together online and offline as well as different categories of influencers. The reference to the ideas of competence and expertise are now equalized to the ones of celebrity and popularity as the shopping experience transform itself not only because of how it is practiced, but mostly because of what it means accordingly to the new meanings associated to the idea of fashion.

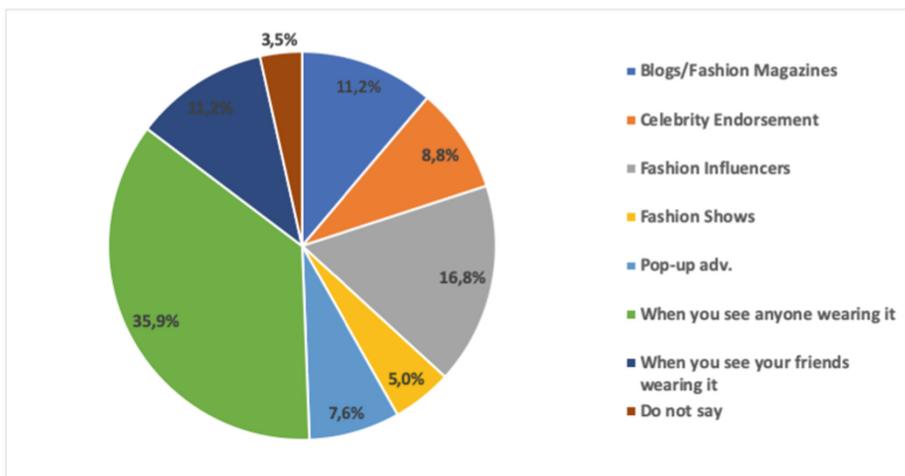


Fig. 2. Who/what influences purchasing choices (350 respondents in total)

As we have seen shopping rhythms are dictated by the new media, and at the same time people reconfigure their shopping experiences, and their customers' journeys in many incredible diversified ways. While offline shopping seems still the predominant way of purchasing fashion items, it is possible to see the significant growth of the online shopping that found its way to create an enhanced shopping experience which is perceived by our respondents also as entertaining. In their perspectives shopping online means saving money (47%); having more choices and being able to buy items not available in store (22.6%); having more time to think about buying it or not (17.8); and last but not least the pleasure and excitement of at home delivery (7.5%).

But where the digital transformation has been mostly effective is in the reconfiguration of the customer journey. As we can see from Fig. 3, while the majority of the people (51.15%) are still describing their relationship with brands (and their content) as spectators, with a consequent low level of engagement, a datum also linked to the fact that the majority of our respondents still prefer to buy offline, there is a 35.2% of 'sociable' people meaning they have interactions with the brands, maybe even just in the form of a comment or review. But even more importantly we have to focus on the small but very significant (11.2%) portion of respondents that define themselves as

'creators' characterized for very high levels of engagement. These data demonstrate that there is already a new scenario of fashion consumption in which cotemporary conscious costumers are already interacting with content created by other consumers, and more importantly that there is a growing amount of people that are already acting as content creators.

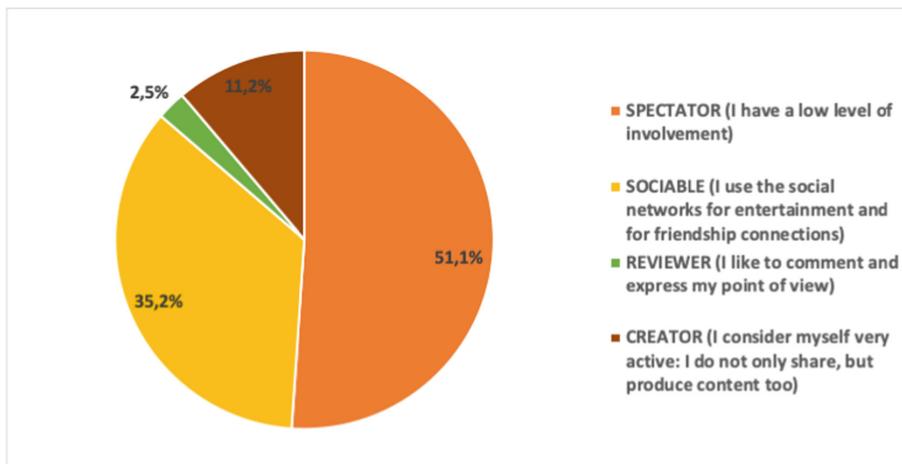


Fig. 3. Habits as social media user in relation to fashion consumption (366 respondents in total)

The further steps of the research, after a more detailed quantitative data analysis, will focus on qualitative research that uses semiotics [8] in order to better understand also the new meanings attributed to the idea of fashion consumption.

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Digitalized Dynamic Fashion Illustration, Using Motion Graphics

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Abstract. This paper aims to unlock the potential of dynamic textile patterns in future-driven fashion design using computer graphics, which enables changes to the visual appearance of a textile for aesthetic, expressive or communicative purposes. In particular, it focuses on experimenting with the possibility of creating digitalized dynamic fashion garments that are illustrated digitally using motion graphics developed collaboratively in a virtual space. To this end, three objectives were formed and addressed. First, a dynamic textile pattern was defined, and the cases of both tangible and virtual dynamic patterns in textiles and fashion garments were investigated to identify their current situations and future prospects in terms of functional techniques and expressive effects. Next, collaborating with a group of graphic designers and motion artists, digital fashion illustrations were created to visualize dynamic patterns changing over time, and their methodological and expressive aspects were introduced. Lastly, some findings resulted from the digital works, which also led to implications for follow-up studies on tangible dynamic fashion design in the future.

Keywords: Digital · Dynamic graphical pattern · Fashion design

1 Introduction

With the radical development of textiles made from smart materials and computational technology, the area of fashion design has also tried to combine aesthetics and style with functional technology, intersecting different areas such as design, science, and technology. As new technologies heighten the potential of fashion garments as devices for experimental observations and practical advances both in conceptual and commercial designs, they also transform clothing surfaces into an interface for ‘fashionable wearables’ [16], becoming a great vehicle for self-expression that is mediated and amplified through digital technology. Fashion image-makers have developed digital special effects, using two-dimensional (2D), three-dimensional (3D) and moving-image tools to present future visions, and fashion and textile designers have combined digitized techniques with traditional analogue versions of their work methods [3]. In addition, the Internet and social networks can also provide a creative platform to communicate and interact with personal expression and playful display between users, as well as designers.

When we consider the nature of change that is inevitable for the fashion industry, the limitless and dynamic possibilities of clothing interwoven with technology look

fascinating and show great promise for fashion design. In this study the author examines the concept of dynamic fashion design of textile patterns using computer graphics, which enables changes to their visual appearance for aesthetic, expressive or communicative purposes. Dynamic fashion is defined in this study as textiles and fashion garments with varying, animated colors or patterns that visibly change from the fabric's underlying colors or patterns to others and then return to the initial color or pattern after a period of time. This demonstrates the potential of different digital expressions than can be programmed to this effect.

Since the early 2000s, there have been significant aesthetic and technological explorations of dynamic textiles and garments. Studies have been conducted on high-performance conductive materials and thermochromic inks that change colors, textures and forms within textiles [1, 12, 15]. Berzowska [1] presented an electronic textile (E-textile), Orth [12] used a heated yarn, and Robertson [15] introduced a thermochromic, liquid crystal to create textiles that change colour. Following this initial research, custom-made personal objects including dynamic textile patterns have communicated and interacted wirelessly with other systems integrated with the necessary technology [19]. Optical fibers and light-emitting diodes (LEDs) have created illuminating colours and surface patterns, blurring the line between graphic art and digital information, as seen in Philips' emotional dress (2006), Hussein Chalayan's LED dress (2008), CuteCircuit's galaxy dress (2008), and so on. The common link connecting these examples is a valuable contribution to developing dynamic textiles or fabric-like surfaces that can be visually transformed through digital technology, which is an emerging field that is still limited in its application.

In previous studies, tangible dynamic textiles and garments have usually achieved a relatively limited range of pattern variability by changing color combinations. However, digitalized dynamic fashion garments that combine images from computer graphic software with portable hardware such as a mobile phone open up the possibility of creating revolutionary displays of patterns that include both still and moving images and that are more personalized and varied than tangible patterns. If fashion garments could have a computer screen's capacity for dynamically displaying colors, patterns, and still and moving imagery, how would innovative changes in the fashion industry be expressed in everyday life? Starting with this question, the author intends to unlock the potential of digitalized dynamic fashion garments represented in digital fashion illustrations using computer graphics in a virtual space.

As Quinn [13] mentioned, garments are themselves emerging as complex, multi-faceted hybrid forms, and many digital applications have provided an array of multi-disciplinary crossovers among digital media, textiles, fashion, electronic engineering and computer sciences. Digital fashion illustrations, the focus of this paper, also demonstrate results from collaborations via a social media platform between the author as a fashion illustrator and a group of motion graphic artists. The resulting virtual dynamic patterns have a more artistic and conceptual nature, rather than commercial or functional ones.

This study addresses the following objectives:

First, it defines a dynamic textile pattern and investigates cases of both tangible and virtual dynamic patterns in textiles and fashion garments. Then, it explores the current

status of dynamic textile and garment patterns and the possibility of applying functional techniques and expressive effects to fashion design.

Second, it presents the case of digitalized dynamic fashion illustrations developed using the methodology, which exemplify dynamic patterns for future-driven fashion design. Collaborating with a group of graphic designers and motion artists, the author created digital fashion illustrations with the theme of ‘Psychedelia’ to visualize experimental explorations of dynamic patterns that change visually over time.

Third, it presents some findings and discussion points resulting from the experimental, digital work. The virtual digital fashion illustrations serve as a starting point for developing tangible dynamic garment patterns and demonstrate the potential of fashion garments that integrate intimate, dynamic fabrics in the real world.

2 Background

2.1 Tangible Dynamic Textiles and Garments: The Typology and Cases

Digital technology today makes movement and change in fashion materials possible. Reacting to various dynamic variables, such as environmental conditions, specific materials, or computational technology, the colors and patterns of dynamic textiles and garments can change their aesthetic and functional expression during use, in contrast with traditional ones with fixed and static expressions. Worbin [19] stated that a dynamic color is a color that temporarily disappears to reveal a fabric’s underlying color or display another printed color. Mackey et al. [11] considered dynamic fabric to be a textile with computational input that enables changes to its visual appearance for aesthetic, communicative and expressive purposes. Similarly, the author of this paper defines dynamic textiles and garments as those with a color or pattern that changes from the fabric’s underlying color or pattern to another one or more different colors or patterns and then returns to the initial display after a period of time.

Since it is still an open issue on how to systematically identify the correlation between textiles and garments and changing colors or patterns, we can examine different technological principles and expressions of the changeable fashion materials, with or without computational technology [19]. Thermochromism (TC) provides a color change by heat; photochromism (PC) by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light; and electroluminescence (EL) by light manipulation (i.e., holography) or by light transfer via optical fibers or luminescent materials. Some of the first textiles that featured TC usually had a conductive section to provide dynamic colors and patterns by heat with electronic or computational approaches. Maggie Orth and her company, International Fashion Machines (IFM), created programmable, color-changing textiles that combine woven electronic circuits, printed TC inks, and drive electronics, bringing about interactive effects. Second, PC can change colors by exposure to UV light. Lauren Bowker and the THEUNSEEN company she leads presented a couture capsule collection, ‘Air’ (2014), which consisted of a garment that responded to heat, moisture and UV radiation, a large heat-responsive sculpture, and wings that reacted to friction and aerodynamics. The leather, beast-like garment was created with Bowker’s compound inks and dyes, which responded to seven different parameters in the environment, and

allowed a mix of controlled and uncontrolled color changes in the material [6]. As the third type of smart color change techniques, EL renders a color change by manipulating lights in optical fibers or luminescent materials. Luminex produced a high-tech, fiber optic fabric with RGB LED lights that could emit and change light colors by combining textiles, optics and electronics [10].

From this typology of dynamic color change techniques, we can see that the ‘fashionable wearables’ mentioned by Seymour [16] have currently demonstrated great expressive promise and the potential to be amplified through the use of technology. Dynamic textiles and garments that change colors and patterns express retro-reflective and interactive designs that react to user demands. They demonstrated that they could revert to the exact same original condition as the time factor is controlled, and their interactivity ranged from human beings to environments and societies and extended to networks in the hypertext structure. The dynamic garments resulted from compositional elements that generate heat, using TC yarns or inks, PC UVs, or EL LEDs.

2.2 Virtual Dynamic Graphical Patterns in Tangible Fashion Using Computational Technology

The digital world can provide textiles and garments with variability, and their elements can be changed into completely different substances. As computational technology, including computer graphic software, has become available to both fashion and textile designers, digital aesthetics have provided the inspirations for new design ideas and visual expressions.

When viewing the visual and cultural characteristics of fashion as an everyday lifestyle product and not only as a fashionable art, it is apparent that it needs to be more easily controlled, personalized to the wearers’ tastes and connected with others in its dynamic transformation. In particular, to display more customized and various dynamic patterns in fashion, we can create digitalized dynamic patterns using computer graphic software by encoding digital pattern information with computational hardware.

In the late 1970s, the appearance of digital color graphics radically changed image-based industries. Imaging software such as ‘Photoshop’, ‘Illustrator’ and ‘After Effects’ greatly influenced every sector of the art and design fields, enabling professionals and amateurs to manipulate both still and moving images. Added to this was the formidable Internet and the growth of social networks, which have provided an indispensable creative platform for users to communicate and collaborate on a variety of design ideas. In last few years, collaborating with fashion image-makers, some designers have developed a new fashion code with a sophisticated use of digital special effects, using 2D, 3D and moving-image tools to fast-forward us to unimagined lifestyles and future visions [3]. Thus, the implicit code of virtual dynamic patterns has often emerged with the convergence of analogue design methods and digital image-making processes, as described below.

Integrating LED technology into his ‘Airborne’ (A/W 2007-8) catwalk, Hussein Chalayan also displayed a digitally animated print design within the garment form to look like the full video of a computer-generated film. Collaborating with a computer graphics operator, Jane Harris concentrated her creative practice on computer graphic visualizations using motion capture. The projected video artwork such as ‘Potential

Beauty' (2002-3) highlighted this technique in its abstract form, in order to develop relationships between fabrics, garments and the human body through the digital simulation of a garment twisting and turning in space [3]. Although Harris's digital artwork did not suggest a dynamic pattern, it indicated the possibility of motion and transformation virtual textiles and garments in the future could bear, including the folds and draping of a fabric, not just digitally painted textiles. As another example of the relationship between digital imagery and the human body, Nancy Tilbury, a co-founder and director of Studio XO, developed the 'Digital Skins' (2011) series that explored the extent to which textiles could be programmed to create changeable patterns and to vary colors like a chameleon's skin [17]. A collaboration between the multimedia artist group UVA (United Visual Artists) and Hamish Morrow introduced a virtual print display in his collection called 'Beauty of Technology' (S/S 2004), where sequential 3D flashes of a series of infinite virtual prints were created by digital media and then projected onto the 'blank canvas' of the dress [6]. Thus, Morrow created a print that was not fixed in time, but rather virtual and ever-changing.

Digital media tools have dramatically altered 2D, 3D and 4D images and empowered them with motion-making and interactive capabilities. Indeed, the aforementioned examples of virtual dynamic fashion have revealed some ground-breaking thinking on the future of digitalized fashion regarding its aesthetic and conceptual qualities that go beyond the usual vision. At the same time, digital media will also lead to creating commercially ambitious and newly personalized fashion products by integrating conventional analogue design processes. In particular, interactively customizable virtual dynamic patterns within fashion garments and accessories have recently appeared in personal portable devices, such as mobile phones, cameras, or glasses.

As Quinn [14] mentioned, fashion materials in the future will be more fluid than fixed, responding, changing and adapting to sets of pre-programmed parameters. Dynamic graphical patterns will be an essential means of communicating and expressing the wearer's technological tastes in the fashions of the future. Thus, fashion designers need to integrate existing traditional methods with fashion design elements integrated with digital technologies, and further explore them as part of their creative agendas.

3 Digitalized Dynamic Fashion Illustration Using Motion Graphics: Graphical Patterns in Motion

Digitalized dynamic fashion design permits fashion items to be customized with flexible colors and patterns of both still and moving images, extending the reach of fashion design. For this project, the author intended to present the future potential of a dynamic fashion garment embedded with moving patterns by creating and exhibiting ten digital fashion illustrations of dynamic fabrics that can not only change their overall color but also display complex patterns. The digital illustrations basically focused on the same topic of how to create dynamic garment patterns that visually change over time. However, it also asks the question whether digital media and display technologies integrated into textiles can open new perspectives of flexible and interactive expressions for real-world fashion creations and not just in a virtual space.

Fashion illustration is a visual language to express a fashion message through images, and digital fashion illustration applies digital technology to an analogue fashion illustration. Digital fashion illustration enables unlimited visual expressions and aesthetic effects by providing fashion illustration with movement, variability, interactions, and virtuality through various compositions and multiple repetitions [7]. Its digital image processing capability can extend to 4D animation, called ‘time art’, that goes beyond 2D and 3D. Therefore, digital fashion illustration could be an appropriate medium to represent dynamic, active, or interactive impressions and optical effects, beyond static images.

3.1 Theme

The author created digital fashion illustrations with the theme of ‘psychedelia’ to visualize experimental explorations of screen-based, moving patterns. The term ‘psychedelia’ was given originally to the subculture that used psychedelic drugs often but also refers to psychedelic art or a psychedelic music, reflecting an experience of altered consciousness and hallucinations [18]. This project showcased transformable fashion fabrications with surreal visuals, dramatically bright and fluorescent colors, and kaleidoscopic optical and geometric patterns inspired by psychedelic art. In addition, by playing psychedelic music in the exhibition hall, the author intended to convey both visual and auditory psychedelia. The accompanying fashion illustrations were created in more abstract and monotonous ways to express impulsive and static body images, in contrast with the psychedelic movements of the dynamic patterns within them.

3.2 Method

To create the digital fashion illustrations with Frida Kahlo’s iconic look in mind, the author used the ‘Illustrator’ graphic software. The illustrations were inspired by Etro’s S/S 2013 and A/W 2013/14 collections, photographed by Erik Madigan Heck. To add the dynamic pattern effects to the illustrations, the author collaborated with a group of digital graphic designers and motion artists called ‘Protobacillus’, via the ‘Tumblr’ social network service (SNS). Fabulous psychedelic animations by ‘Protobacillus’ sparked the inspiration for creating the dynamic fabrics and patterns of the digital fashion illustrations. In terms of the technical method, the author used the ‘Illustrator’ to create the digital fashion illustrations as a first step. Next, the author took apart the GIF animations (produced by the ‘After Effects’) in ‘Photoshop’, and then mapped each fabric image in turn to the parts of the garments and accessories in the digital fashion illustrations through photoshopped collages. Finally, each fashion illustration mapped with the sequential fabric images was composed with a video group and saved as a GIF or rendered as an mp4 file by ‘Photoshop’. Thus, the end results were extraordinarily energetic and freshly dynamic graphical patterns. More specific technical method to create a dynamic digital illustration is illustrated in the following section with a sample.

3.3 Dynamic Digital Fashion Illustration with a Sample

This sample (Fig. 3) is a digital fashion illustration that includes dynamic patterns on the back of a t-shirt and a hair accessory. The dynamic patterns in the garment present gradual color changes and animated patterns that are interchangeable with the patterns in the illustration's background. The dynamic patterns present two types of radial shapes and concentric circles, which gradually evolve from one shape to another and then back to the original condition using the replay option. The dynamic patterns expand and contract repeatedly, and the fills and the strokes of the objects are exchanged, creating blurring effects between the objects and the background and between fills and strokes. The different expressive effects represent a virtual dynamic fashion design that is interactive to the demands of wearers and environments.

More specific technical method as exemplified in this sample is as follows: A static fashion illustration (the default condition) with solid base garments was created using ‘Illustrator’ as the first step (Fig. 3a). In the second step, five GIF files were used for dynamic fabrics (Fig. 2). The animation files were opened with multiple layers of separate images in ‘Photoshop’ and had 24 sequential frames that displayed according to the timeline function (Fig. 1a). Of these, some separate images with different colors and patterns were chosen for the dynamic fabrics. In the third step, the default illustration was replicated ten times. Then, the prepared dynamic fabrics were mapped onto the replicated digital illustrations in various ways. In the fourth step, each static digital fashion illustration containing different fabric patterns was composed to create a video group of the dynamic fashion illustration. To render the video group, it was saved as a GIF or rendered as an mp4 file to be played with QuickTime Player. In the last step, the resulting file was opened and the dynamic digital illustration was finally played (Fig. 3p). By selecting different numbers, order, delay time, and looping options for the animation frames in the timeline panel, the dynamic fashion illustration could present a variety of expressions, with different transition speeds, inversion effects, repetition options, etc.; ten digital illustration frames could therefore transform into nineteen frames (Figs. 1b-1, 3p).

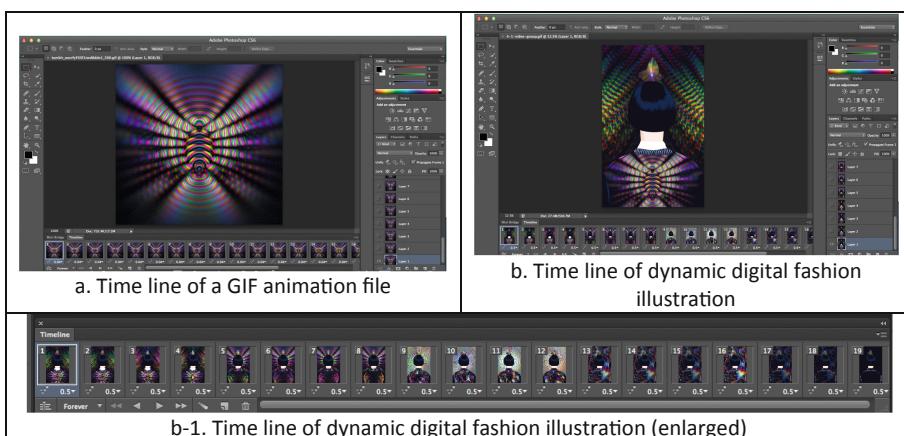


Fig. 1. Production process of a dynamic digital fashion illustration

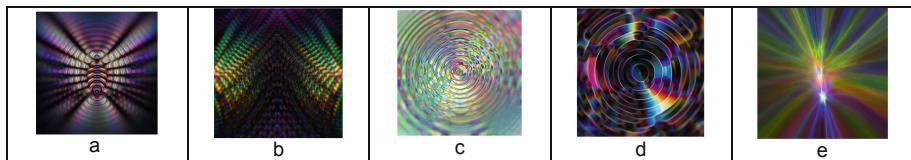


Fig. 2. GIFs (hyperlinked to a google drive) dynamic fabrics (designed by ‘Protobacillus’)

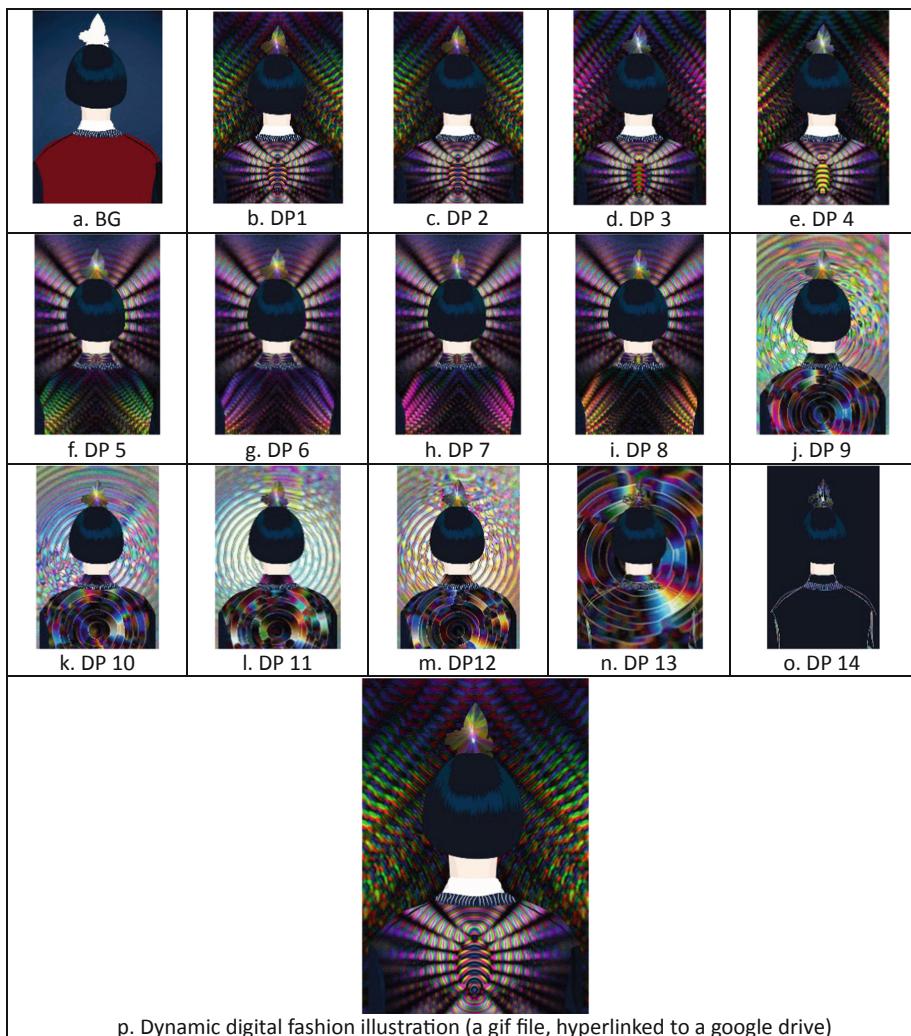


Fig. 3. The base garment (BG) and dynamic graphical patterns (DP) in a t-shirt and an accessory

4 Findings and Discussions

From the virtual experiments of dynamic digital fashion illustrations, the author recognized that digital media can provide a myriad of aesthetics and expressions and identified the following findings.

First, digital dynamic fashion illustrations did not fundamentally characterize ‘variability’ in the colors and patterns in motion but also did demonstrate various expressive effects such as ‘composition of different elements’, ‘multiple duplicability’, and ‘hyper-reality’. The dynamic graphical patterns of the fashion garments and textile-based accessories and the backgrounds of the digital fashion illustrations continued to present flashy animation and idiosyncratic movement with infinitely changing colors, forms, and sizes. This transformed the design elements into a completely different look with dynamic manifestations.

Every single frame of the dynamic graphical samples resulted from the hybrid composites of different image sources, and all the digital illustration frames were integrated to create a video group. The default illustration, including the base garment, was replicated and different patterns were mapped onto the replicated base images. Some illustration frames in the video group were also replicated to the extent allowed by the digital media data storage capacity, in order to generate various expressions and self-evolving changes. The resulting dynamic digital fashion illustration suggests a virtual reality to the viewer and sometimes also an augmented visualization in a hypertext structure. In addition, when posted to an Internet space, the dynamic graphical sample could provide a borderless network space and enable a virtual engagement by various participants.

In this regard, Lee [8] suggested that the main characteristics of digitally based fashion were ‘interaction’, ‘variableness’, ‘virtuality’, ‘multiples’ and ‘hyper-text’. Chun [2] characterized digital art and digital fashion as having ‘perfect duplicability’, ‘interactivity’, ‘networkability’, ‘variability’ and ‘compositeness’. Clarke and Harris [3] said that digital media provide imagined, screen-based scenarios, incorporating imagery that is abstract, hyper-real, macro, time-based, self-generating and fast-evolving. Although the dynamic digital fashion illustrations of this project hardly suggest an interactive effect, one of the significant characteristics of digital art is that they also imply interaction between objects and backgrounds, between more than two objects, or between objects and the viewer by presenting changing dynamic graphical patterns.

Second, the base garment that represented the default condition for the dynamic graphical patterns in the digital experiment was an important element for the visual changes in its colors and patterns. The base garment had plain colors that were ready to be mapped with different dynamic graphical patterns. If the dynamic graphical patterns were to be interactively integrated with digital devices, then virtual, dynamic fashion design, including transformable logos or typography in addition to the different colors and patterns, would lead innumerable styles created from the base garment, and might make its users experience a virtual reality (VR). As such, considering the base garment’s form and style as a generic object could provide fashion designers with a new agenda. Furthermore, the participants in the VR space could become designers or

creators by manipulating personalized dynamic patterns. Farren and Hutchison [4] stated that the key reason the base garment concept is so important is because it allows an extension of what people are already doing with fashion and garments - making choices about what they wear, how they appear, and what that appearance communicates to other people.

Third, the possibility of dynamic graphical patterns integrated into the base garment might enable the concept of a sustainable and ultimate garment, which might generate a new fashion norm where a single garment functions as multiple garments. Farrer [5] has already verified that transformable garments could be directly connected to the sustainable practices of consumers through design versatility. In the dynamic digital fashion illustrations, one base garment could be duplicated and transformed into multiple garment designs with different colors and patterns. The ultimate garment, which could be rechargeable and changeable in the virtual world could potentially reduce waste and transform current fashion norms with their seasonal cycles and trends, as Mackey et al. [11] called it ‘social ecosystem’. Therefore, digitalized dynamic functions will be able to have lots of influences on sustainability in fashion. The versatile garments with dynamic textiles will make consumers involved in sustainability in fashion in everyday lives. Digitalized dynamic fashion garments will be used for a long time by wearers with multiple changes of their looks, reducing wastes and extending their life cycles. In addition, dynamic textile garments which can interact with wearers will strengthen a relationship between consumers and garments with do-it-yourself thoughts, satisfying their needs and ultimately engaging sustainable values.

Fourth, the notion of time in the digital dynamic fashion illustration looked to be continually cyclic and iterative. When motion was integrated into the static illustration, the element of time was introduced to 4D animations of dynamic fashion garments using the timeline function of the software. The dynamic garments changed from one expression to another or several different expressions - from flamboyant to dull colors and from complicated to simple patterns - and then finally returned back to their initial condition. This means that whenever a designer and a user want to go back to the initial garment design, they could retrieve the initial conditions and original expressions of their own garments without wearing them out. Therefore, the element of time in the digital landscape appeared to yield unlimited extensions through an infinite number of parts and repetitions.

This study proposed that computer graphics and digital imaging technologies integrated into fashion could virtually create eye-catching and futuristic dynamic fashion designs that can change their colors and patterns and can be customized by the wearers or users. The active wearers or users would be able to download the dynamic garments to try them on the new digital garments and sometimes create their own fashion designs in both the virtual and tangible worlds by controlling the dynamic graphical patterns with digital technology.

Tangible fashion garments merged with the virtual dynamic graphical patterns using digital imaging interface will enhance more customizable and interactive fashion design in everyday life. For this, the integration of antennae in clothing and textile articles as Loss et al. [9] mentioned might deserve to be considered. If the antennae can

be used to charge devices and even sensors for monitoring and communication, like the ‘Internet of things’, it might play a role as an interface which wearers can send optimal colors and patterns to their garments, providing ubiquitous communication between the user and the monitor. Then, those dynamic fashion garments which respond to consumer expectations also will lead to sustainability.

Dynamic fashion design might bring about a radical change in the concept of future fashion as a moment in time, requiring various multi-disciplinary collaborations. With the emerging advances in digital technology that will continue for the foreseeable future, norms of time and space will be continuously shifting and evolving, challenging the current state of fashion and changing design and manufacturing methods.

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Digital Fashion Communication: The Influence of Instagram-Queer-Makeup Artists and Their Future Developments on the Industry

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Abstract. This paper aims to explore how queer makeup has been largely influencing the cosmetics industry and its trends. Therefore, grounding data about new technologies in communication and queer art where combined in order to support our theory: for the past 50 years, the LGBTQ community has been the main creative gear of our society. The data allowed the creation of a “virtual makeup” device and visuals that exemplify what the future of the industry will look like. Lastly, through our observations, we strongly believe in the economic potential of our results however our prototypes need future development.

Keywords: Digital fashion · Makeup · Queer · Instagram

1 Introduction

If you look at modern communication devices like the mobile phone and the way people use it in the city, you will see a certain type of physical posture and form. Hand to the ear while talking and walking, hands free talking to what appears to be an invisible person and more recently as with the proliferation of ear buds for music, holding the phone like a plate in front of the mouth. All these stances are a kind of public theater, the public art and gesture of private conversation.

With this concept of technology, posture, performance and the kind of urban dance we have tried to construct devices and systems that are driven by these phenomena. When wearing these objects, it's possible to turn mundane environments and human surfaces into digital theatrical gestures. They owe a great deal to accentuated posture as its so large small head movement cause an exaggerated display. Public conversation as theatrical dance (Fig. 1).

We are also trying to go against the modern fashion design paradigm of utilitarianism. Practical sportswear and workwear domination and the average urban street

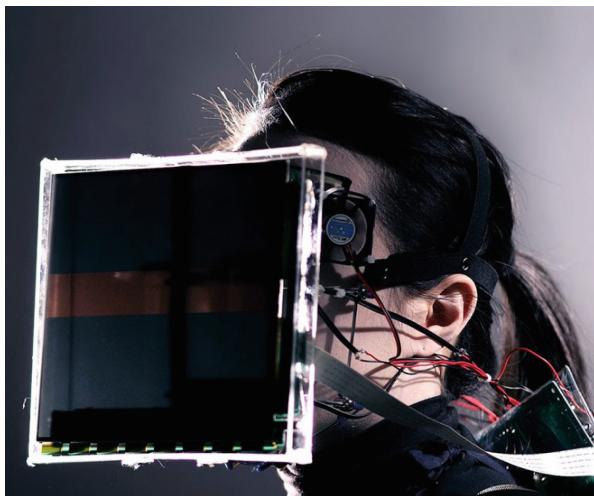


Fig. 1. Title: LED face projection device – “Run”, 2007. (Source: Authors)

around the globe. The objects and systems themselves are deconstructed mobile phones, 3D prints and augmented projections with a laser cut shells to form the structures (Figs. 2, 3).

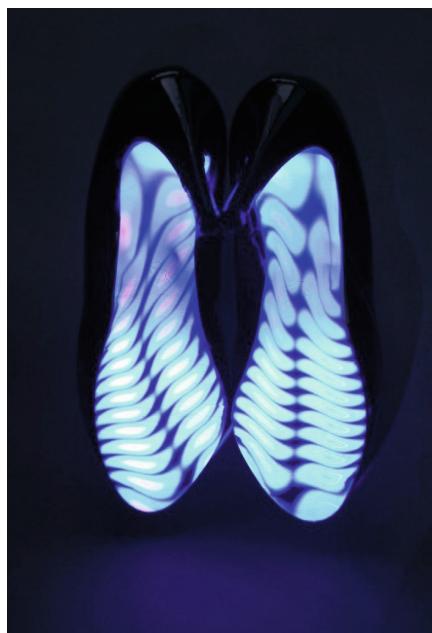


Fig. 2. Title: Augmented reality high heels, 2007. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 3. Title: 3D modelling for avant-garde headpiece, 2007. (Source: Authors)

2 The 5 Future Developments of Contemporary Communication

2.1 Fashion, Fetishism, Branding and New Augmented Technology

The nature of augmented systems is a new series of senses altogether, visually augmented reality is a complex overlay of reality plus. The interesting and unique part of new augmented systems is are trans biological desires and creative malleable system of gender, sexuality and identity.

2.2 Social Networks and New Forms of Augmented Sexuality

The concepts of space, time, and social relationship in urban environment are put in flux, while there are growing interests among communities of artists viewing city as social playground, public space, fluid canvas, and invisible layers of network. Our objective is to conceptually explore the possibilities of site-specific locative media and design. To enable a connection between the environment, location and sexuality.

2.3 Paradigm Shifts, Code, Complexity and Pleasure

After digital body modification has become endemic, we envisage new visual and mathematical forms of pleasure and identity, many identities become one and one can become many.

2.4 Clouds and the Internet of Things for Transhuman Desire

The emergent property of collective desire as a result of cloud based digital global interactions will in our view give rise to a phenomenon that we are only now just seeing the shadow of. These new integrated expressions of liquidity in desire will be the domain of a new artform of exploration. In the past the concept of new physical experience of chemically induced and modified pleasure, with augmented systems we are at last free of the biological constraints and thus free to creatively explore.

2.5 Sociology and Ethics

As the biological attributes of augmented, digital fashion and beauty become transformed, beauty and desirability will of course become less generally valuable but more specifically valued. Society was (and perhaps still is) driven by a seeking out and commodifying beauty. Within that, the pressure to be a certain pre-defined physical form (like the wolf in “The Beauty Myth”) has been pursued by medical procedures, and then subverted by the body modification movement. Malleable and ever-changing digital modification can be seen as the next logical step in being free of biological constraints. Once everyone is beautiful through augmented systems then pre-defined beauty will be common place and thus have little value or power, we will finally be free to define beauty by other vectors.

3 History of Queer Art and Media

Since the beginning of human life forms in the planet Earth, art was always a present form of expression, from the Neolithic Age when man was drawing pictures on the cave walls and objects to express their habits or myths, passing through its resignification during the Renaissance and Industrial Revolution till what we know today as art. Art is around us and it's an intrinsic human condition.

Within that perspective, queer art, so as art itself, has always been present in the human history, it is important to understand that for some historians and researchers the concept of queer art has only emerged in specific moments in history because our societies had for many years excluded LGBTQ individuals off the narrative. This argument could be used to completely support this paper, but forward in the reading, we also present other points that motivated this research and project.

In the UK, even though the death penalty for sodomy was abolished in 1861, being queer was still punishable with imprisonment till 1967 when the partial decriminalization of sex between men happened. During this period artists were able to create connections and build communities, their work was most of the time coded in order to communicate secretly their desires or their will to find others with the same identity [16].

Moving forward 2 years in history, 1969 is known as the year that initiates the gay liberation movement, which started after the Stonewall Riots in Manhattan, New York City. A series of violent demonstrations against the police urged gay activist movements across America and the world, within a year of the riots Pride Parades started to

be held and the movement grown exponentially. Queer artists started to focus their work on activism and political issues regarding their community.

One of the biggest queer artists of that era was Andy Warhol. Originally from Pittsburgh, Warhol moved to New York after the 50s and lived as an openly gay artist, most of his work includes photographs of gay nightlife personas, drag queens, sex workers, and others. His called “pop-art” created a clear separation in what we see as queer aesthetic nowadays and still influences artists from all generations.

Even though sexual awakening had been a milestone for the society during the 70s, consequently empowering the LGBTQ movement, the turning of the decade was one the darkest moments for the community. The AIDS pandemic began in the early 1980s and rapidly affected more than 100,000 people in the US by 1989 because the disease first appeared in homosexual patients, politicians didn't act fast enough to identify the cases, which resulted in the loss of thousands of lives. LGBTQ artists started focusing on empowering the community to fight for action and survival [4].

Gran Fury was one the most famous and influential art-collective at the time, mainly using their platform to promote awareness about the virus and the forms of prevention, also helped to break the stereotype that HIV was only transmitted between gay and lesbian individuals. Their artistic protest pushed various politicians such as the New York mayor Ed Koch to address the AIDS pandemic. Between their famous works we can highlight “The Government has Blood on its Hands”, “Kissing Doesn't Kill” and “Silence = Death”, the last one being one of the most referenced pieces of the movement and has its own documentary [1].

From inside the collective Gran Fury, one artist has left a legacy that is celebrated worldwide. Keith Haring moved to New York in 1978 to study painting in the School of Visual Arts, he started to get attention when his work was found in a variety of advertisement chalkboards placed in subways stations across the city, he gained visibility when his work was featured together with brands such as Absolut Vodka and Coca-Cola. Haring was openly gay and advocate of safe-sex, unfortunately, he was diagnosed with the virus by 1988 and the last years of his life was dedicated to bringing awareness about the disease.

Warhol's and Haring's art opened the chapter for other queer scenes to grow in New York, one of the most interesting and subversive people on the rise was the so-called “Club Kids”. In the 80s and 90s, New York had almost duplicated its population due to the opportunities on the big apple, the city was also known by its prestigious art institutes and universities which brought many creative people to the city. One of those creative characters was Michael Alig who came from Indiana to attend Architecture at Fordham University on a scholarship, Alig was seduced by the cities opportunities and open-minded environments, later he gave up on the university and became a waiter at the famous club Danceteria.

Alig became a party-promoter and a nightlife celebrity, he had a group of eccentric friends, all with different personas and looks. The Club Kids were New York new sensation in the queer community, their group had nightlife icons, such as, RuPaul, James St. James and Amanda Lepore, their aesthetic and lifestyle was described by James as “part drag, part clown, part infantilism”, they became extremely popular after appearances on the Geraldo Show and in the Joan Rivers Show, which catapulted their

visuals across America and the world with one strong message “we all born naked and the rest is drag.”

Unfortunately, Alig witnessed the end of his nightlife career when he was incarcerated in 1996 for the murderer of one of his fellow Club Kid friend. Andre “Angel” Melendez was killed by Alig and a friend after a drug-dealing discussion, after hitting the victim with a hammer, Alig dismembered his body, packed in a box and left in a river, which was found after a few days later by the police. Alig spent 17 years in prison and was released back in 2014.

In the other hand, Rupaul Andre Charles, known just as Rupaul has recently become one of the most famous people in the entertainment industry and created an empire for himself. Born and raised in San Diego, Rupaul moved to New York City during the 90s and became a successful drag queen performing at the club Limelight doing numerous appearances in tv shows and music videos. The stardom breakthrough came in 1993 with the song “Supermodel (You better work)” which peaked at number 45 in the billboard hot 100 and exposed the “art of drag” and Rupaul to a worldwide audience.

By 2008 Rupaul, along with being considered the most commercially successful drag queen in America, started producing Rupaul’s Drag Race, a competition reality tv-show which features drag queen performers from across the country aiming to win the title of “America’s Next-Drag Superstar”. Currently, in its 11th season and has spin-offs like Rupaul’s Drag Race All Stars, the show is a worldwide phenomenon responsible for turning drag queens like Bianca Del Rio, Trixie Mattel and Aquaria into international stars in a short period of time and changing how the contemporary mainstream media views LGBTQ+ individuals and queer artists.

In 2019, with the advent of Instagram and other social media channels queer artists, specially drag queens found in social media a way to connect rapidly and massively with their public, that exposure opened the industry and the number of new artists keeps growing every day. This “golden era of drag” is directly influencing fashion and the beauty industry in a way that hasn’t seen before.

4 Instagram Queer Makeup Artists

It’s a known fact that the beauty industry creates trends almost daily, the main reason for this constantly changing market is their large demand for innovation. According to report released in 2018 by research company Orbis the global cosmetic products market was valued at USD 532.43 billion in 2017 and by 2023 is expected to reach the incredible amount of USD 805.61 billion, this data represents a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.14% between 2018–2023.

In the past two decades, our medical and technological development has helped the world’s population to decline both fertility and mortality rates resulting in its aging. Both men and women are interested in maintaining their youthful features for a longer period and improve their well-being on investing in skin care, makeup, hair care, and others. By 2050, 2.09 billion of the population will be over 60 years old this demand on the rise opens room for constant innovation in cosmetics, thus boosting the beauty industry growth [8].

Social media has proven to be the main source from where the trends become viral and the beauty industry launches its innovations. Cosmetics, in special, makeup and color cosmetics are mostly used to enhance facial features but can also conceal or create different ones depending only on the user's creativity. Drag queens and queer performers have been exploring with makeup since long ago their techniques were primarily used to conceal masculine features and turn them more feminine, creating the fantasy of female-impersonation.

The use of cosmetics for a more artistic purpose has pushed brands to develop different products and spread those innovations to the mainstream, for example, the technique called "contouring" was originally used by drag queens, they use creams and powders in darker colors to create stronger shadows around the deep areas of the face in order to trick the light and feminize the features. This trend had its tipping point when the reality-show celebrity Kim Kardashian took a selfie showing an after and before picture with the technique applied by her makeup artist Scott Barnes.

The 2018's ELLE documentary "BEAT. Contour. Snatched. How Drag Queens Shaped the Biggest Makeup Trends" shows exactly how drag makeup shifted the industry and society, what it was considered as taboo before is now celebrated by fashion magazines, celebrities, and media. This documentary also highlights how Instagram and Youtube makeup artists are extremely influenced by the work of queer artists and unconsciously spread those trends across the thousands of videos and content created every day.

Simultaneously to more mainstream makeup artists using social media for their business, queer artists also are taking vantage of the platform and using Instagram to bring their ideas into life and show their avant-garde perspective into a broader audience. Within the huge demand for trends, innovation and for the fact that now people can be reached with no more than a click, the makeup industry is getting in touch with those artists faster than before and brands are developing products specifically for queer artists or for consumers who want to take part in the lifestyle.

One example of that is the brand Sugarpill created in 2003 by the drag queen superfan and punk-goth creature herself called Amy "Shrinkle", the brand always focused on brighter and bolder stage makeup and immediately was adopted as their favorite for most drag queens and queer artists. Through their fast growth, Sugarpill has sold out their products in every edition of the drag queen convention DragCon which is held twice annually in New York and Los Angeles. Recently, Sugarpill has paired with the winner of "Rupaul's Drag Race All Stars Season 3" Trixie Mattel to release an eyeshadow kit called "Oh Honey", the name originated from one the catchphrases of the queen, the limited-edition kit was an immense success to this date is out of stock in their website.

A brand was also created by one of the queens from the show, the Miss Fame Beauty features the makeup art by the queen Miss Fame runner-up in the 7th season of "Rupaul's Drag Race". Fame released in 2018 a kit of lipsticks paired with, what they called as, "Experimental Glitter" a high-shine loose glitter to top the lipsticks for a more vibrant look. The brand was featured on many Youtube and Instagram makeup channels, with positive reviews and sales Miss Fame is planning on releasing new products early this year.

The sale success and visibility are not just a single-way road from queer entrepreneurs and queer consumers, this movement had also reached the mainstream society. Jeffree Star is a queer androgynous celebrity who became illustrious between the YouTube community for his shocking yet glamorous looks and makeup tips. In 2014 started they own makeup brand with only 3 lip-glosses, by this year Jeffree has a net-worth estimated in USD \$50 million and his main consumer is young-woman from 13 to 25 years old.

Those examples are listed to show that queer art came a long way since the 60 s, from being a taboo and marginalized by the society to now being praised and accepted by most industries, but LGBTQ+ individuals agree that still a long way to go on equality and recognition, and that this community has shaped our world and will help to shape our future.

5 Future Developments on Beauty Industry

According to the data presented in the last two chapters, we created this project based on the trends and predictions regarding the beauty industry and its parallel relationship with the queer community. We emphasize that most trends presented haven't reach a final business implementation, in that way the result of this paper is also considered as an experimental piece which will go through future developments.

Internet-age artists are constantly mixing reality and the virtual space, in order to change our perceptions of what is real and to simulate what they think our future will look like. With that perspective in mind, our research shows that one of the movements that have been evolving on Instagram between queer artists can be named as “Virtual Makeup” or “3D-makeup”. Using a variety of techniques as 3D modeling, face-tracking, VR & AR filters, artists are simulating of what beauty and makeup will look like in the future.

Recently featured in the American online magazine “Vice”, Ines Marzat also known as “Ines Alpha” is one of the names starting this movement. Based in Paris, Ines has been collaborating with diverse artists and even cosmetic brands to generate her visuals, her aesthetics are very bubbly and holographic and most of her pieces are small videos posted on Instagram every month.

Keeping in mind the growth of this movement, also the opportunities for innovation and finally its business potential, we decided to approach “Virtual Makeup” with a design perspective on which visuals and a device were created to exemplify how a cosmetic store of the future will look like.

6 Prototype of a “Virtual Makeup” Device

A semester before the start of this project we explored the creation of performances masks that simulated makeup styles, in order to combine those object's aesthetic value and technological appliances available, we decided to move forward into a “Virtual Makeup” device prototype (Figs. 4, 5 and 6).



Fig. 4. Title: Embroidered mask 01, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 5. Title: Embroidered mask 02, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 6. Title: Embroidered mask 03, 2018. (Source: Authors)

For 4 months we explored the creation of a “Virtual Makeup” device prototype and videos that simulate how a cosmetic store of the future can look like, keeping in mind the role of the queer community into what we know as beauty nowadays and how it’s going to evolve. This chapter aims to explain and show the design process in detail from the initial sketches, photogrammetry process, 3D modeling, face-tracking, projection mapping, and physical prototyping.

The first sketches were created aiming to find out which area of the body is best to place the device and took into consideration the visuals of past queer artists for the shape. The following images are presented in a timeline order for a better understanding of the process (Figs. 7, 8 and 9).



Fig. 7. Title: Body placement sketches, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 8. Title: Selected placement: Neck – Sketches, 2018. (Source: Authors)

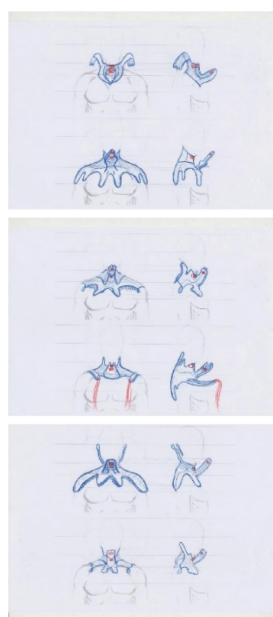


Fig. 9. Title: Side and front view for 3D modelling – Sketches, 2018. (Source: Authors)

After the development of the sketches, the goal was to create the “neck-corset-device” into a 3D environment for faster prototyping, aiming to speed the process we used the technique of photogrammetry to capture in detail the features of the torso to place the device with precision. Photogrammetry is a technique that uses 360° pictures and translates that data into a 3D mesh that can be used inside of any 3D software, the following pictures are also in a timeline to exemplify the process in detail (Figs. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16).

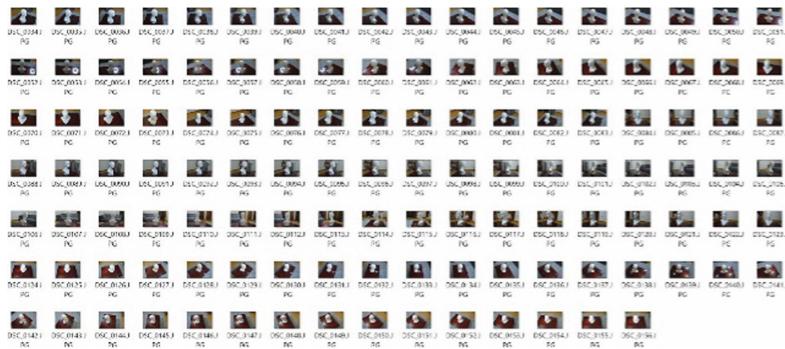


Fig. 10. Title: File with pictures in 360 degrees, 2018. (Source: Authors)

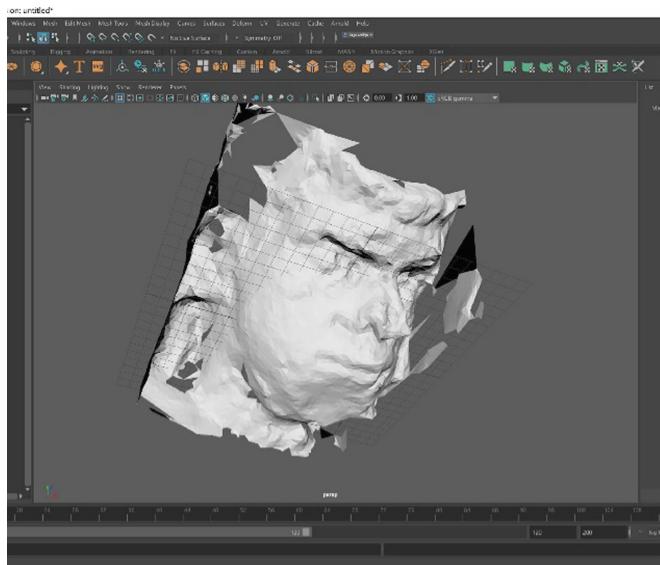


Fig. 11. Title: 1st attempt at photogrammetry technique, 2018. (Source: Authors)

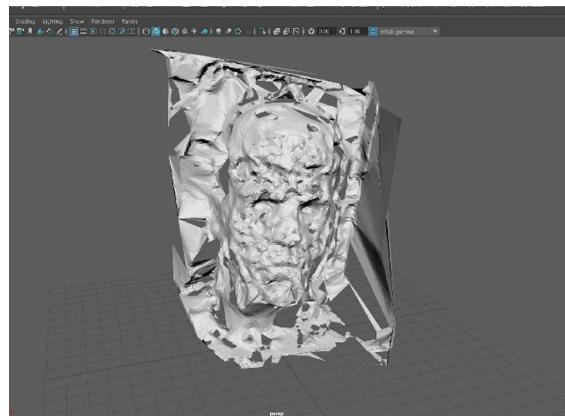


Fig. 12. Title: 2nd attempt at photogrammetry technique, 2018. (Source: Authors)

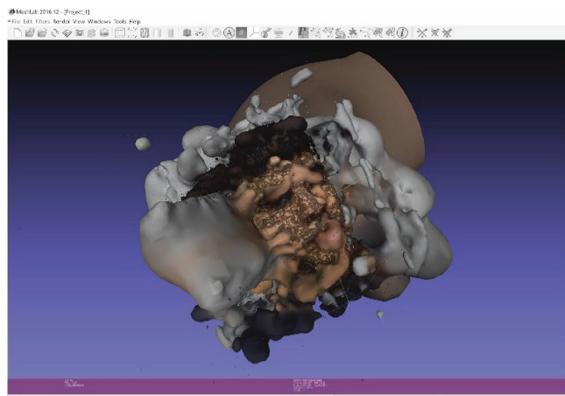


Fig. 13. Title: 3rd attempt at photogrammetry technique, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 14. Title: 4th attempt at photogrammetry technique, 2018. (Source: Authors)

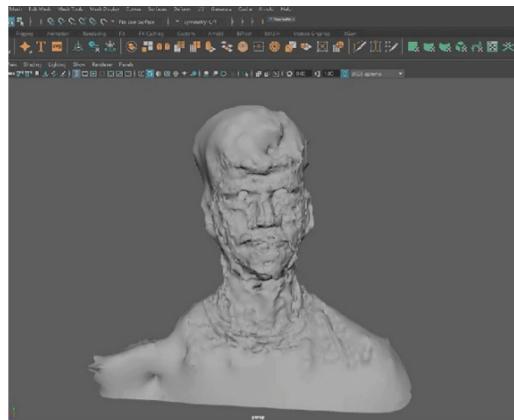


Fig. 15. Title: 5th attempt at photogrammetry technique, 2018. (Source: Authors)

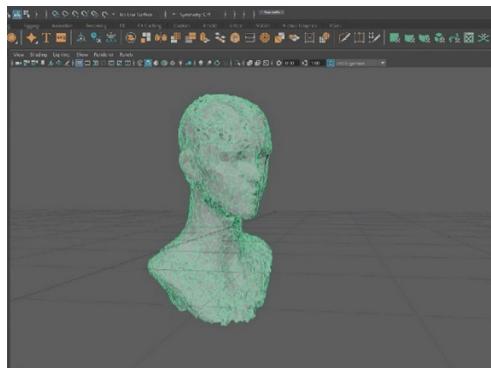


Fig. 16. Title: Final attempt at photogrammetry technique, 2018. (Source: Authors)

The third step was to quickly prototype the device into a mannequin head to understand the proper placement of the mirror and the projector aiming to properly reflect the “virtual makeup” into the face (Figs. 17, 18, 19 and 20).



Fig. 17. Title: 1st attempt at a fast prototype with metal filaments, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 18. Title: EVA fast prototype – Projector box, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 19. Title: EVA fast prototype – Projection reflected to the mannequin face through a over the head mirror, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 20. Title: EVA fast prototype – Projection reflected to the mannequin face through a under the neck mirror, 2018. (Source: Authors)

The final step was to model the device in 3D and adjust the shape for 2D unfolding inside of the software “Pepakura”, in this way the object can easily go through a laser cut machine and be assembled (Figs. 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30 and 31).

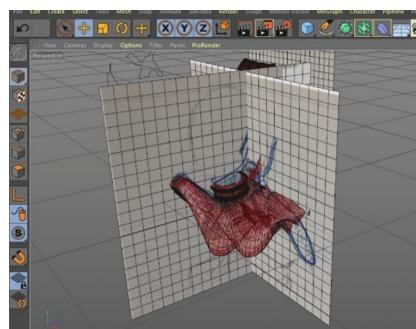


Fig. 21. Title: 3D modelling attempt with the front and side view sketches, 2018. (Source: Authors)

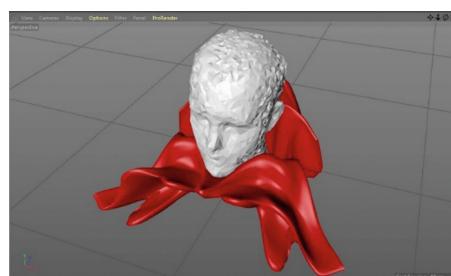


Fig. 22. Title: 3D modelling attempt with the front and side view sketches 2. (Source: Authors)

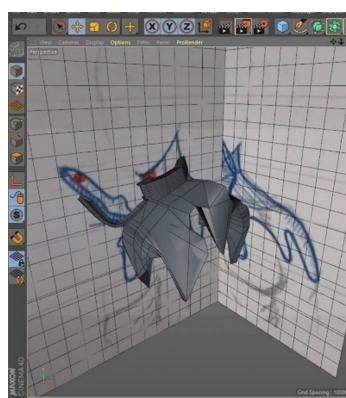


Fig. 23. Title: 3D modelling attempt with the front and side view sketches 3, 2018. (Source: Authors)

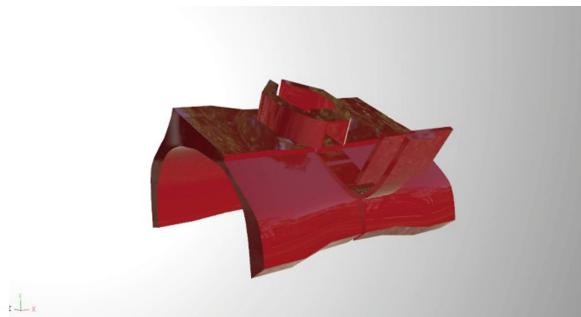


Fig. 24. Title: 3D modelling modifications, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 25. Title: 3D modelling modifications 2, 2018. (Source: Authors)

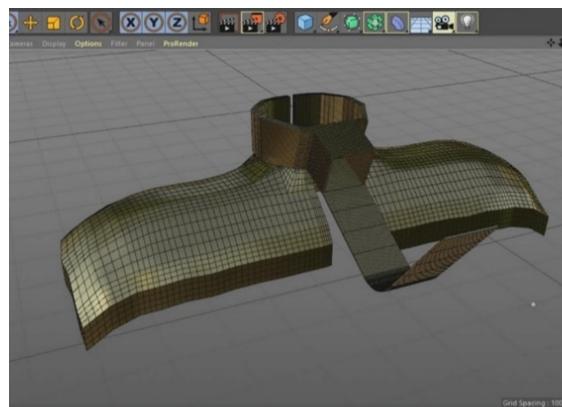


Fig. 26. Title: 3D modelling modifications 3, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 27. Title: 1st attempt at unfolding on “Pepakura”, 2018. (Source: Authors)

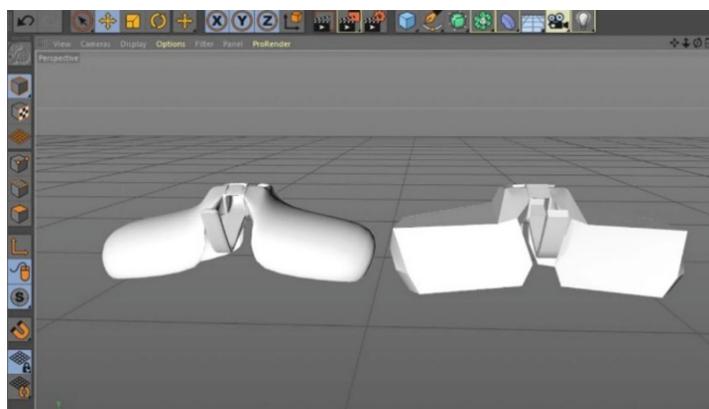


Fig. 28. Title: Final design changes, 2018. (Source: Authors)

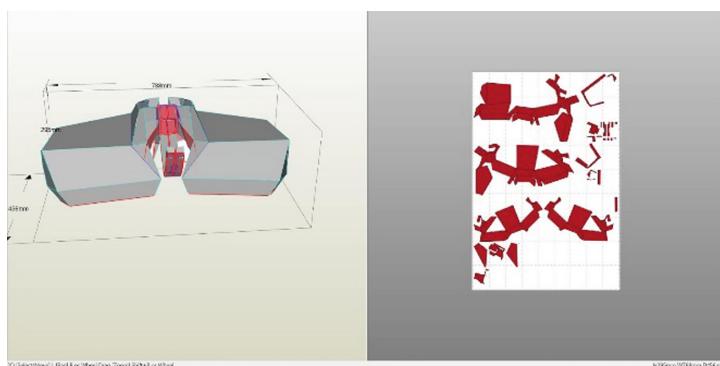


Fig. 29. Title: Final design changes unfolded on “Pepakura”, 2018. (Source: Authors)

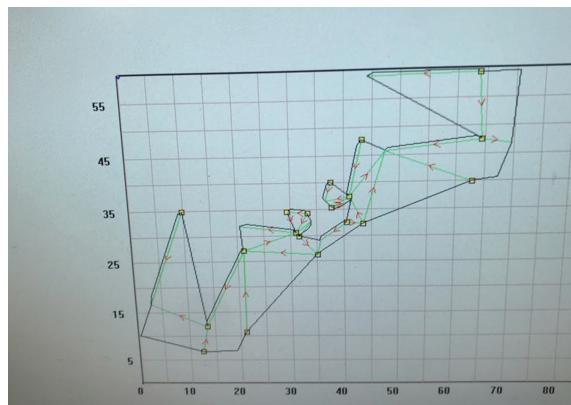


Fig. 30. Title: Final design placed on laser-cuter software, 2018. (Source: Authors)

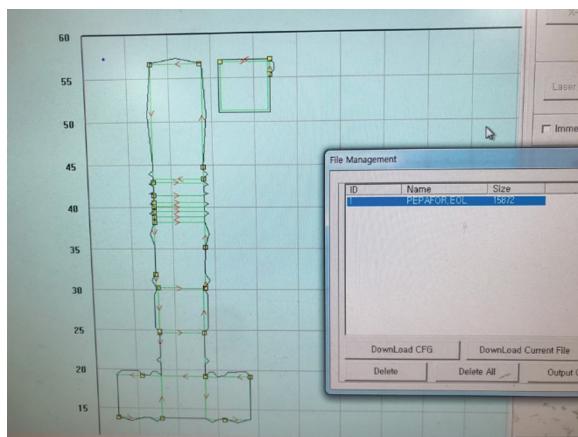


Fig. 31. Title: Final design placed on laser-cuter software 2, 2018. (Source: Authors)

7 Final Results

The result of this work can be described as the prototype of a device for a future cosmetic store, where the experience and the “instagammable” value was taken in consideration for a more media-driven retail contact with the consumer. The device is a neck-corset structure made in 3D which the model was unfolded in 2D and laser-cut, the structure was spray painted in red, the beam projector and the mirror was added in a 13 degrees angle with a secondary fiberglass filament structure to keep stability. An animation with “virtual makeup” graphics were projected into the beamer and reflected on the face (Figs. 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37).



Fig. 32. Title: Assembled prototype 1, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 33. Title: Assembled prototype 2, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 34. Title: Assembled prototype with 3D animation, 2018. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 35. Title: Prototype in a model, 2018. (Source: Authors)

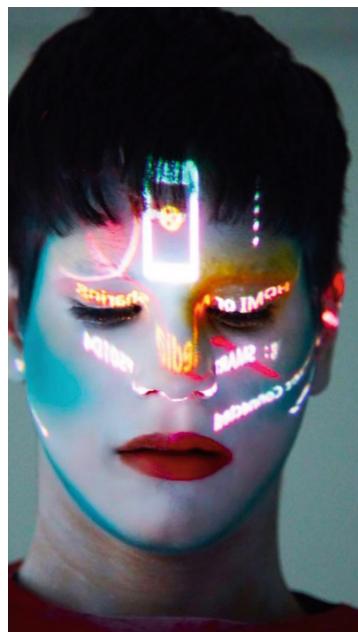


Fig. 36. Title: Adjusting the animation into the face, 2018. (Source: Authors)

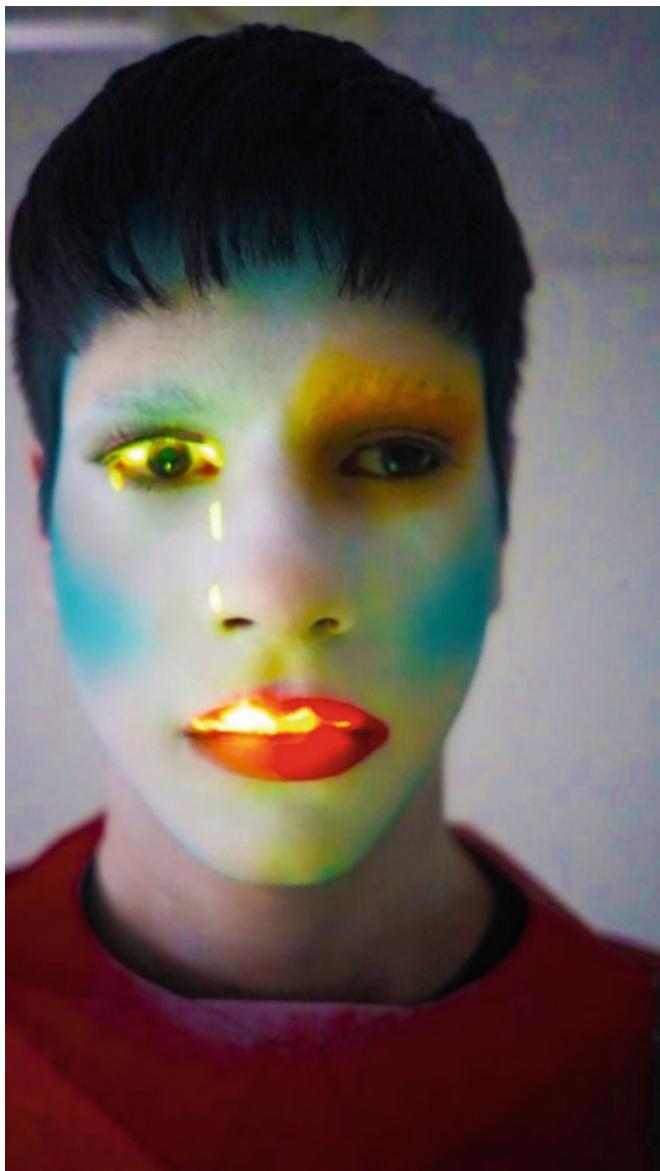


Fig. 37. Title: “Virtual Makeup” into the face, 2018. (Source: Authors)

After successfully being able to project the makeup into the face with the help of a wearable device, we continue the visual exploration of “Virtual Makeup” on a more environment-controlled media, we decided to use video to create more detailed pieces emphasizing the combination of real makeup with virtual elements (Figs. 38, 39 and 40).



Fig. 38. Title: Poecilostomatoida – Print screen, 2019. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 39. Title: Top and bottom lashes cause I'm versatile – Print screen, 2019. (Source: Authors)



Fig. 40. Title: Unprovoked – Print screen, 2019. (Source: Authors)

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize again that this project reflects trends and predictions that are happening, and we strongly believe they will become mainstream and a business opportunity in 5 to 7 years. Keeping that in mind, we do agree that the project and the device should also go through future developments, specifically changing the device shape and design for a more suitable wearable feature, and the “virtual makeup” animations should be more detailed in order to enrich the visual experience of the consumers.

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Multimodal Neural Machine Translation of Fashion E-Commerce Descriptions

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Abstract. Neural networks become extremely popular in artificial intelligence. In this paper we show how they aid in automatically translating fashion item descriptions and how they use fashion images to generate the translations. More specifically, we propose a multimodal neural machine translation model in which the decoder that generates the translation attends to visually grounded representations that capture both the semantics of the fashion words in the source language and regions in the fashion image. We introduce this novel neural architecture in the context of fashion e-commerce, where product descriptions need to be available in multiple languages. We report state-of-the-art multimodal translation results on a real-world fashion e-commerce dataset.

Keywords: Multimodal neural machine translation ·
Multimodal multilingual space · Alignment model ·
Stacked cross-attention · Fashion e-commerce

1 Introduction

Internationalisation is considered as a big trend in e-commerce. There is an increasing interest by e-commerce businesses to expand to other countries. Language is here an important barrier. E-retailers struggle to efficiently translate their product descriptions and websites in a variety of languages. Currently, this is still done manually. However, consumers prefer to read product descriptions in their native language to get an optimal understanding of the product specifications and to be able to compare products.

Neural machine translation (NMT) is an approach to machine translation which uses an artificial neural network to predict a sequence of words in the target language given a sequence of words in the source language. In multimodal neural machine translation (MNMT), the source sequence is paired with an image and the target sequence is generated aided by the information in the image. The fashion e-commerce domain, where product descriptions reference to fine-grained product attributes somewhere in the image (e.g., V-neck, floral print), is a challenging but interesting domain for MNMT which requires to efficiently integrate the visual and textual information. State-of-the-art NMT systems are sequence-to-sequence networks with an attention-based encoder-decoder architecture. The encoder encodes each source word with a vector representation which captures the word's semantics. At each timestep, the decoder outputs the most likely target word by looking at the source word representations and the target words generated in previous timesteps. In this work, we propose a

MNMT model which jointly learns to align semantically related source words, target words and image regions and to translate. Hence, it infers a multimodal, multilingual space where a source word, target word and image region that refer to the same fashion attribute have vector representations which are close together. This way the source word representations become visually contextualised or *visually grounded*, which informs the decoder about the visual context in an efficient way.

The main contributions of our paper are:

- We infer a multimodal, multilingual space in which we embed an image region, source word and target word that refer to the same fashion attribute close together. In this space, they are aligned through an attention-based alignment model which uses cosine similarity to measure semantic relatedness. Next, the decoder attends to the inferred visually grounded representations of our source words.
- We propose a new, natural setting for multimodal translation, that is fashion e-commerce, which is challenging because of its references to fine-grained fashion attributes and the limited amount of training data.
- We show state-of-the art multimodal translation results on a real-world fashion e-commerce dataset.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In Sect. 2 we review other work related to the subject of this paper. Next, we elaborate our model architecture in Sect. 3. In Sect. 4 we describe our experimental setup. The results of the conducted experiments can be found in Sect. 5. Finally, we present our conclusions and provide directions for future work in Sect. 6.

2 Related Work

Unimodal machine translation models are trained with pairs of sentences, where the target language sentence is the translation of the source language sentence. Currently, neural machine translation is the most popular and successful technique. The neural networks are in the form of sequence-to-sequence networks with an attention-based encoder-decoder architecture. [2] were the first to introduce an attention mechanism in the decoder. The intuition behind it is to compute the expected alignment of every source word with the next target word and to jointly translate. The pure text-based model of [2] will serve as our unimodal neural machine translation (UNMT) baseline.

There is a current interest in MNMT and more specifically in using additional visual information to aid the translation [3–5, 7, 9, 19]. Although these works achieve promising results, they indicate that further exploration to what is the best way to benefit from the visual context is needed. One approach in MNMT is to use a double attention mechanism, one over the source words and another over different regions of the image [3, 5]. However, this approach neglects to exploit the semantic relatedness between the image regions, source words and target words which is an important indicator for the relevance of the visual information. Our approach makes use of an additional alignment model to align the image regions, source words and target words to infer visually grounded source word representations. This is different from [9] who project the visual features to the space of source word embeddings and append these

visual words to the head/tail of the source sentence. The encoder then encodes both these visual words and the source words. In contrast to our work, they do not use an alignment model to infer their multimodal space and do not attempt to include the target language in this space. Most closely related to our work is the work of [19] where the visual context is grounded into the encoder through the joint learning of a multimodal space and of a translation model. More precisely, they embed images close to their attended source sentence representations in a multimodal shared space. Additionally, they initialise the decoder hidden state in such a way that the source words closest related to the visual context have more influence during decoding. In contrast, we do not embed full images and sentences in our shared space, but instead work at a finer level to find the latent alignment of image regions and words, which proves to be valuable especially for fashion data. Moreover, we also include the target language to obtain a space which is both multimodal and multilingual [19] report the state-of-the-art results for MNMT and therefore we use their model as our MNMT baseline.

In order to find the semantic correspondences between the image regions, source words and target words we make use of an alignment model. Alignment models have already proven to be useful for other tasks that require to jointly reason over vision and language, such as image captioning [10], visual question answering [1, 17], multimodal search [11] and image-text matching [12, 18].

Neural networks and deep learning models have become an essential item in the toolbox of fashion-related businesses (e.g., in apparel recognition, fashion search, product recommendation and outfit combination). Closer to this work is the work of [13] who generate persuasive textual descriptions of fashion items given a number of key terms that describe the item in order to encourage an online buyer towards a successful purchase. However, their neural architecture ignores the image when generating the persuasive descriptions. The neural architecture proposed in this paper could expand the work of [13] in multimodal and multilingual settings.

3 Methodology

First, we describe the baseline models for UNMT and MNMT in respectively Sects. 3.1 and 3.2. Next, we elaborate our proposed MNMT architecture which aligns the image regions, source words and target words with stacked cross-attention in Sect. 3.2. In all formulas, matrices are written with capital letters and vectors are bolded. We use letters W and b to refer to respectively the weights and bias in linear and non-linear transformations.

During the training phase, all models learn from a training set of examples of paired descriptions in source and target language. The MNMT models also have access to a corresponding image. During the testing phase, the models only have access to the source sentence and image.

3.1 UNMT Baseline

In UNMT the goal is to translate a source sentence $X = (x_1, x_2, \dots, x_M)$ consisting of M words into the correct target sentence $Y = (y_1, y_2, \dots, y_N)$ consisting of N words. Our UNMT baseline is the attention-based encoder-decoder architecture of [2]. For more details, the reader is referred to [2].

3.2 MNMT Baseline

In MNMT, a source sentence $X = (x_1, x_2, \dots, x_M)$ is translated into a target sentence $Y = (y_1, y_2, \dots, y_N)$ aided by the visual information in image I paired with source sentence X . Our MNMT baseline is the model of [19]. The model obtains visually grounded source word representations by sharing the encoder between the translation task and a multimodal space inference task.

Encoder. The encoder is a bidirectional recurrent neural network (BRNN) [15] with gated recurrent units (GRUs) [6]. It produces a source word representation $s_j \in \mathbb{R}^{2d_x}$ for each word x_j of source sentence X by concatenating the forward and backward hidden states.

Shared Space Inference Task. The objective is to infer a shared space for images and source sentences which captures the semantic meaning across the two modalities. Each image is represented with vector $v \in \mathbb{R}^{2048}$ obtained from the *pool5* layer of the convolutional neural network ResNet50 [8] pre-trained on ImageNet [14]. The representation of the source sentence s_{att} is obtained by applying attention to each source word representation s_j with image representation v . This produces attention scores z_j which measure how well the source word at position j corresponds with the image. Next, the attention scores z_j are normalized with the softmax function and used to weight the source words s_j . This way, the words which are more related to the image content get a higher weight in the generated source sentence representation:

$$z_j = \tanh(W_s s_j) \cdot \tanh(W_v v) \quad (1)$$

$$s_{att} = \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j s_j, \text{ with } \beta_j = \text{softmax}([z_1, z_2, \dots, z_M])_j \quad (2)$$

Next, image v and source sentence s_{att} are projected to their representations \hat{v} and \hat{s} in the multimodal space:

$$\hat{v} = \tanh(W_{vemb} v + b_{vemb}) \quad (3)$$

$$\hat{s} = \tanh(W_{semb} s_{att} + b_{semb}) \quad (4)$$

with $\hat{\mathbf{v}}, \hat{\mathbf{s}} \in \mathbb{R}^d$. The projection to the multimodal space is learned by minimizing a triplet loss which enforces that a corresponding image-sentence pair should be closer than a non-corresponding pair:

$$\begin{aligned}\mathcal{L}_{triplet1} = & \sum_e^E \sum_{e' \neq e}^E \max(0, m - f(\hat{\mathbf{v}}_e, \hat{\mathbf{s}}_e) + f(\hat{\mathbf{v}}_e, \hat{\mathbf{s}}_{e'})) \\ & + \sum_e^E \sum_{e' \neq e}^E \max(0, m - f(\hat{\mathbf{v}}_e, \hat{\mathbf{s}}_e) + f(\hat{\mathbf{v}}_{e'}, \hat{\mathbf{s}}_e))\end{aligned}\quad (5)$$

where index e ranges over the number of training examples and m is the margin. In the multimodal space, cosine similarity $f(\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y}) = \frac{\mathbf{x}^T \mathbf{y}}{\|\mathbf{x}\| \cdot \|\mathbf{y}\|}$ measures semantic relatedness.

Translation Task. The visually grounded source word representations s_j are used by the decoder, which is a conditional GRU [16] consisting of two stacked GRUs. At each timestep t , the decoder produces the next target word y_t starting from the previously emitted word y_{t-1} , the previous decoder hidden state \mathbf{h}_{t-1} and the source context vector \mathbf{c}_t^{att} :

$$\mathbf{o}_t = \tanh(E_y y_{t-1} + W_h \mathbf{h}_t + W_c \mathbf{c}_t^{att}) \quad (6)$$

$$P(y_t | y_{t-1}, \mathbf{h}_t, \mathbf{c}_t^{att}) = \text{softmax}(W_{out} \mathbf{o}_t) \quad (7)$$

where $E_y y_{t-1} \in \mathbb{R}^{dy}$ is the vector representation of the previously emitted word and context vector \mathbf{c}_t^{att} is acquired by applying Bahdanau's attention [2] on the source word representations s_j based on the decoder hidden state proposal \mathbf{h}'_t from the first GRU. At timestep $t = 0$ the decoder hidden state \mathbf{h}_0 is initialized such that the source words most closely related to the image have a bigger influence during translation decoding. More precisely, \mathbf{h}_0 is computed as a weighed sum of the attended source sentence representation s_{att} and the mean of the source word representations s_j :

$$\mathbf{h}_0 = \tanh\left(W_{init} \left(\lambda s_{att} + (1 - \lambda) \frac{1}{M} \sum_{j=1}^M s_j \right)\right) \quad (8)$$

with weight λ a hyperparameter. During training, we quantify the quality of the translation with the cross entropy loss:

$$\mathcal{L}_{cross-entropy} = - \sum_e^E \sum_t^T \mathbf{y}_{et} \cdot \log(\bar{\mathbf{y}}_{et}) \quad (9)$$

where indices e and t range over respectively the number of training examples and number of timesteps, \mathbf{y}_{et} is the one-hot encoded ground truth vector for training example e at timestep t , and $\bar{\mathbf{y}}_{et}$ is the vector of predicted probabilities as outputted by

the softmax layer for training example e at timestep t . Therefore, the complete loss function for the MNMT baseline is:

$$\mathcal{L} = \alpha \mathcal{L}_{cross-entropy} + (1 - \alpha) \mathcal{L}_{triplet1} \quad (10)$$

where α determines the contribution of the translation loss versus the visual grounding loss.

3.3 MNMT with Alignment Model Based on Stacked Cross-Attention

Similar to the MNMT baseline, our model learns a shared space jointly with the translation task to obtain visually grounded source word representations. In this shared space, we align source words, target words and image regions which refer to the same fashion attribute. Hence in contrast with the MNMT baseline, our space is both multimodal and multilingual and our alignment is finer, resulting in a space which captures fine-grained semantics across the visual and textual modalities. Note that the alignment at the region and word level is latent: we know which sentence corresponds with which image, but which words and image regions correspond is unknown. Therefore, we use an alignment model to learn these correspondences from frequent combinations of words and visual patterns in our training set. The alignment model is based on stacked cross-attention [12]. We will further refer to our model as the MNMT SCA model.

Encoder. The encoder is identical to the one of the MNMT baseline in Sect. 3.2.

Shared Space Inference Task. We obtain image regions by representing the image with the *res4f*-features $\mathbf{v}_k \in \mathbb{R}^{1024}$ ($k = 1..196$) of ResNet50 [8] pre-trained on ImageNet [14]. The image regions \mathbf{v}_k , source words \mathbf{s}_j and target words $E_y y_t$ are projected to $\widehat{\mathbf{v}}_k$, $\widehat{\mathbf{s}}_j$ and $\widehat{\mathbf{y}}_t$ in the multimodal, multilingual space:

$$\widehat{\mathbf{v}}_k = W_{vkemb} \mathbf{v}_k + \mathbf{b}_{vkemb} \quad (11)$$

$$\widehat{\mathbf{s}}_j = W_{sjemb} \mathbf{s}_j + \mathbf{b}_{sjemb} \quad (12)$$

$$\widehat{\mathbf{y}}_t = W_{ytemb} E_y y_t + \mathbf{b}_{ytemb} \quad (13)$$

with $\widehat{\mathbf{v}}_k, \widehat{\mathbf{s}}_j, \widehat{\mathbf{y}}_t \in \mathbb{R}^d$. The projections to the multimodal, multilingual space are learned by minimizing a triplet loss which enforces that corresponding image regions, source words and target words should be closer than non-corresponding ones:

$$\mathcal{L}_{triplet2} = \frac{\ell(\widehat{V}, \widehat{S}) + \ell(\widehat{V}, \widehat{T}) + \ell(\widehat{S}, \widehat{T})}{3} \quad (14)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{with } \widehat{V} &= \{\widehat{\mathbf{v}}_1, \dots, \widehat{\mathbf{v}}_{196}\}, \widehat{S} = \{\widehat{\mathbf{s}}_1, \dots, \widehat{\mathbf{s}}_M\}, \widehat{T} = \{\widehat{\mathbf{y}}_1, \dots, \widehat{\mathbf{y}}_T\} \\ \ell(Q, K) &= \max(0, m - SCA(Q, K) + SCA(Q, K_{hard})) \end{aligned} \quad (15)$$

$$+ \max(0, m - SCA(Q, K) + SCA(Q_{hard}, K)) \quad (16)$$

where m is the margin and $SCA(Q, K)$ is the similarity score of two sets of features Q and K . Note that we use hard negative sampling here, i.e., Q_{hard} and K_{hard} are the hardest negatives for the corresponding feature sets (Q, K) and are given by $Q_{hard} = argmax_{Q' \neq Q} SCA(Q', K)$ and $K_{hard} = argmax_{K' \neq K} SCA(Q, K')$. Similarity score $SCA(Q, K)$ of feature set $Q = \{\mathbf{q}_1, \mathbf{q}_2, \dots, \mathbf{q}_{Q_{tot}}\}, \mathbf{q}_i \in \mathbb{R}^d$ and feature set $K = \{\mathbf{k}_1, \mathbf{k}_2, \dots, \mathbf{k}_{K_{tot}}\}, \mathbf{k}_i \in \mathbb{R}^d$ is computed with stacked cross-attention. Stacked cross-attention works in two stages of attention. In the first stage, we compute the cosine similarities $f(\mathbf{q}_i, \mathbf{k}_j)$ of all pairs of \mathbf{q}_i and \mathbf{k}_j . These cosine similarities are thresholded at zero and normalized to get attention scores c_{ij} for each \mathbf{q}_i and \mathbf{k}_j :

$$c_{ij} = \frac{\max(0, f(\mathbf{q}_i, \mathbf{k}_j))}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^{Q_{tot}} \max(0, f(\mathbf{q}_i, \mathbf{k}_j))^2}} \quad (17)$$

Next a context vector \mathbf{c}_i^{att} is computed for each \mathbf{q}_i as a weighted combination of the \mathbf{k}_j :

$$\mathbf{c}_i^{att} = \sum_{j=1}^{K_{tot}} \gamma_{ij} \mathbf{k}_j, \text{ with } \gamma_{ij} = \text{softmax}([\eta c_{i1}, \eta c_{i2}, \dots, \eta c_{iK_{tot}}])_j \quad (18)$$

with η a hyperparameter. If \mathbf{q}_i corresponds with some \mathbf{k}_j , then \mathbf{c}_i^{att} will be highly correlated with this \mathbf{k}_j . Otherwise, \mathbf{c}_i^{att} will not be correlated with any of the \mathbf{k}_j . In the second stage, the similarity score of the two feature sets is calculated as the average cosine similarity f between feature \mathbf{q}_i and its context vector \mathbf{c}_i^{att} :

$$SCA(Q, K) = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{Q_{tot}} f(\mathbf{q}_i, \mathbf{c}_i^{att})}{Q_{tot}} \quad (19)$$

Translation Task. Aligning the image regions, source words and target words in the multimodal, multilingual space makes that the source word representations \widehat{s}_j become visually grounded. Therefore, we feed these \widehat{s}_j to the decoder (instead of the s_j) to let the decoder benefit from the visual context. The decoder hidden state is initialized with Eq. 8 but with s_{att} computed as:

$$z_j = \max(0, \max_k (f(\widehat{s}_j, \widehat{v}_k))) \quad (20)$$

$$s_{att} = \sum_{j=1}^M \beta_j \widehat{s}_j, \text{ with } \beta_j = \text{softmax}([z_1, z_2, \dots, z_M])_j \quad (21)$$

with f the cosine similarity. The complete loss function for our MNMT SCA model is the same as in Eq. 10, but with the triplet loss $\mathcal{L}_{triplet2}$ of Eq. 14 instead.

4 Experimental Setup

4.1 Dataset

For this task we acquired a new, real-world e-commerce dataset from the company e5 mode, with product descriptions in English, French and Dutch and images of fashion products. The product descriptions describe the main features of a product, but do not provide an exhaustive description. Moreover, not all described product features are visible in the image, e.g., they might apply to the back of the product. The English and Dutch descriptions are sentence-aligned, i.e., they are exact parallel translations. The English and French descriptions have comparable content, i.e., they have similar content but are not translations of each other. The product descriptions are associated with one image that displays the fashion product on a clear, white background. A fashion product can either be a clothing item such as a dress, blouse, pants or underwear, or a clothing accessory like a necklace, belt, scarf or tie. The dataset consists of 3082 product images with associated descriptions in the three languages. The amount of products in this dataset is a realistic size for most e-retailers. Of the total amount of products, 2460 ($\sim 80\%$) are used for training, 314 ($\sim 10\%$) for testing and 308 ($\sim 10\%$) for validation. The validation set is used for hyperparameter tuning during training.

4.2 Experiments and Evaluation

We train the UNMT baseline, MNMT baseline and our MNMT SCA model on the e5 fashion dataset for English→Dutch and English→French. We evaluate the translation quality of the resulting models with the BLEU score. The BLEU score has a high correlation with human judgements of translation quality and is one of the most popular metrics to evaluate translation systems. It computes the number of matching N -grams (with $N = 1..4$) between the generated translation and the ground truth reference translation. We use beam search with a beam size of 12 for translation decoding.

4.3 Training Details

All hyperparameters are set based on our validation set. For models trained with both the cross entropy loss and triplet loss, a factor α of 0.99 and a margin m of 0.1 were found to work well. The dimensions d_x and d_y of the source and target word representations are set to 256. The dimension d of the shared spaces is set to 512. The hidden state of the decoder is 512-dimensional. The decoder initialization weight λ is set to 0.5 and the inverted temperature of the softmax function η to 4. We stop the training phase if there is no improvement in BLEU score on the validation set for 10 consecutive evaluation steps.

5 Results

Table 1 shows the BLEU scores obtained by all models on the e5 fashion dataset. These results indicate that our MNMT SCA model outperforms the MNMT baseline on both language pairs. Hence, a multimodal, multilingual space which aligns images and sentences at the level of regions and words is best for visually contextualizing the source word representations. Figure 1 compares some of the translations generated by our MNMT SCA model with those of the MNMT baseline. In the first example, the MNMT baseline incorrectly interprets *loosely* as referring to the shape of the pullover, while it refers to the knit. Both the MNMT baseline and our MNMT SCA model generate a wrong translation for *flattering*, but while the word *rounded* (*afgeronde*) generated by our MNMT SCA model also applies to the neckline, the word *yellow* (*geel*) generated by the MNMT baseline does not.

Table 1. Translation results for English→Dutch and English→French in terms of BLEU score on the e5 fashion test set.

Method	English→Dutch	English→French
MNMT baseline [19]	69.47	44.57
MNMT SCA model	74.06	45.62

Table 2. Percentage of test examples where the model outperforms the UNMT baseline for English→Dutch and English→French in terms of BLEU score.

Method	English→Dutch	English→French
MNMT baseline [19]	20.38	31.53
MNMT SCA model	34.08	34.71



Source: A light pink, *loosely knitted* pullover. The *flattering* boatneck and short bat sleeves give a very soft and feminine profile. The fabric contains 20% wool.

MNMT baseline: Een lichtroze, *losse* pull. De *gele* boothals en korte vleermuismouwen geven de pull een heel zacht en vrouwelijk profiel. De stof bestaat uit 20% wol.

MNMT SCA: Een lichtroze, *losjes gebreide* pull. De *afgeronde* boothals en korte vleermuismouwen geven een heel zacht en vrouwelijk profiel. Het stofje bestaat uit 20% wol.



Source: Elegant *printed* short *skirt*. Ultra-soft and lightweight *A-line model*. Closes with a *concealed zipper* at the back. Fitted with a petticoat.

MNMT baseline: Elegant kort *mouwloos kleedje*. Elegant *zacht* en *makkelijk te combineren*. Sluit met een *lichtbruin - rits* achteraan. Voorzien van een onderrok.

MNMT SCA: Elegante *bedrukte* korte *rok*. *Sober* en licht *A-lijn model*. Sluit met een *blinde rits* aan de achterzijde. Voorzien van een onderrok.

Fig. 1. Comparison of translations generated by the MNMT baseline and our MNMT SCA model for English→Dutch (best viewed in color).

In the second example, the MNMT baseline generates a description of a *sleeveless dress* (*mouwloos kleedje*) instead of a *printed skirt*. Moreover it misidentifies the shape as being *easy to combine* (*makkelijk te combineren*) and the zipper as being *light brown* (*lichtbruin*). These mistakes are not made by our MNMT SCA model.

As also confirmed in previous works [3, 4], the MNMT models are still surpassed by the pure text-based UNMT baseline, which achieves a BLEU score of 74.38 for English→Dutch and of 48.05 for English→French. This is because the signal coming from the text in a MNMT model is stronger than the one coming from the vision side, and distilling the relevant fine-grained details from an image is a difficult task. However even if the UNMT baseline performs better overall, we can also compare the BLEU scores of the individual test examples. Table 2 reports the percentage of test examples where the associated image helps generate a better translation. These results show that in a third of the test examples, supplying an image with the source sentence results in an improved translation when using our MNMT SCA model. One of the test examples for English→Dutch for which this is the case is shown in Fig. 2.



Source: A navy scarf with [white](#)-blue squares. With fringes. 30 cm on 160 cm.

UNMT baseline: Een navy sjaal met [zwart](#)-blauwe blokjes. Met franjes. 30 cm op 160 cm.

MNMT SCA: Een navy sjaal met [wit](#)-blauwe blokjes. Met franjes. 30 cm op 160 cm.

Fig. 2. Example for which our MNMT SCA model outperforms the UNMT baseline for English→Dutch (best viewed in color).

While the BLEU score is a good metric to determine translation quality, it has some disadvantages. For instance, a translation which is significantly different from the reference translation will get a low BLEU score, even if it is still valid and acceptable to the human reader. Moreover, a translation which does not sound that smooth or contains a rather unexpected word may not get penalised as much by BLEU if it still closely resembles the reference translation. For a human though it will be clear that such a translation was generated by a machine. However, e-retailers might prefer having consumers find and buy desired products through machine-generated translations instead of not at all, or through human translations which are much more expensive to obtain.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, we have proposed a novel neural architecture for MNMT, which learns a multimodal, multilingual space jointly with a translation model to obtain visually grounded source word representations. By attending to the visually grounded source word representations we can jointly reason over vision and language in a way that is effective to produce the translation in the target language. We introduced this model in

the context of fashion e-commerce, where the product descriptions describe fine-grained product attributes somewhere in the associated image. Moreover, we have improved state-of-the-art multimodal translation results on a real-word fashion e-commerce dataset.

As future work and to further improve the results, we would like to expand our model by integrating multiple languages and to investigate neural architectures that still better recognise fine-grained fashion attributes in images. We would also like to further explore the possibility to train on comparable data as this forms a realistic setting when dealing with product descriptions in different languages. Finally, the model proposed in this paper offers opportunities to automatically generate different types of fashion item descriptions (in one or multiple languages) that are adapted to its users, to the targeted country or culture, or to marketing strategies, which will take into account images of the fashion item.

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Remixing the Fashion Brand: Uniqlo Through Instagram and Twitter

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Abstract. Social media platforms have given brands new way to interact with consumers, but they come with opaque algorithms which complicate brand-to-consumer communications. This paper offers an experimental exploration of branding in social media spaces by using “remix” techniques [1]. It builds potential brand images for Uniqlo, the Japan fashion retailer, as presented within its Twitter and Instagram feeds. Three competing brand images are constructed through the same set of messages to illustrate how social media algorithms have a profound effect on what information consumers receive and how that may alter understandings of fashion brands.

Keywords: Brand image · Digital media · Fashion branding · Remixing · Social media

1 Introduction

Brands may be ubiquitous in much of contemporary society, however, fundamental questions remain around their meaning creation [2]. Today, brands are seen as complex, media objects [3] that are created across various networks of “images, practices, relations, [and] settings” [4]. Yet, despite the increasingly complex theorization of brands, professionals and consumers alike continue to see them as intelligible semiotic system [5, 6], which can be understood in a variety of constructions [7]. While consumers have always been able to impart “unique and idiosyncratic meaning to brands,” [8] researchers largely assume there is some meaning to be had, even if the information provided to consumers is incomplete [9], able to change over time [3] and can be imparted with different meanings [10].

The advent of social media [11] and algorithm culture [12] has brought with it additional demands on brand managers, requiring them to rethink communication strategies and interactions with consumers [13–16]. Meanwhile, as researchers have begun to study algorithms in earnest [13, 17, 18], the focus has largely examined topics like visibility [19, 20] and impact on culture and labor [12, 21], over “everyday social media” [22].

This paper uses remix methods [1] in order to explore how the fashion brand Uniqlo *could* be understood through its Twitter and Instagram feeds. The contention is not that these are full representations of the brand, but rather that they could construct what Uniqlo is for some people. In fact, the contention is that due to social media

algorithms, it is impossible to have a finite sense understanding of a brand. This paper questions the coherent construction of a “brand” as an object that is meaningful, identifiable and financially calculable [4, 23], while also providing a method to imagine how individual users *might* understand the Uniqlo brand.

2 Social Media and Fashion Brands

The internet has changed the way we shop [24] and the way advertisers communicate with their audiences [18], and while brands were eager to move into social media, they were initially rebuffed and viewed as “uninvited crashers of the Web 2.0 party” [14]. This led to extensive soul-searching for managers and researchers [15, 25], forcing brands to experiment with their social media communication [13, 16] and increasingly see themselves as “open sourced” [14]. As Holt [23] reminds us, brands have long been products of co-creation, as managers and consumers have seen them more as cultural resources rather than a unidirectional message; social media platforms have simply highlighted and exacerbated this fact, ushering in an era of “prosumption” whereby users increasingly producer content as well as consume it [26]. In the way, contemporary branding often involves two different types of consumers: those who are active participate in its creation and distribution, as well as others who are simply targeted by data-driven systems [13].

While algorithms are intended to highlight messages of user interest [19, 27], there are still significant variables that play into what a user sees on social media. The number of accounts one follows and interacts with, as well as the frequency that they check social media, alter what algorithms promote, including newer posts over older messages [19]. Both Twitter and Instagram initially showed all content in reverse-chronological order (i.e. newest posts first) before changing to more complicated algorithms [28, 29]. In all cases, these algorithms create a situation where social media users will have different interactions with the brand based on their prior choices.

This dynamic is not new to social media platforms; brands have long been able to present themselves differently to various parties [3]. However, despite more nuanced arguments to how brands come together within the cultural world [3, 4], they remain largely understood as sign systems that can be identified and take on specific meanings [6, 30]. In fact, Danesi [5] notes that products must be given “a specific set of *connotata*” before they are turned into brands. Elsewhere, it has been noted that the meaning given to a brand, whether it is described as an identity, personality, lifestyle or heritage, is developed from the brand’s tangible communication [7]. And while other researchers have suggested a brand must be understood as a set of relations rather than a specific sign, they still acknowledge that a brand remains “identifiable and calculable” [4]. As such, researchers have suggested brands develop images, personalities, stories and lifestyles [31–33], despite there being evidence that consumers have not been exposed to the same tangible communications [34] and thus do not necessarily understand a brand in the same way.

The idea that individuals will have different experiences with a brand is especially pertinent to fashion brands, which have often followed a cultural branding model [31]. Researchers have noted that some ambiguity can help brands [35, 36], but social media

algorithms create a different dynamic. While general processes might be ambiguous [7] and open to consumer intervention, a belief remains that intangible elements that can be intelligibly constructed from tangible communications. Indeed, algorithms within social media platforms make it nearly impossible to get a complete picture, and many algorithms are designed to show the content which appeals to us.

3 Remixing Uniqlo

Uniqlo, a Japanese store selling private label appeal, has had a presence in the U.S. retail market since 2005. Owned by fashion firm Fast Retailing, the chain first opened a series of mall-based stores in New Jersey, before shuttering those venues in preference of a single flagship store in Manhattan's SoHo district [37]. In 2011, Uniqlo embarked on an aggressive expansion that aimed to open 200 stores across the U.S. by 2020 [38], however, it lowered expectations after finding tepid enthusiasm in suburban locations [39]. Today, there are about 50 Uniqlo stores across the U.S., including in Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. Within the popular press, the Uniqlo brand has been heralded for its minimalist, low-priced basics that are more fitted than its competitors and offered in a variety of colors [40]. Meanwhile, much of the brand's focus has been on developing better products through design innovations and Uniqlo's CEO Tadashi Yanai has said it "is not a fashion company; it's a technology company" [41].

A hallmark of Uniqlo's expansion has been aggressive online and social media campaigns during expansions into new areas. Accepting that tangible communications ultimately allow brands to develop intangible elements [7] and meaning [30], then the transmission of *specific* messages takes on more importance. As users develop a sense of brand meaning through the messages they are presented within a "normal" social media context [22], it is imperative to have a means to interrogate what *possible* understandings might develop. Markham [1] suggests remixing—"sampling, borrowing and creatively reassembling units of cultural information"—can help researchers explore context and sense-making. Similarly, Markham [1] notes that algorithms act as their own remixing tools, temporarily bringing together various bits of information. Remix, as a methodological process, involves five distinct parts: generate, play, borrow, move and interrogate. Generate is the collection of information and data, while play, borrow and move all address the ways researchers can piece information together. Finally, interrogate allows researchers to explore these combinations and their implications [1].

This paper demonstrates how remix techniques can be applied to brands, especially the U.S. social media feeds of Uniqlo. First, to generate a dataset, all messages posted to Twitter via "@UniqloUSA" and Instagram by "uniqlousa" within the month of August 2018 were collected and numbered. In total, 115 messages posted (60 on Twitter and 55 on Instagram). Then, in order to play, borrow and move the messages, a random-number generator was used to create three sets of 35 messages. These messages represent slightly more than 30% of the total messages sent, keeping in line with Instagram's finding that social media users miss up to 70% of their feeds [42]. Finally, in order to interrogate the constructions, these following pages will describe the brand

image—the “attributes and associations” from which “consumers derive symbolic value” [32]—as created by each set of messages.

4 Uniqlo’s Brand Image

4.1 Brand Image A—Simple, Young and Sporty

Three main attributes or associations can be found from the first set of social media messages. These themes were dispersed throughout the messages and appeared in both hashtags and through the images used. The idea of simple designs appeared several times, including with the #SimpleMadeBetter tag. These posts featured both men and women in simple garments and styles, including women’s jeans and button downs, men’s T-shirts and khakis.

The second attribute that developed from these messages is “youthful”—largely through the promotion of Mickey Mouse and anime characters. Two posts included the same video of artist Kate Moross’s collaboration with the brand called “Love & Mickey Mouse.” The posts—which were repeated on both Twitter and Instagram—promoted “limited edition” Mickey Mouse ears to those who purchased from the collection online. Two other posts showed models wearing T-shirts with Mickey Mouse on them. One caption read, “You’re never too old to wear a #MickeyMouse tee.” while the other included a more generic caption (“Sunday is truly a funday”) and the hashtags #MagicForAll and #WearYourWorld. The anime posts were also repeated on both platforms and promoted the restocking of the Shonen Jump T-shirts. These were also presented with the #WearYourWorld hashtag, showing them in the same vein as some of the Mickey Mouse products.

Finally, the other major attribute from these messages would be “sporty,” primarily from two Instagram posts featuring Uniqlo brand ambassador, Swiss tennis player Roger Federer, promoting the same clothing he wore on the court. One of the posts mentioning Federer also promoted free tickets to a Uniqlo event featuring the player during the U.S. Open. Other posts that developed sporty associations came from a video about a street soccer league and a skateboarding model.

4.2 Brand Image B—Simple, East Coast Urban

The brand image created by the second set of messages has some overlap with the first, and through these messages, Uniqlo can be seen as simple and East Coast urban. The #SimpleMadeBetter tag appeared throughout these messages promoting clothing items like men’s button downs, women’s ankle pants, flannel shirts and socks.

The second association that was developed throughout the messages is Uniqlo as an East Coast entity—specifically based in New York City and Washington, D.C. Two Twitter messages promoted the opening of the Uniqlo store at Pike and Rose in Bethesda, Maryland—a suburb of Washington, D.C. Additionally, the brand’s Instagram account shared a photo of a couple wearing Uniqlo’s clothing in Reston Town Center, another suburb of Washington. Several of the user-generated photos reposted by the Uniqlo account are based in New York. These photos are tagged with the SoHo

and West Village districts, outside the trendy restaurant Tacombi and in Sara Delano Roosevelt Park—all located in Manhattan. One photo is taken at the beach, but was posted by an Instagram user from New York, while another photo shows user “katherineinmanhattan” wearing Uniqlo’s Airism at a coffee shop. Finally, a reference to the SPRZ NY collection of clothing—which is a collaboration between Uniqlo and the Museum of Modern Art, in New York—created the New York City association.

To a lesser degree, Uniqlo’s collaborative clothing lines also are shown throughout these messages. Several posts reference the Uniqlo x Hana Tajima line, while others reference the Ines de la Fressange line and, again, the SPRZ NY line (which is largely a collaboration). There are far fewer references to cartoon designs and only two posts that specifically sell children’s clothing.

4.3 Brand Image B—Simple, International

The third set of messages repeats the main association with the other sets, but put a decidedly international spin on it. In this instance the #SimpleMadeBetter tag is used to promote men’s button downs, women’s pants, men’s chinos, sweats and kids clothing.

There is also a decidedly international association developed within the messages. Broadly, Uniqlo itself is an international company that has moved into the U.S. More specifically, these messages promoted the Uniqlo x Hana Tajima line multiple times. Tajima is a U.K.-based modest fashion designer, and the promoted design includes head scarves and other loose-fitting clothing. While the designer prefers the term “modest”, Tajima’s designs are generally seen as being influenced by Islamic culture [43]. In addition to the heavy promotion of Tajima, these messages also promote French designer de la Fressange, and repost a user-photo from Iceland. Moreover, a post to Hokusai Blue—a distinctive style of art from Japan’s Meiji period—supports the international feel to the brand.

To a lesser degree, these messages construct youthful associations, as its Disney collaboration is referenced throughout. There are also multiple references to children’s clothing (apart from the Disney posts that are aimed at adults), and various references to Uniqlo’s Blocktech line.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

By remixing and playing with Uniqlo’s social media messages, it is possible to see how temporal and algorithmic factors can lead to different brand images, and to imagine how those images might be constructed for an “everyday social media” user [22]. Again, following the belief that tangible communication becomes intangible elements of a brand [7], then different consumers will develop alternative meanings for the same brand depending on the specific set of messaging they received—as has been shown above. While some of this variance may be “unique and idiosyncratic meaning” [8] that consumers have always assigned to a brand, an over-reliance on social media could potentially make a cohesive brand image impossible to cultivate; consumers may receive varied messages and might assemble even the same set of messages in different ways.

With these messages, some of the difference was in the nuanced as Uniqlo's repetition of "simple" managed to come across in each set. However, other connotations are equally important—especially for a growing brand. Some of the practical information, such as store location or product lineup, can easily get missed or misinterpreted. Such divergent messages could prove problematic for new and growing brands, as those with longer histories would have more stable associations.

Remix techniques offer researchers a way to reimagine how a brand might be perceived. There is no way to guarantee which messages are being consumed and how they interact with other messages, whether by, about or related to the brand. Temporal and self-selecting factors impact what specific users learn about and how they understand the brand. Remixing allows researchers to imagine (and reimagine) how source material might be assembled differently, by different users, in different situations. Moreover, while social media multiplied the number of messages sent by any given brands, the circulation of physical materials can produce similar dimensions within a brand.

Both colloquially and academically, we continue to refer to a brand as a single entity and laud specific, identifiable meanings. However, as brands have grown ever more complex, the messages any specific consumer received are not guaranteed to work toward a specific brand image. Digital communication and social network sites separate messages and require consumers to reassemble the pieces. There is no guarantee that consumers will be able to put together the intended messages and/or understand the same larger cultural creation. As such, remixing these messages allows researchers to imagine the way others might receive and interpret these divergent messages.

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Imaginaries, Fashion and the Internet. Towards a New Ethics Paradigm

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Abstract. Fashion in our contemporary world, thanks to its natural tension between tradition and innovation, has assumed a key role for understanding individual and collective acting in society, both online and offline. The mirror of the modern social imaginary, fashion represents a paradigmatic form of “direct access society”, à la Taylor. In the Web anyone can access fashion communications without the mediation of professionals. The question that emerges then is whether these new forms of access to fashion, typical of the present era, favor the generation and dissemination of new social imaginaries conveyed by the world of fashion and whether these imaginaries open up ethical implications regarding fashion communication. Above all, if, and to what extent this facilitates the construction of people’s identity and individuality on the basis of such imaginaries. This form of access facilitates our knowledge of fashion itself and, ideally, gives voice to any “ordinary” individual to display themselves through fashion, in the creation of many different fashion imaginaries. However, it also gives rise to a radical individualism and to a form of narcissism. These imaginaries are conveyed online by the mechanisms that regulate the Web, inducing people into following the fashion that responds to their personal taste and into generating further imaginaries. The risk is of individuals becoming enclosed within non-communicating worlds. This fosters an ethics based on visibility and self-referentiality at the expense of more mindful and responsible relationships between individuals, fashion and the media.

Keywords: Access · Communication · Ethics · Fashion · Imaginary

1 Introduction

Fashion, in our contemporary world, thanks to its natural tension between respect for tradition and longing for novelty, has assumed a key role for understanding individual and collective acting in society within multiple spheres of action, both online and offline.

Historically in the world of fashion the imaginaries in place have been those evoked by a shared background knowledge, those which have become cemented over the course of time, but which nevertheless look towards the future. This antithetic aspect is even more accentuated in today’s internet society. The online environment constitutes a setting in which fashion is an exemplary case for highlighting the breakdown between

old and new, between public and private spheres, between clinging to the past and tending towards the unexpected. As Benjamin asserted, in the thesis XIV, – in an era of the “technical reproducibility” of works of art – likewise “fashion gives new life to costumes from the past. Fashion always holds a sense of the present, regardless of where it may reside in the realms of the past” [1].¹

We observe, even today, in the communicative area of fashion – understood as the establishing and spreading of aesthetic and behavioral models among groups of people, i.e. the expression of the predominant taste – a sort of “absolutization” of the imminent, albeit in a continuous loop of historical ebbs and flows aimed at stimulating the process of controlled obsolescence [3].

As Taylor observes, fashion represents a perfect example of “direct access society”. Everyone is part of a fashion circle, displaying themselves on the basis of personal choices, going beyond the mediation typical of pre-modern societies [4]. With the internet, this circle has expanded, bringing people together in real time, regardless of distance. The internet is a mediation tool, however, compared to more traditional media, it might also be considered a space for dis-intermediation [5, 6] – this is the taylorian meaning of “direct access” – the possibility to inform and be informed without going via professionals in the sector. This also applies to fashion communication; the Web offers a more immediate relationship through blogs, social media, as well as interactive and experiential sites dedicated to this theme, between those who produce, those who communicate and those who follow fashion, thus reducing the number of steps to access information. We can therefore speak of what is a form of more “direct access” within a mediated space. In reality what is sometimes found is that this wider accessibility doesn't necessarily open individuals up to the pluralism of trends that the fashion world actually offers. Instead, via the same mechanisms that regulate the Web, it can lead them to becoming closed, not always consciously, in the context of an imaginary² of style that reflects their online research, without them having critically evaluated other fashion ideas. Indeed, what the internet offers the individual, in terms of new trends, are always in line with their tastes.

This is a phenomenon that has transformed the concept of fashion, because small niche groups can be created, with the risk of multiplying these new imaginaries, of fragmenting the dominant imaginary of fashion or, *in extrema ratio*, annihilating it. Nowadays it is not so much fashion items as fashion experiences that are published on social networks. This way of communicating seems to have become a tool for experimenting with and testing out the imaginaries themselves.

In light of these premises, the question that emerges is whether these communication characteristics typical of our contemporary online reality are of any help, and if so to what extent, in the generation and dissemination of new social imaginaries related to fashion and, above all, in the construction of one's identity on the basis of such imaginaries. Individuals find themselves immersed in worlds based around fashion and

¹ Emblematic in this sense is the text published for the first time by Benjamin, in 1936, in German, under the title *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* [2].

² In this context reference is made to the modern Western imaginary, following on from Taylor, for whom modernity, going beyond the more traditional historiographical setting, starts with the seventeenth century up to the present day [7].

its values (cultural, aesthetic and ethical), in which they recognise themselves, and through which they create and convey their personal identity and social belonging, creating a real community of supporters of a certain style and way of experiencing fashion. It is no longer just the professional stylist who creates fashion, but also the “ordinary” person. This is a person who is observed in their daily activities, to whom people can relate, corroborating the importance of visibility of the self and one’s own self-presentation in relations with the other. A person who displays their way of living life and fashion in order to attract followers. Fashion preserves itself as a system of mutual relations, albeit draped in economic interests that are anything but secondary when considering the communication of influencers who propose new “essentials” often creating their own aesthetic model. As Castoriadis affirms, “each society invents ever new ways of responding to its needs and, at the same time, invents new needs” [8], thus increasing levels of consumption.

This “direct access”, typical of fashion and modern society, boosted by the Web, facilitates our knowledge of fashion and potentially gives voice to any ‘ordinary’ individual to display their way of living or making fashion, in the creation of many different imaginaries. This undermines the role of the fashion professionals. Nowadays anyone can potentially become involved in fashion, with the risk of fostering individualism which, according to Taylor, is one of the sources of the angst of modernity [9, 10]. Whereas in the past people looked to their friends and peers, nowadays the number of sources and, consequently, the quality of the messages, in real time, varies greatly.

The danger is that fashion through the Web not only increases the number of models of fashion and behavior, but also feeds the desire of individuals to display themselves. Individuals who, to attract more followers, often project an image which is less than authentic. As Pezzano writes referring more generally to social imaginaries, fashion via the web, while on the one hand “opens up the possibility of an active experience of the world, [...] on the other it can lead to confinement within a specific environment, due to a tension that for the human animal, in search of a meaningful life, is irrepressible” [11]. This happens at the expense of an ethics of authenticity, which ought to be applied to the self and also to the relations among individuals as well as between individuals and the media.

2 Fashion and Social Imaginary

Fashion today would seem to call two “interpretative models” to our attention, models which concern the relation between the individual and society: the social imaginary and what has been referred to as the “direct-access” society.

Firstly, let us focus on the meaning of social imaginary, a concept difficult to define in that it includes a variety of manifestations, material and mental, which ascribe the imaginary to an individual as well as a social sphere, both rational and also visionary [12, 13].

This ambivalence, evoked by the etymology of the term imaginary, which incorporates the Latin *imago*, is sustained by two of the leading theoreticians on social imaginaries, Charles Taylor and Cornelius Castoriadis, both of whom owe their

philosophical stance to the Baczkian school of thought [14]. Taylor, in particular, in the 1990s, in conjunction with the spread of the internet on a global scale, considered fashion to be an exemplary case of the social imaginary and of the “direct-access” society [15]. Castoriadis identified a paradigm of the imaginary that, complementary to Taylor’s in some ways, ascribes to the institution of society itself from a philosophical and psychoanalytic perspective. For Taylor the social imaginary represents “something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. [...] the ways in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” [16]. For Castoriadis, the social imaginary “[...] is not an image *of*. It is the unceasing and essentially undetermined (social-historical and psychical) creation of figures/forms/images, on the basis of which alone there can ever be a question of ‘something’” [17].

Despite the apparent diversity of the two positions, we can see the common matrix of Baczko, Swiss historian and philosopher according to whom social imaginaries refers to those nodal elements produced by every collective, through which it “perceives itself, organizes itself and develops its own purposes”. Social imaginaries are therefore the tools a collective uses for “a global and all-encompassing representation of society as an “order” in which each element finds its own “place”, its identity and reason for being” in the context of a common background, sedimented over time, but also of a creativity that is constantly renewed and regenerated [18].

According to Castoriadis it is a magma, “an indefinitely blurred bundle of conjunctive fabrics, made up of different cloths and yet homogeneous, everywhere studded with virtual and evanescent singularities” [19], which must be completed by an act that is purely creative, that is, from an imaginative dimension which he defines as radical imagination or radical imaginary.

The modern imaginary, Taylor further argues, exists in a range of forms, “horizontal” forms, which include the economy, the public sphere, the sovereign people and fashion, all “sites of common action”. Moreover, he explains, fashion, as in economics, consists of “a host of individual actions concatenate behind our backs. However, it is different from this as well, because our actions relate in the space of fashion in a particular way. I wear my own kind of hat, but in doing so, I am displaying my style to all of you, and in this, I am responding to your self-display, even as you will respond to mine. The space of fashion is one in which we sustain together a language of signs and meanings, which is constantly changing but which at any moment is the background needed to give our gestures the sense they have. If my hat can express my particular kind of cocky, yet understated self-display, then this is because of how the common language of style has evolved between us up to this point. My gesture can change it, and then your responding stylistic move will take its meaning from the new contour the language takes on” [20].

Individuals, therefore, are to be conceived as members belonging to a fashion space which is a collective and public agent, which acquires and spreads styles [21]. Just as with social, political and religious movements, fashion connects people, and thanks to

the internet, even more trans-locally and trans-socially than in the past, in real time. It has made the social imaginaries of the various social classes more similar, eliminating the so-called “split consciousness” between the *élite* and the middle classes.

Through the internet, fashion increasingly represents a typically modern form of horizontal imaginary, in which people understand each other thanks to the simultaneous presence of the other. Yet the individual sphere, that of the self, remains primary and that of the other functional to one’s self-presentation. Indeed, Taylor observes that the fashion space “is not that of a common action, rather of mutual display. It matters to each of us as we act that others are there, as witnesses of what we are doing and thus as co-determiners of the meaning of our action”. These are important aspects in city life where individuals are usually strangers. Each person’s display will offer something to others and generate a response, creating a “common mood” [22].

The imaginary of fashion represents the space in which the individual defines and understands themselves, their own desires, preferences and possibilities for acting, displaying these via items that transform their outward appearance [23]. Initially it is shared by a limited number of individuals, but later reaches a much wider community. It evokes implicit aspects that form the background of society, as well as representing the needs and fragility of the individuals who, when “dressing”, decide how to display or not to display their emotions on the basis of a background knowledge that guides their choices, or facilitates the creation of something new on which to base future choices. In this way, people are able to express themselves. Clothes are the outer layer upon which far deeper individual and social changes emerge. They are a sign that connects the individual to the group, and at the same time an aesthetic and ethical form of transition between the individual and the social.

The world of fashion is essentially a device of “modernity”, mutable par excellence. It embraces and reproduces the relation between patterns of consumption, social practices and production systems on the basis of a specific social imaginary that appears ever more fluid on the Web [24]. Excessive attention to fashion can lead people to base their actions on an ethics of narcissism and radical consumption, resulting in a sort of “fictitious economy” [25].

Fashion is therefore both a fundamental basis for, and a product of, the social imaginary, taking on the aspect of a social and indeterminate space within which individuals find themselves immersed and at risk, according to a pessimistic vision, of remaining trapped, creating real social epidemics [26].

3 Fashion and “Direct Access” Forms

As far as the concept of the “direct access” society is concerned, it is clear that the possibility of more easily and directly accessing data, services and communication tools has radically altered the way we relate, also in the world of fashion. Regarding this point, it is necessary to refer again to Taylor who defines this concept as the fact that “each of us is equidistant from the center” because “we are immediate to the whole”, through a virtuous circle of two-way relations, both between people and institutions as well as among people, which has been strongly accentuated by the advent and spread of the internet. “We have moved from a hierarchical order of

personalized links to an impersonal egalitarian one; from a vertical world of mediated access to horizontal, direct-access societies”, remarks Taylor [27].

Despite acting independently, the displaying of one’s own style of dressing is a way of communicating with others, albeit influenced by the social imaginary of reference. There is the desire to open up a common space, an intermediate area between isolation and openness to the other, typical of city life, that started with the Industrial Revolution in the late nineteenth century. It is a phenomenon that today has become transformed into something “metatopical” [28], within the virtuality of spaces.

In light of the above, some questions emerge: with the Web, *ab origine*, there is “direct” access to fashion information (and the imaginaries it opens) because all people are in relation equally, with no need for fashion experts; now, with the spread of social media, the type of “direct” access has changed. Is there a new form of mediation of ordinary people who become experts who become the new professionals?

When choosing the elements that characterize their appearance, individuals are presenting themselves and responding to external requests for self-presentation and self-promotion. Through blogs, Instagram and various websites, as well as through figures such as fashion bloggers and influencers, often with a great number of followers, the internet becomes what is only seemingly a “horizontal” stage of mutual display. Every individual that we might define as a “microcelebrity” [29], is interested in having an audience that observes them and for whom witnessing them simultaneously determines the meaning of their own actions. These are actions of purchasing, further diffusion of the fashion images or the communication of the influencers themselves. In contrast to friends, peers and celebrities that mediate fashion, influencers (ordinary people who think they are experts) answer their own followers in real time.

Thus, there are not only direct actions but also mediated actions that derive from these direct actions, both influencing each other, constituting the context of reference for people’s lives [30]. The internet revolution has created new ways of forming communities, in which each individual or group of individuals acts independently, but with the awareness of acting within a group or community that adheres to a certain fashion imaginary, to a certain style, able to call upon certain images at any moment over the course of time.

So today fashion has become a tool to communicate one’s own social imaginary against the background of an imaginary founded ever more upon individualism and real time. It is possible to form universes of style that are often unable to communicate with each other, while at other times they may blend together to create a new universe of meaning that manifests itself online. Crowds of followers are created, just like at a rock concert, but they are still “solitary crowds”, à la Durkheim, where individuals feel the need to be part of a group in order to self-determine as individuals that are in fashion. These are ambiguous spaces of mutual display and attraction, ways of being together that respond to society’s pressing demand for individual freedom, but also for the creation of an *ad hoc* community in which to recognize oneself and be recognized.

The fashion space is emblematic in this sense. Instagram, and social media more generally, have strengthened these characteristics but, rather than propagating a dominant social imaginary, there are instead numerous social imaginaries that proliferate on the internet, which do not always communicate with each other. This opening therefore seems, on the contrary, to be a closure, a new form of mediation that closes its

followers into micro-cosmoses, encouraging the annihilation of their critical thinking and of the affirmation of their identity and authenticity in terms of their personal taste.

Therefore, in a direct-access society do social imaginaries, understood as background knowledge, tend to lose themselves in favor of imaginaries that continually regenerate? Certainly, a sense of resilience to the past does remain, but the mechanism of controlled obsolescence is fueled to such an extent that attempts are made to present things as novel even when they are not. However, it is necessary to point out that these mechanisms are very rapid indeed: the new imaginaries disappear just as fast as they replaced the previous ones, all part of a process lacking in continuity.

The primary objective is that of creating personalized fashions whereby the individual who proposes them in turn becomes a “brand”. The risk is of losing one’s sense of fashion, understood as attention to beauty and good taste, instead putting one’s trust in those who put themselves forward as lifestyle experts. They are the protagonists of an online advertising carousel, testimonial of a brand that is in fact the influencer themselves.

4 Vetrinization of the Self and Individualism, Towards Radical Narcissism

With digital media the communication of fashion also seems to be taking the form of advertising³. The different levels of access to fashion and a constantly mutating imaginary have made the internet an ideal showcasing-platform for displaying fashion and in particular for displaying oneself according to a certain style. A space within which self-exhibition is taking on a predominant role.

Selfies featuring particular fashion items are posted to demonstrate a belonging, not so much to a specific brand as to a certain social imaginary and cultural context, personalized and unique, creating another value system, in turn, that is both aesthetic and ethical. This is, after all, a way of building and consolidating one’s identity and of publicizing oneself as well as the fashion brand [31]. A world is created that is seemingly closer to the target audience, the followers. Selfies are taken with a specific item of clothing or accessory and spread by bloggers whose aim is to persuade followers to wear or buy them. Anyone can be a blogger, trend setter or influencer and try to create their own public, but in the end, as Kierkegaard wrote in *A Literary Review* of 1846, the concept of public is a “fictitious abstraction” [32]. Individuals display their way of living life and fashion, using the most persuasive advertising strategies, seeking approval and reflection in a, hopefully, ever larger public.

On this point Abruzzese writes “the public is neither a population, nor a generation nor a group of contemporaries, nor a community of believers, nor a society nor any such group of defined persons”, but anyone can actually desire “to have their own public at their disposal” [33]. A public that, according to its etymological meaning,

³ The meaning adopted here for advertising is twofold: one closer to the Latin etymology of the word *publicare*, meaning “to make public” (and subsequently the French *publicité*); the other closer to a specific form of persuasive communication, from the latin verb *adverto*.

deriving from the Latin *populus*, means of the people and, therefore, belonging to everyone.

This multifaceted nature of the concept of one's own public in "direct-access" society certainly encourages narcissistic behavior. But is it only the digital media that foster such narcissism? Or is it the tendency, typical of Western contemporary society, to base itself ever more upon individualism, on ourselves as individuals and on how the self is perceived by the world? It is a system of self-branding [34], through fashion items, in which individuals work towards creating their own self, presenting it and capitalizing on what comes from their very own self-presentation platform, a system for transforming one's subjectivity and one's private sphere into a reality arising out of public interest [35].

It is a form of individualism that is not merely expressive, but also moral, founded on the ideal of self-realization. Indirectly, followers are encouraged to copy the style and buy the goods worn by influencers, creating a sort of conformism. Moreover, when searching for an item online, and on social media, similar items are suggested, further reinforcing the imaginary.

Individualism is certainly not a new concept, and derives from previous forms of individualism that originated as early as the eighteenth century, such as that of "disembodied rationality" proposed by Descartes or Locke's political rationality. Today the absolute importance attributed to the individual has lead to the acquisition of a freedom of choice in our lives that was previously unimaginable. A freedom that also opens up to a "dark side": to a "focusing on the self, which at once flattens and narrows our lives, impoverishes their meaning, and steers them away from an interest towards others and society", to the point where this can lead to narcissism, to a loss of meaning of everything that does not concern one's own person, even to the point of bringing about an identity crisis [36]. And fashion communication is an increasingly active tool in this sense, one that is being reinforced by the internet platforms. An individualism is emerging that opens up to "radical anthropocentrism", consolidated by the very instrumental reasoning of the technocratic culture. The risk is that, in wanting to promote oneself at any cost, one can transcend, as Taylor states, in two directions, firstly, towards egocentrism, secondly, towards nihilism à la Derrida and Foucault, in which the horizons of meaning are lost [37].

It is an individualism that Taylor defines as "holistic", since the necessary requisite for the development of individuality consists in embedding the individual within a community [38]. A new way of understanding society and sociality is becoming widespread, one focused on mutual benefit, mutual support and the equality of its members.

This individualistic paradigm is linked to the so-called "ethic of authenticity" [39], whereby the individual is motivated to choose and act in order to become self-fulfilled. By authenticity Taylor refers, in particular, inspired by Trilling, to that moral ideal that is the background for self-realization and being true to oneself. Authentic, after all, comes from the Latin *authenticus* and, earlier still, from the Greek *authéntes* which means "corresponding to truth, valid" but also "original", which brings us back to the freedom of being oneself. He stresses that by moral ideal, he refers, not so much to what we actually want or for which we feel the need, but to a model of what we should want [40, 41].

However, the consumerism so criticized by Baudrillard that permits the individual to manage his own self and his own personal space entirely according to his own preferences through the purchase and consumption of what society has to offer, is the manifestation of the culture of individualism (and consequently conformism) and authenticity at its very worst [42]. Individuals use fashion more as a means of promoting themselves, rather than the fashion itself. And the communication of fashion on the web is likely to encourage and propagate precisely this trend.

“Direct access”, both real and presumed, though a completely relational tool, when sharing images of fashion, “one’s own fashion”, fosters individualistic action and narcissism; in the spasmodic search for visibility it also constitutes the key for increasing consumption and convincing people of the value of owning certain goods. This visibility tends to be referred to as transparency, used to gain the trust of the other and to stimulate the purchase or diffusion of a certain style or brand. But it is a transparency that, though originating with Bentham as a way of putting people in a position to be able to observe each other, today closes people into narrow spaces, which perhaps make us feel stronger, but in reality they simply make us more fragile. In this way we are not creating mutual support communities, simply social networks. Are we sure that such transparency is merely a democratic instrument, or does it make us slaves of a purpose-built visibility, there to put us under the gaze of the other in the exact manner in which we wish to appear or we want others to see us, rather than showing the originality and creativity of influencers? Streams of images are created which appear and disappear in an instant. What remains, however, is the importance attributed to the aestheticisation of bodies, displayed not merely online but even in the day-to-day life of this reality of ours that is constituted by objects. The hope is that one does not become a commodity for the promotion of other goods and that one can choose not to be constantly on the scene [43].

5 Conclusions

What has emerged is that the new forms of access to fashion in all its forms and the social imaginary of fashion offer the opportunity to learn about and get closer to certain items faster, in real time and simultaneously, however it also promotes consumption. So easy, for example, through online purchases.

This virtual showcase heightens the narcissism of the modern-day individual. Anyone can show their latest purchases and their interpretation of them. In this way new trends are generated – rather than new fashions – which influence the choices of followers. New “experts” have emerged, influencers, sometimes remunerated by specific brands, who take on the role of trustworthy style guides: they choose for us and absolve us from the need for our own critical thinking and the risk that comes with making choices, making us conform to the lifestyle they propose and that corresponds to their individuality.

This space may seem like the result of freedom of expression, yet it is oriented by another aspect. Is there a new form of mediation that is at work on the various online platforms, thanks to algorithms, which filter information favoring a particular imaginary over another? These mechanisms influence the responses to our queries. In this

way many fashion universes are created, tending to circumscribe and enclose those who generate them within micro-imaginaries. A new form of “mediated access” is generated, which is shown as being “direct” both by those who generate this space and those who follow it.

Thus, the internet, intended as a way of providing faster and more “direct” access to information, is becoming a complex tool for “meta-mediation”. The public in question, often young and easily influenced, can decide whether to become the (in)voluntary mouthpiece of a certain imaginary in which they identify and wish to identify themselves or whether to create a new one, based on their own personality and individuality, stimulating new approval.

In the first case, in the identification of an already defined imaginary, a kind of depersonalization actually takes place. But above all there is a meta-mediation in which the protagonist becomes spokesperson for a brand, and the (un)intentional producer of advertising, irrespective of the presence or otherwise of the #adv hashtag. We risk implementing fashion, not based on our own preferences and, therefore, on the alleged contemporary individualism aspiring to Taylor’s authenticity, rather, based on those mediators (web mechanisms) and on those influencers upon whom we rely and who commit themselves daily to strengthening their virtual space.

In the second case, this process favors a proliferation of many closed imaginaries of fashion which may lead to new “trends”, if we can consider them such, being the expression of very restricted groups, losing the original sense of the fashion. In this way people construct themselves upon their own way of being, while looking for followers to “influence”.

But how long will this process – founded upon the friendly advice of individuals who invite us to wear certain clothes or suggest certain styles and brands to us through the narration of their lives (and in real time) – continue to inspire our trust?

It would seem that displaying in the Web their own way of interpreting fashion emphasizes modern individualism and radicalizes their own narcissism. In reality this way appears to seek confirmation and suggestions from the other by entering into micro-communities that undoubtedly close us within a certain way of being. They also show how continual comparison is necessary, and is in this case more direct, with individuals similar to ourselves, in terms of taste and personality, and in real-life situations in which we might find ourselves daily. In the communication of fashion, new imaginaries should also emerge which transcend the centrality of appearing and the consumption that such communication often induces, in favor of new moral values based on making web communication public [44]. In relation to consumerism, in *L'institution imaginaire de la société* and in *Une société à la dérive*, Castoriadis, well before the advent of the Internet and the digital communication of fashion, prophetically states: “[B]ut that sort of revolution would require profound changes in the psychosocial structure of people in the Western world, in their attitude toward life, in short, in their imaginary. The idea that the only goal in life is to produce and consume more is an absurd, humiliating idea that must be abandoned. The capitalist imaginary of pseudo-rational pseudo-mastery, and of unlimited expansion, must be abandoned. Only men and women can do that. A single individual, or an organization, can only prepare, criticize, encourage, and sketch out possible orientations, at best” [45].

It is probable that a community of consumers aware of the value and role of fashion, both online and offline, can facilitate these tasks, which are certainly not easy, and make us reflect upon the role of the Web and of new fashion mediators, to avoid conforming to the imaginary of others, in favor of our own uniqueness. But above all we must reflect on the ethical implications that can derive from certain purchases and from certain presentations. The ease of access to fashion and related information via the Web must not lead us to forget that the results of our research queries are polarized towards certain imaginaries of fashion rather than others.

So if fashion does represent the mirror of the Western social imaginary, this secularity could be exploited, not to corroborate one of the peculiarities of the same imaginary, consumerism, but to stimulate the process of responsible consumption, via the re-modulation of some aspects of the imaginary. A responsible imagination first and foremost in which, as some designers are starting to suggest, the new fashion experts, the influencers, should spread the idea of a less emotional and more rational consumption. This desirable paradigm shift of the imagination and of the imaginary, could push us to use social media not primarily for a mere aestheticisation of the self and one's own life, but also to critically interpret the fashion images (also of advertising) that appear on social media, avoiding the risk of individuals themselves becoming brands.

Regarding the world of fashion it would be appropriate to recall the original meaning of communication applied to fashion, namely, to share, to offer a *donum*, a gift to be reciprocated in a process of mutuality. This *donum* is the sharing, responsibly, of fashion and the fashion spaces that internet opens up. In this way individuals choose not to adhere to the principle of radical visibility, trying to convince their followers of their way of seeing, interpreting and communicating fashion, but by stimulating a new, more critical and ethical level of access to the Web. People might then “follow” only those “experts” who really respond to their own way of being, to their authenticity, without external conditioning, remaining open to the plurality of fashion information.

In this way, more ethical relationships may be created between individuals, fashion and the network through an imaginary based on a responsibility mindful of the individual and the community.

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The Transformation of Fashion Practice Through Instagram

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Abstract. This case study analyzes Virgil Abloh's 2018 debut show for Louis Vuitton's menswear to investigate the impact of the social media platform Instagram on fashion practice. Using Bruno Latour's Action-Network-Theory, the qualitative analysis of Instagram's influence on other network actants in the fashion industry reviews the impact on choices of set design, casting, guests, the use of audio, collaborations, and the choice of the designer himself by the LVMH luxury conglomerate for the brand. It is contextualized within traditional fashion practice, specifically fashion show practice, as documented by fashion studies literature. The conclusion confirms a shift, suggesting that the digital literacy skills identified by Henry Jenkins have become a prerequisite for success in the fashion system. It also addresses challenges and opportunities which the format, strategy and commercial purpose of social media networks offer in the field of fashion, in particular the production of content by platform users

Keywords: Instagram · Social media platforms · Fashion practice · Bruno Latour · Paris fashion week

1 Introduction

The focus of this case study is the impact of Instagram on fashion practice through an analysis of the first Louis Vuitton Menswear show by artistic director Virgil Abloh, which took place in Paris in June 2018. While much research on the impact of social media has focused on the effects on political practice, little attention has been paid to ways in which Instagram has transformed the practice of fashion. Instagram's impact on the fashion industry, valued at more than 2.5 trillion dollars worldwide by the United Nations in 2019, offers opportunities and has consequences.

As Entwistle [7] has argued in *Thinking Through Fashion*, French intellectual Bruno Latour's work on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) has become increasingly relevant to help us analyze the impact of non-human participants in the fashion industry. Especially relevant to Instagram research is Latour's concept of mediators, which denotes "technologies that do not function as passive objects...they transform, translate, distort and modify the meaning of elements they are supposed to carry" [11].

In 2017, Rocamora [16] documented how fashion not only engages with the forms and logic of social networks, but how its practices are also transformed by and for digital media. She quotes designer Albert Elbaz' complaint that social media has

“flattened” fashion, the success of a dress being determined by its photogenic appeal on social media. The number of Instagram users has since surpassed 1 billion, and the platform has transformed its static narrative technique to a multimedia one, introducing ‘Stories’, IGTV (Instagram Television), visual dialogue and interactive filters as it pursues the market shares of Snapchat and YouTube. Investigating the impact of Instagram’s impact on a milestone fashion show for one of the world’s dominating luxury conglomerates allows for an examination of the resulting challenges and opportunities.

2 Context

The application’s algorithms can only function within the context of the ubiquitous use of smartphones, their camera capacity and their connection to a digital network. Bueger [1] illustrates how according to Latour, actants cannot act on their own: “Agency is realized through networks and in association with other actants. An actant is configured in specific networks through which an effect is being produced. A network, in other words, gives an actant shape and turns it into a concrete actor”.

As Rocamora [15] reminds us in applying Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the field, fashion is a collective process. As of March 21st 2019, the Instagram hashtag #InstaFashion featured 105,000,000 user-generated posts. According to an interview with Eva Chen, director of fashion partnerships at Instagram, fashion represents the third most followed type of account on Instagram; most fashion followers open Instagram 32.5 times a day, and 400 million people use Instagram Stories every day [4]. Virgil Abloh’s brand Off-White (founded in 2013) has 6.9 million followers. At the time of his first Louis Vuitton show, Abloh’s personal Instagram account showed 2.3 million followers - it has since increased to 3.7 million followers. In comparison, Nicolas Ghesquière, Louis Vuitton’s Artistic Director of Women’s collections, has 774 thousand followers. Ten years ago, while Ghesquière was the artistic director of Balenciaga, Abloh was still an intern at Fendi.

Louis Vuitton (a company founded in 1854) has 30.8 million followers. Abloh’s personal follower count represents more than one tenth of the followers of Louis Vuitton, which operates in 50 countries worldwide, is one of the world’s most valuable luxury brands, and has a digital team at its disposal.

3 Methodology

A literature review of traditional fashion show practice served as a framework, while the attendance of the show allowed for a qualitative and immersive analysis of key elements in a real world context. Further research analyzed the coverage of the show on Instagram with the use of hashtags and location tags, while keyword searches enabled analysis of press coverage for further analysis of Abloh’s fashion practice and digital skills. A qualitative longterm survey approach was used from the show in June 2018 until March 2019 for measuring the various Instagram engagements of 10 students present and canvased at the show. This study allowed for longterm observation of

engagement with the show and avoided posts going unnoticed since not all show audience members post immediately, and many omit hashtags or location tags when posting. All follower metrics of Instagrams were assessed again in March 2019, and all metrics unless stated otherwise are based on March 2019 numbers.

4 Set Design

Traditionally, fashion show seating arrangements give higher value to front-row seating. The design of the catwalk is a key element in the seasonal ritual of the fashion world which has been described as “the greatest show on earth” by Duggan [5], and as performance art by Teunissen [21]. The Louis Vuitton Menswear show featured a catwalk stretching 200 m in length. The length allowed for only two seated rows on each side of the catwalk, with the standing row behind these at arm’s length. This layout strategically enabled high-quality, user-generated visual content, while imbuing all visuals with a perceived ‘Front-Row’ quality and prestige. Set design choices are especially relevant given Virgil Abloh’s background as a student of civil engineering and architecture rather than fashion design. The set’s vivid colors provided an ideal backdrop for content creation, especially for selfies taken by guests on the catwalk. This constituted the highest number of content posts for students.

5 Casting

“The vocabulary according to Virgil Abloh”, the show’s program available on each seat, featured maps detailing the birthplace of all models and those of their parents (covering every continent except Antarctica), “offering a global view of diversity linked to the travel DNA of the brand”. The cast of models included a multitude of stars from the music, art and design worlds, such as Steve Lacy, Octavian, Dev Hynes, Kid Cudi and artist Lucien Smith. Many of the models have an Instagram following rivaling Abloh’s own fan base, such as Playboi Carti and A\$AP Rocky (respectively 2.9 million, and 9.5 million followers).

6 Audio

The emotional appeal of music and the popularity of its follower base was integrated both in the cast and with a live music performance by Badbadnotgood, performing a cover of Kanye West’s Ghost Town. Abloh, who has been performing as a DJ since he was a teenager, also played a set at the after-party, alongside sets by Benji B (36.7 thousand followers), No Vacancy (29.1 thousand followers) and others. Short clips of Abloh DJ’ing are added to his Instagram feed once a week on average. He has released a collaborative EP with Berlin-based producer Boys Noize (167 thousand followers). He records an Apple Music Beats 1 radio show called ‘Televised Radio’ at the Louis Vuitton atelier in Paris featuring a selection of popular guest contributors. Though lagging behind Spotify’s 96 million subscribers, Apple Music has just over 50 million

subscribers. An important part of streetwear culture, the music industry has been instrumental in the promotion of streetwear brands worldwide. Moreover, in the context of the mass adoption of voice-enabled devices such as Alexa, the analysis of music selection is increasingly being used for targeted advertising, ranging from sentiment analysis to style recommendations. Menswear start-up Eison Triple Thread has for example developed an app linked to Spotify playlists to recommend products [6].

7 Guests

The actant fashion network includes the selection of guests, described by Skov [19] as part of the performative spectacle of fashion practice. Kanye West, Abloh's long-time mentor, former employer and friend was present at the show. The celebrity guests also included Kim Kardashian, Rihanna, Kylie Jenner, Rita Ora, Bella Hadid, Chadwick Boseman Naomi Campbell, and Jordyn Woods, whose total combined followers amounts to 390.3 million. In addition, the press and bloggers present included several YouTube stars in addition to major media outlets, each with their respective readership following.

A key segment of the invited guests were fashion students, who had been invited from Paris-based fashion design schools. Each was handed a color specific Louis Vuitton-branded T-shirt, matching the colorful sections of the catwalk, thus integrating the students into the set design. A survey of Instagram accounts of ten students of Parson Paris (The New School) in attendance showed that each student documented and broadcast the show via their personal Instagram network, ranging from one to 9 posts. The students show a range of 165 to 1242 followers, with an average range of 600 to 700, while one student showed 95,500 followers. The combined worldwide broadcast by fashion students in return for a T-shirt and the possibility of a picture on the catwalk (or of Kanye West) was a prime example of viral marketing, but also of the decentralization, diversification and customization of content described by Castells [3].

The success of social networks lies in the fact that they are not providing content but platforms—the content with which they make billions is entirely user-generated. According to Wagner [22], Instagram is expected make some \$8 billion in revenue this year by selling advertising against content users that produce for free. Though consumers have seemingly increased their control within the participatory culture of these platforms according to Jenkins [8], their contribution of content is mined to lead to new products and allows for increasingly targeted marketing strategies and plans. Luce [12] describes some methods for data mining used for analyzing both Instagram fashion images and the platform's inbuilt feedback loops. This shift towards 'prosumers'/collaborative consumers described by Sheehan [18] plays a very important role in re-shaping the fashion industry and practice.

Fashion represents prime content for Instagram, as is generating live transmissions and videos: short videos of less than 30s tend to accelerate consumption. Newell [14] reports that as of 2017, consumer-generated video content saw a 96% interaction rate among shoppers. As a result, catwalk design and events are being increasingly structured to encourage participative content production, with VFiles and Made recently abandoning traditional catwalk shows for 'immersive' experiences.

8 Designer

Virgil Abloh has no formal fashion education, though his mother was a seamstress, and he interned for Fendi in 2009 (alongside Kanye West). He has undergraduate degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and a master's degree in Architecture from the Illinois Institute of Technology. A creative director for Kanye West, Abloh launched his first own brand, Pyrex Vision, in 2012, which he shut down in 2013 before launching Off-White. An ‘artistic experiment’, Pyrex featured deadstock Ralph Lauren flannel shirts screen printed with the word *Pyrex*. In 2015, Off-White was named a finalist for the LVMH Prize.

Abloh has stated: “Instagram is more important than anything else” [17] and displays masterful digital literary skills, described by Jenkins as including “play, collective intelligence, appropriation, transmedia navigation, and networking” [9]. He has successfully collaborated with Nike (over 84 million Instagram followers). His Instagram post of the show (“You can do it too...”) significantly echoed the Nike slogan “Just Do It”. The advent of sneakers and streetwear in the luxury market and specifically in the house of Louis Vuitton had already been presaged by the collaboration of the fashion house with the street- and skate wear label Supreme. According to a 2017 study by consulting firm Bain & Company [2], luxury streetwear has helped boost global sales of luxury goods by 5% last year at an estimated value of 263 billion euros. The shift towards a new sartorial language of streetwear may not be Abloh’s invention, but Instagram has both fueled his success and enabled Louis Vuitton’s recognition that the market demand for it exists.

According to John Matthews, strategy director at Siegel+Gale London, because “Instagram is now the most important visual medium for fashion, the industry has keyed in on streetwear’s logos and graphics as instantly visible, transmittable memes” [20]. It should be noted that while the logo of Louis Vuitton works well on Instagram, many other brands, including the increasingly tech-oriented Burberry, have recently taken to adapting their logos in what appears to be an effort to improve their visibility online and on social networks.

9 Conclusion

As Rocamora [16] predicted, mediatization has spurred the dematerialization of fashion, blending material, immaterial and symbolic consumption. In Latour’s [11] definition, agency is understood as an effect or modification of a state of the world, as everything that has an impact upon it. This case study confirms that the platform Instagram is an actant which has substantially transformed and modified fashion practice, and is playing an increasingly active role in how fashion is being created, communicated and consumed [10].

The increasing importance of Instagram scenography, including set design, model casting, guest selection and audio, indicate changing skill requirements as described by Jenkins [8] for Human Resource decisions at luxury brands. In addition, interactive digital platform elements also assume many of the functions which according to Skov [19] previously made the catwalk show itself a “primary framework in the organization

of the fashion world”, suggesting a replacement of the longstanding fashion practice of traditional physical show formats.

Abloh’s connections to other fields such as the music industry, his strategic and far-reaching collaborations with celebrities and alignments with mass market brands such as Apple and Nike have been key factors to his success, and confirm the value of cross-marketing development.

It is important to note that the focus on numbers in terms of quantifiable followers and engagement derives from the platform structures themselves. Quantifiable follower metrics allow structures such as Instagram’s parent company Facebook, which acquired Instagram for \$1 billion in 2012, to modify fashion practice and to redefine luxury industry strategies. The challenges and opportunities of the fashion industry are being redefined by its algorithms and its quest for audiences and profit. Their analysis is especially relevant in the context of recent changes within the company, such as the departure of Instagram’s founders and its increasing importance to the revenue of its parent company Facebook.

The case study’s illustration of the impact of this social media platform also exemplifies the rising importance of communication theory for the fashion industry: understanding fashion today implies “understanding media” in the terms of McLuhan [13], and further technological developments, such as mixed reality or shoppable video and audio content all call for further empirical research on their impacts on fashion practice.

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Country-Specific Studies



Britishness: Heritage, Tradition and Authenticity

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Abstract. This paper discusses, through the vehicle of case studies, how Fashion and Design brands have been instrumental in regenerating commerce in the United Kingdom (UK) regarding luxury goods, leathercraft and footwear. A particular attention is paid to the current research surrounding the ‘commodification of heritage’ exemplified by the fashion house Burberry, which demonstrates Britishness as an intangible element of cultural heritage. In-depth findings illustrated cover V&A Archives, Burberry’s celebrity endorsement and the royal appointment system. To compare the findings from this top profitable company, the centuries old footwear brands of the Northampton area in the English Midlands that have preserved the making of gentleman’s shoes, are also exemplified. It has been noted that some manufacturers have been taken over by international houses such as Hermès and Prada to essentially safeguard the craftsmanship that is “Made in Britain”. Both exemplars will be related to the UK Government funded initiatives and by Walpole, British Fashion Council, Made in Britain Initiative, London Craft Fair, as well as other benevolent bodies, namely Leathersellers and Cordwainers Guilds. Live fashion events and halo projects sponsored by industry are also the focal point for certain aspects of the intangible cultural heritage industry. Policy and reports, such as The State of Fashion [1], will inform the debate. In conclusion, it is argued that the exclusive club of luxury labels with ‘intangible cultural heritage’ is at the cross-roads in retailing and frequently referenced to define notions of Britishness, which will be the focus of discussion.

Keywords: Britishness · Heritage · Authenticity

1 Introduction

Britishness is something that exists as a term, and yet has no physical manifestation, cannot be exactly defined, or given a precise value. Design and Communication in the United Kingdom monetizes this asset and this investigation tracks and presents some relevant stakeholders, through archival research and participant-observation. A report ‘The State of Fashion 2019,’ produced by The Business of Fashion (BoF) [1], states that it will be a ‘year of awakening’, and highlights the necessity for brands to be ‘nimble, think digital-first and achieve ever-faster speed to market.’ This will also involve proactive approaches to social issues such as sustainability and transparency. Furthermore, it defined the top priority that is to have the courage to “self-disrupt” their

own identity and the sources of their old success, in order to realize these changes and win new generations of customers'.

It will be argued that the exclusive clubs of luxury brands with ‘intangible cultural heritage’ [1] are at crossroads in retailing, where the underlying layers of their heritage must undergo a process of “self-disruption” to maintain and gain consumers. As Barrère (2013) observes there exists a ‘double-edged effect of heritages, which while bestowing competitive advantages and favoring the development of creativity, do orient development along a given path, promoting a certain kind of creativity that may lead to lock-in effects, and build obstacles in the way of development.’ [2].

However, the cultural heritage associated with luxury labels is nuanced and underpinned by a variety of tangible and intangible threads. These strands can include history, heritage, technical and creative innovation, national identity, and approval by royal appointment, and endorsement by explorers, innovators and celebrities.

For example, in the twenty-first century, Burberry (est. 1856) deploys nuanced connotations of ‘real’ aristocracy and ‘synthesized’ media worlds, to develop complex and subtle promotional communications in a synthesis of life, or ‘lifestyle’. The trench coat, (lined with the ‘House check’)¹ is the historic totem, upon which Burberry have constructed an international luxury ‘fashion’ brand. The key constituents of Burberry’s international appeal have been the commodification of corporate ‘heritage’ and ‘Britishness’.

For the purposes of this paper, the authors investigated the brand of Burberry as a member of the “super winners” [1] alongside heritage footwear brands which demonstrate an ongoing ability to reference their past, whilst “self-disrupting” [1] in a manner that acknowledges British heritage by emphasizing the eccentricities and signifiers of Britishness.

2 Context

2.1 The Revival of Made in Britain

In the article ‘Inside the Check Republic’ in Vogue 2011 [3], Ellison defined the technique of Christopher Bailey (former CEO of Burberry), of presenting a synthesis of ‘Britishness’ as fundamental to his success, stating that:

“Bailey has harnessed a very successful melange of Britishness into the brand ... The girls look like lovely folk heroines, with natural make-up, long straight hair, fresh faces - and they’re always slightly indie girls. And the music at the shows is always British music. And you can see an element of the British countryside, and nature in the colors that he uses, and in the way he’s brought the colors to the shows. Michael Kors might have Long Island clambakes, but Bailey’s taken the dodgy British weather - and the need to have a mac with you - and made it fun and glamorous. He’s used it all to his advantage” [3].

¹ Burberry’s official website chronology specifies that check lining was ‘officially’ introduced the trench coat in 1920. [4] However, advertisements from 1914-1918 clearly show check linings in trenchcoats. This suggests that Burberry may have introduced their own ‘design’ of check in the 1920’s, would appear to be corroborated by a Burberry outfit from the V&A archives, which has a camel colored check lining, with contrasting red stripes to match the outer red colored proofed cloth of the garment. (Garment ref T.308, Skiing outfit, Margaret Duchess of Argyll, ca.1920).

Burberry is the leading luxury brand in the 2018 Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI), [4] and has been included for the fourth consecutive year in the ‘Textiles, Apparel & Luxury Goods’ sector. Burberry’s score reflects its commitment to drive positive change, as well as its early progress towards its responsibility goals to 2022, which were launched in 2017 [5].

It is argued that Burberry has commodified its heritage to present a nuanced accumulation of tradition and authenticity, via a complex negotiation of the national identity. The reference to historic and social institutions, the ideologies, the romanticized notion of the landscape, the weather, and the eccentricities of behavior have come to imbue the trench coat with the national identity of this ‘green and pleasant land.’ As Goodrum argues ‘The British ‘look’ is synonymous with a legacy of country weekends, tea drinking and sedate pastimes, a commodified set of national values that are infused with an idealized concept of Britishness’ [6].

The appeal of a nation’s heritage signified in a trench coat is that it provides authenticity and distinction in a ‘neo’ Britishness that embodies a post-modern [7] re-working of the national identity. Thus, the characteristic landscape, the institutions and national traits are all deployed to construct connotations of perceived value and authenticity. Likewise, the adroit juxtaposition of ‘heritage’ with postmodern design strategies has proved lucrative in emerging cultures of luxury consumption in the Far East, where the increasing fluidity of ‘lifestyle’ has arguably led to a desire for authenticity.

‘...British fashion is tailored to the Japanese imagination and is confined to a partial vision revolving around the key notions of eccentricity, class branding and exquisite standards’.

2.2 Paradigm of Britishness

In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the paradigm of Britishness at Burberry, signifying the ideological and social history of the nation, has intensified by strategic media commodification of Burberry’s corporate ‘heritage’. Also, the emerging trend in international ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions, (juxtaposing period costume, art collections, or historic interiors with contemporary designer collections), played a significant role in fusing the prestige of historic, cultural aesthetics with consumerism. The exhibition, *AngloMania: Tradition and Transgression* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2006) was sponsored by Burberry, and presented a ‘romanticized’ patriotism for traditional country landscapes and the national enthusiasm for outdoor pursuits as the official and unofficial signifiers of national identity [8].

2.3 AngloMania/Exhibitions - the Blockbuster

Whilst art exhibitions have maintained their popularity around the world, ‘blockbuster’ exhibitions involving fashion and design have become increasingly popular, and due to restricted entrance can ‘sell-out’ online in advance of the specified show dates. These exhibitions are often sponsored by luxury brands like Burberry, Hermès, and Gucci to

reinforce and commodify their historic lineage. In recent years, popular examples have included categories with historic specificity:

- Fashion: ‘AngloMania: Tradition and Transgression’, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Sponsored by Burberry (2006).
- Accessories: ‘Hermès Leather Forever’, Royal Academy of Art, London (2012).
- Footwear: ‘Shoes: Pleasure and Pain’, V&A, London (2015).
- Interior, country house style: ‘House Style: Traditions and Transgressions, Dressing to Impress, The Quest for Excellence.’ Chatsworth House, Derbyshire (2017).
- Couture: ‘Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams’, V&A, London (2019).

Whilst British fashion has been defined by a knowing and self-conscious historicism, by focusing on historicizing tendencies, the exhibition “AngloMania” presented a series of tableaux based on Britain’s literary and artistic traditions. According to Bolton [9], the works of a wide spectrum of British designers evoked “the irony of satirical prints, the romance of landscape paintings, the glamour and bravado of grand manner portraits”. He further noted that a dialogue between the past and the present being established by engaging the function, decoration, and iconography of the Annie Laurie Aitken Galleries.

The ‘unofficial’ uniforms depicting outdoor pursuits, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century became as identifiable as the ‘official’ uniforms of the nation’s political, military, judicial and sporting institutions. The Britishness of both ‘uniforms’ alludes to membership of ‘the Establishment’², and the ‘multiple-coded’ layering of social hierarchy therein.

For Goodrum, Britishness is a ‘notoriously difficult concept’, but argues for Osmond’s term ‘Anglo-British’ (1988) as a valid construct:

‘...as referring to the dual identity operated by England, indicating a national self-awareness in terms of English identity but simultaneously belonging to the multinational state that is Great Britain ... once they were simply ‘the English,’ with the Home Counties as their core ... whose overarching identity, Britishness, concealed the hierarchy, the extent and the heterogeneity of England’s evolving empire’.

3 Case Study One - Burberry

3.1 Britishness and Branding

To classify the commodification of Britishness at Burberry, it is necessary to define the perceived historic traits of Englishness and Britishness. The eighteenth century emerges as a period when the English began to ‘explain and codify’ themselves, via their own perceptions, and also those of visitors travelling to England [9].

² “By the ‘Establishment’, I do not only mean the centers of official power - though they are certainly part of it - but rather the whole matrix of official and social relations within which power is exercised. The exercise of power in Britain (more specifically, in England) cannot be understood unless it is recognized that it is exercised socially.” Fairlie, H. (1955) Political Commentary, *The Spectator*, 23 September.

... the English pioneered the ‘political’ concept of dress, exploring notions of class in clothing ... and creating a flexible society, sartorially speaking, in which on the one hand, upper-class young men could playfully adopt certain elements of working-class clothing ... and on the other hand, the middle classes ... could evidence their upwards mobility by wearing versions of elite clothing [9].

3.2 Communicating History

Historically, the Victorian era (1837–1901) defined Britishness in a global context, due to the expansion of the British Empire, the institutions, and the mechanisms of trade which are now commonplace.

Paradoxically, the perceived national signifiers of this ‘green and pleasant land’ frequently take the form of symbolic English institutions and the architecture which represents them, for example, Buckingham Palace; the Victorian Gothic Houses of Parliament; the Old Bailey; the playing fields of Eton; the ‘dreaming spires’ Oxford; Chatsworth Stately Home and Lord’s cricket ground and the grass courts of Wimbledon. In *The Englishness of English Dress*³, Breward [10] cites Pevsner’s ‘idea of ‘Englishness’ (like all other national identities), as “a collection of mediated memories and ‘inventions of tradition’”.

The patterned tartan cloth, which signifies the ‘fabric’ of the nation, also became increasingly ‘fashionable’ in Victorian England.⁴ Tartan, which was once associated with the Highlands of Scotland,⁵ came to signify class and distinction as appropriated by the upper classes of Victorian England. Paradoxically, British Royalty and aristocracy popularized tartan, in structured, tailored garments for outdoor clothing, and in kilt form.

A Burberry’s promotional sample book from 1908⁶ in the V&A archives contains original swatches of proofed check fabric, and demonstrates how tartan became synonymous with the iconography of leisure clothing for the leisure class. British royalty also influenced the nomenclature of checks like Royal Stewart and Hunting Stewart.

3.3 Designer Themes/Iconography/Subcultures

Unlike seasonal ‘trends’ in patterned cloth, the use of checks at Burberry as a non-seasonal and non-gender specific pattern has prevailed. The Burberry ‘House check’ has become totemic as a globalized signifier of Britishness, forming part of the potent design iconography of the brand.

³ A title which the editors, Breward, C. Conekin, B. and Cox, C. confess to having borrowed the title from Nikolas Pevsner’s *The Englishness of English Art* (1956).

⁴ The acquisition of Balmoral Castle in the Scottish Highlands, by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert in 1848, created a fashion for ‘all things’ tartan [8].

⁵ In the twenty-first century, tartan is synonymous with the iconography of Scotland, but in 1747, after the Jacobite uprising, an act of English parliament had banned the wearing of plaid in the Highlands. The wearing of plaid was permitted in 1757, for Scottish Highland regiments fighting in North America, and in 1782 the ban on plaid was repealed [11].

⁶ Burberry sample book ca.1908, (Ref. T.187) V&A, London.

The appropriation of the ‘Nova Check’ by an unofficial subculture called ‘chavs’⁷ [12], threatened to devalue the brand’s reputation. The ‘chavs’ had origins rooted in the British ‘Casuals’ style of the 1980s, identified by Hall and Jefferson [13]. The Burberry ‘Nova check’ on garments and accessories in the 1990s became the group ‘social-marker’ of the ‘chav’. At the height of ‘chav’ popularity, the Burberry check came to signify a sporting fraternity, which unlike Veblen’s [14] sporting leisure class, was arguably not to be emulated.

Part of the process of reclaiming the brand integrity and shedding ‘negative’ connotations, involved revoking manufacturing licenses for the check from overseas companies. The process of reintroduction involved restraint, subtlety and moderation in usage. Paradoxically, Burberry have now reclaimed the check as symbolic of their ‘British Heritage’, by incorporating the design into Burberry’s new headquarters in Horseferry in London, in 2007, by architects Gensler.

4 Case Study Two – Northampton Shoemaking

4.1 Made to Last

Footwear has been a particular part of outfit where a notion of ‘class’ has long been explored as a form of self-expression for ‘well-bred people’. [14] Linked to this concept, this section discusses several types of footwear that have closely been associated with ‘Britishness’ or with English shoe making; also, the influence of subcultures including US college fashion on the Northamptonshire footwear industry. To quote from ‘Uniforms’, a song by Pete Townshend [15] of music group The Who:

“It don’t matter where you’re from, what matters is your uniform. Wear your braces ‘round your seat, Dr. Martens on your feet” [15].

The adaptation of working class boots by subcultures such as the skinheads and punk generation, wearing army style boots manufactured by the Northamptonshire firm Griggs and their Dr. Martens brand has led to a cult following. The use of ‘Doc’s boots’ in popular culture which was said to be originated by Pete Townshend, frontman of The Who and subsequently been popularized through a musical film ‘Tommy’ with Elton John performing as ‘pinball wizard’ in outlandish oversized boots, referencing Dr. Martens [16]. The footwear is recognizable through its air-cushioned sole design, yellow welt stitching and black and yellow heel loop.⁸

Gentrification is the process by which a place, especially part of a city, changes from being a poor area to a richer one, where people from a higher social class live. In footwear one can observe the social advancement of a shoe type in the appropriation of brogue patterns, from a type of rugged footwear worn by rural communities into a style with distinct punch holes and toe cap perforations which are associated with country

⁷ The ‘chav’, a Youth subculture, of football supporters, using the Burberry checks as an informal marker of group membership [12].

⁸ Dr Martens style boots, worn by Elton John as the character Pinball Wizard in Ken Russell’s musical film ‘Tommy’ of 1975, Northampton Shoe Museum [16].

living. Brogues have become acceptable for more formal wear and are a main product line of Northampton shoe makers Tricker's (est. 1829).

Other more traditional style footwear have become synonymous with business and evening wear. The professional classes, in particular the banking community of the City of London are associated with 'Oxford' and 'Derby' styles of shoes, typically to a 1920s pattern, fabricated with a Goodyear welt. This is a process that sets apart English shoemaking from continental European lasting methods, whereby the upper of the shoe is stitched together with the insole and sole through a welted seam. This labor intensive process facilitates repeated resoling and longevity of the shoe.

Northampton has a tradition of gentleman's shoemaking and shoes made in the town have received royal approval including the current Prince of Wales. Tricker's are holders of a royal warrant that has been foil embossed onto their products, packaging and on display in international showrooms of gentleman's fitters in Tokyo's fashionable Ginza district.⁹ Endorsements by celebrities continue with actor Daniel Craig as the fictional MI6 agent James Bond in 'Skyfall'. Thus, Northampton shoe manufacturer Crockett & Jones (est. 1879) was pleased to announce that it has once again supplied a selection of styles to the character James Bond in the 24th Bond film, 'Spectre' [17].

A casual footwear type, 'loafers' are a moccasin style construction, worn by English gentry that may have originated in naval deck shoes. This informal style, alongside V-necked pullovers, has been adopted by post-war college students in American East Coast universities and 'Ivy League' colleges. Style icons and film stars popularized the genre, and this has been documented in a Japanese publication 'Take Ivy' [18]. The exhibition 'Craft to America, Style to Britain' at the University of Northampton in 2015 celebrates the craftsmanship of the Northamptonshire shoemakers and their stylistic links to American collegiate and mid-century styles¹⁰. It references 'Take Ivy' and makes the link between British footwear and the heritage of Ivy League inspired clothing, through photography and artefacts. The curators constructed that "it would make an interesting angle for taking a fresh look at the resurgence of the Northamptonshire industry and there was little doubt that a considerable portion of the local makers' inventories included styles which originated in the US. Exploring different aspects of the Ivy story; its elitist origins, its adoption by Hollywood ...and how the style was exported to Britain and the World", the curators asserted that strong stylistic links and the preservation of local craft skills have reinforced this connection [19].

⁹ Company presentation by CEO of Tricker's on Luxury Brand Marketing at University of Northampton, 28 February 2019.

¹⁰ The exhibition 'Craft to America, Style to Britain' at the University of Northampton 4 - 25 November 2015 was curated by Tim Walker and Tom Shaw, with support from the British Footwear Association. This exhibition illustrates how the Ivy League style of the elite universities of the North Eastern United States transferred to Britain via Hollywood, influencing much of the footwear crafted in Northamptonshire.

4.2 Education Matters

Northampton is located close to the heart of England. The town is renowned for its tradition of shoe-making, and has a long history of leather manufacturing and education of leather technologists. The teaching in the local university also reflects a changing local industry. Fashion, Footwear and Design courses have an integrated approach with students linking research, business management and marketing studies directly associated with design projects and are supported by industry. Students tackle a variety of projects throughout their three years; some live projects from local firms, some linked to international businesses within luxury goods and some set to challenge the students with the global realities of today's marketplace.

In addition, the Institute for Creative Leather Technology at the University offers research, consultancy and leather related higher education including doctoral studies, serving businesses across the globe. The University of Northampton, a local university, is found to be at the hub of networks of organizations and people such as London livery companies, leather material scientists, designers and makers of Jeffery-West or Church's Shoes. It is part of professional networks which are defined through membership in a guild or society, such as the Worshipful Guild of Leathersellers, Cordwainers, Gloves, Drapers, and the Society of Leather Technologists and Chemists. Furthermore, informal or formal creative communities evolved from the craft around leather in an industrial district in which they are physically located or are associated with. Global networks also emerged as local companies manufacture or trade with abroad, or became part of luxury goods market. For example, Church's Shoes are part of Prada and John Lobb, a brand within the portfolio of Hermès. New links and collaboration with British car manufacturers, French and Italian fashion houses can be observed with Northampton graduates benefiting through placements and job opportunities.

4.3 Shoe Town

Local commerce in Northampton is represented through small businesses within the contracted shoe and leather industry, namely Church's, Crockett Jones, Edward Green John Lobb and Tricker's. In addition, Springline is Britain's sole remaining shoe last manufacturer and key supplier of wooden and high-density polyethylene lasts for boot and shoe manufacture. Lasts are moulds on which shoes are made, standardized in a nomenclature of sizes and widths. These are custom fit and made for handmade, benchgrade and handcrafted manufacture, and kept by the company until client calls for repairs and refitting. Shops of Northampton footwear companies have been clustered around Jermyn Street in the exclusive St James area of London to serve their clientele. The factories of these companies are located in Northamptonshire, which is recognized as the center of UK's shoe industry. The market is characterized by a continuing decline of shoemaking in the UK and Europe, with 'Goodyear welted' gentleman's shoemaking stabilized on a sustainable level and market growth in the Far East. The production is labor intensive but partially mechanized, with highly specialized staff and machinery including closing machinery and digital pattern cutting with the capability for customization and yield optimization, through scanning. Sole leather is sourced

from the few remaining British vegetable tanneries, and upper leather imported mainly from Italy and France. In response to a changing market and economic situation, the companies have started to diversify and manufacture for overseas markets. The firms began to investigate sessional trends and social media more fully and realized that more innovation and knowledge would be required to open up new markets for them, combined with the increasing shortage of skilled footwear staff.¹¹

A contributor to ‘Made in England’ magazine and campaigner Kate Hills wrote on Dr. Martens [20], “When bankruptcy loomed for Dr. Martens in 2003 nearly all of their production was sent to the Far East, but the business kept the original Cobbs Lane factory with the hope that one day customers would value the Made in England label again. Now that day has come, and the company is increasing manufacture of the Dr. Martens boot in the UK, yet still the capacity of the Wollaston factory is only 70,000 pairs a year, a mere 2% of the total 3.8 millions pairs produced in 2011”. Moving forward, in early 2019 it has been announced that Dr. Martens is investing £2 million in its Northampton site and will double the capacity of its ‘Made in England’ range with “investment will upgrade the existing manufacturing facilities to nearly double production of its made-in-the-UK collection to up to 165,000 pairs a year” [21]. The footwear business will also open a new visitor and heritage center to highlight the its history, ongoing commitment to Northampton and to upholding Dr. Martens’ distinguished brand heritage. The CEO of Dr. Martens stated to be “really proud of our history and of our roots in Northampton – the city has played a huge role in the growth of our brand and we want people to be able to experience this” [21].

4.4 Limited Editions

At Dr. Martens and Northampton’s shoe firms the product lines are produced in seasons, limited editions or short runs and at a very high quality. They are tailored to their market, be it a branded outlet or individual retailer, as a service as much as product. The innovation forms an indispensable part, not only for combining traditional craftsmanship and skill, but also the integration of digitally enhanced manufacturing using traditional and manmade materials. Drawing on the knowledge base that is residing with parent companies, creative industries, universities and the international manufacturing, utilizing both traditional and the emerging technologies and materials, the firms are seen to raise the impact and profile of their products and also their commitment to high quality British manufacture.

5 Discussion - British Brands ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage’

The notion that an outsider can identify the characteristics of Englishness with greater clarity than the English is a recurrent historic theme. As Steedman observes [22], the ‘critical eye’ of the outsider or the ‘Other’ can offer a more critically honed portrayal,

¹¹ Site visit to Northamptonshire shoe manufacturers conducted by Schaber, F. et al. between 2013–2017.

than the original example.¹² This can be evidenced in a commercial context by David Lauren,¹³ when referring to the Ralph Lauren commission to designing the official uniform for that English sporting institution, Wimbledon;

“We were inspired by the way that we dreamt Wimbledon looked in the past, but actually never really did.” As Long explains in the same article ‘Wimbledon may be quintessentially English, but it takes an American to keep it looking that way’ [23].

Ralph Lauren has constructed an international empire by appropriating ‘retro’ as their leitmotiv; which Guffrey [24] considers “an interpretation of history”. Lauren used ‘retro’ imagery for collections with nostalgic connotations reminiscent of times past ‘À la recherche du temps perdu’ including ‘British County’, ‘Beaton’, ‘Sporty’ and ‘Old School’ [25]. Here, we argue that this is to connote heritage in a constructed synthesis of ‘lifestyle,’ which for Burberry is authentic heritage. Burberry adverts from 2006 show similarities in depicting the ‘British County’ look which Lauren frequently mimic. Lorna Hall, Senior retail analyst at trend forecaster WGSN [26] identified Ralph Lauren as the exemplar company model, and that Burberry has the potential to become a ‘British Ralph Lauren.’¹⁴

Both of these exemplify the trends found in initiatives funded both by the UK Government as well as other organizations such as Walpole, British Fashion Council, Made in Britain Initiative, London Craft Fair, Graduate Fashion Week and other benevolent bodies, namely the Guilds of Leathersellers and Cordwainers. These organizations aim to showcase makers and manufacturing communities in Britain, to benefit in sales, marketing, exports and PR.

6 Conclusions

Authentic Burberry heritage now forms the foundations upon which multiple layers of ‘neo-Britishness’ are constructed. The interconnectedness of fashion with contemporary British musicians, models and celebrities is deployed by Burberry and Dr. Martens alike to reinforce associations with youth culture and clientele. Baudrillard [27] identified the role of the electronic mass media as being blurring the distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘imagined’ with a ‘synthesis of life’, or ‘lifestyle’ emerging. Thus, we contend that the fashion associated with British style, allows the consumer to adopt a synthesis of the inherent characteristics of British tradition and a ‘neo’ heritage, which have become fused with modern interpretations of ‘Brit’ style. Businesses increasingly compete in a global marketplace and producers in the U.K. by investing

¹² In making reference to the role of ‘the Other’ in defining Englishness, Steedman considers its origins in Husserlian phenomenology, but concludes ‘If the Other supplies the notion of the Self (if, for example, Frenchness and Catholicism provide the self-image and identity of the English, or the British nation), then the mechanism of this process must be the individual imagination.’

¹³ David Lauren, son of founder Ralph Lauren, and Senior Vice President of Advertising, Marketing and Corporate Communications.

¹⁴ At the time of the article, (2011) Polo Ralph Lauren had sales of (£3.1bn), compared with Burberry’s £1.3bn.

extensively on their capacity to take on innovative process and practices. As seen in Case Study One, whilst many have closed manufacturing routes in the U.K. and shifted their production to the Far East, others, like in Case Study Two, have survived because of the specialized service they could offer.

What are the factors encouraging the growing trend for supporting British production? One of the most pertaining elements would be of retaining skilled jobs and expertise. The creative industries are defined by their ability to generate intellectual property. Northampton shoemakers are notable suppliers to the fashion industries, and the collaboration with designers, emerging talent and style icons will enable the companies to more fully engage with other creative industries. These kinds of companies, being facilitated by business, digital communication and fashion expertise, will also be in a position of creating their own intellectual property based on their unique craft skills and technology that they have developed to serve the market with bespoke products is something that exists, but that identity cannot be touched, exactly described, or given an exact value.

Design and Communication in the United Kingdom monetizes this asset and this investigation tracks and presents some relevant stakeholders, through archival research and participant-observation. A liminal phase is emerging, as the historic collides with the what the BoF identifies as a need for ‘disruption’ to sate the appetite of shifting habits of consumption, as Gaillard argues in the ‘directionality of the search’ with reference to Proust, it ‘proceeds *at the same time* backward and forward (in the chronological time of conscious succession)’ [25]. Disrupting heritage in design can become a paradigm of ‘A La Recherche du Temps Perdu.’

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‘Another Genre’ of Media in Fashion: The East Asian TV Industry Mediates Youth’s Popular Aesthetics

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Abstract. Since 2000, based on the accelerated cultural globalization, a new TV production genre –trendy drama– have been massively created by the East Asian TV industries to signify Asian modernity. This has therefore developed a specific popular culture phenomenon circulated within Asia and brought forth a sense of fashion, that exclusively belongs to the contemporary Asian aesthetic perspective. The aim of this article is to explore how the Taiwanese TV industry has adapted this drama genre to represent a range of women’s fashion, through which the modern Taiwanese women’s attitudes are able to exhibit. It is argued that the East Asian TV industry has symbolic power to create trendy drama, the new genre in Asia, conveying zeitgeist for Asian audiences to recognize. The drama performs as a specific symbolic form, enabling the Asian TV industries, such as the Taiwanese, to employ its encoding strategies in costume. Roland Barthes’s semiotics in fashion is drawn for this paper to analyze both levels of signification of costuming in *My Queen*, a Taiwanese women-led trendy drama. By displaying the heroine’s fashion, this paper also looks into deep culture signified in this drama. The drama represents a modern society, where women are not limited in what they can wear or do. In the wake of registering specific new values, women’s dressing in trendy drama gives rise to an imagined fashion community for East Asian audiences. East Asian people then relook at themselves and start to identify their Asian-owned fashion, no longer in the pursuit of Western popular aesthetics.

Keywords: Media power · Symbolic form · TV genre · Fashion

1 Introduction

Trendy drama was a new genre created by the Japanese TV industry for the middle classes in the 1990s; it now has at least a 20-year history. During these years, trendy drama has developed based on specific elements, which have produced certain cultural meanings for the Asian TV market [1]. Accordingly, the specific elements described enable trendy drama to be recognized as a new genre in the Asian region. The popularity of this genre has encouraged particular countries to adapt in their local productions. In particular, the Taiwanese and Korean TV industries have subsequently responded to the adaptation and now Mainland China participates in it. Having experienced transnational circulation, imitation and adaptation during these two

decades, trendy drama currently becomes legitimised as the most popular TV drama genre among younger generations in the Asian region. Notably, the Korean trendy drama has had a significant influence in the Asian society, including the costume arranged in the drama that is now called ‘Korean style’ as a specific popular fashion in Asia. A term, Koreanization, is created to describe how Chinese young people tend to dress themselves up following the stylish costume of Korean characters.

The specific social influence brought about by trendy drama can be associated with media’s symbolic power that of what Nick Couldry proposes. He claims that media institutions have the capability to frame and mediate social reality and then urge ordinary people to adopt “the patterns of thought, language, and action” conveyed in media as the ‘routine’ for their everyday life [2]. Couldry maintains “media power – the massive concentration of symbolic power in media institutions – is the complex outcome of practice at every level of social interaction … [it is] reproduced through the details of what social actors (including audience members) do and say”. In this sense, trendy drama performed this symbolic act providing specific cultural values to the East Asian middle class. The group adopted the cultural elements signified in the genre. This was evident in their behavioral patterns, which then formed the two peculiar cultural phenomena, the Japanese Craze and Korean Wave. It was also demonstrated in the popularity of the Taiwanese trendy drama in the Chinese communities. For instance, in the late 2000s, many young people from Mainland China sought to study fashion design in Taiwan, because they thought fashion as represented in Taiwanese trendy drama was up-to-the-minute and popular, believing that Taiwanese fashion was better known than Chinese fashion [3]. This example indicates trendy drama to be acknowledged as the dominant genre in terms of leading trends in fashion; and that other countries in the region have gained this knowledge through the television programming.

The aim of this paper is to shed light on how trendy drama acts as ‘another’ genre that embodies symbolic elements in creating Asian-owned fashion. I explore the specific elements in costume and ideas conveyed in trendy drama to examine the encoding strategies used by the East Asian TV producers to combine both of physical and abstract signs to generate certain cultural meanings in fashion. In particular, this paper applies a deep cultural analysis mixed with semiotics as the key methodology drawn to investigate the costume signification. I choose the Taiwanese trendy drama, *My Queen* [4] as the example because this drama represents contemporary directors’ approaches to drama production. *My Queen* was locally produced to establish the Taiwanese brand. It was very popular when first transmitted, focusing on issues related to Taiwanese single women. In this sense, semiotics is significant when discussing ‘how’ trendy drama was thought of as a platform to receive cultural messages in fashion related to popular culture in Taiwan and Asia.

This paper foregrounds that trendy drama as a new genre became the specific symbolic form for the East Asian TV industries to establish and circulate certain cultural meanings. I posit this is because the East Asian TV industries have symbolic power to transform the specific elements into certain cultural meanings through this genre. Following the legitimisation of this new genre in Asia, trendy drama provides the media frame for Asian young people, especially modern women, to relate popular fashion to their social life. After trend drama has a legitimised and naturalised status in

the Asian TV market, it functions like the fashion catwalk, which is indeed more than a fashion show. Upon this catwalk, fashion is not only embodied by ‘the beautiful models’, it is also represented in the context of social reality framed by media. This catwalk is to demonstrate physical beauty and also express self-consciousness as well as a sense of collective popular aesthetics.

2 Trendy Drama – Symbolic Form of Framing Youth’s Fashion

Having been a new genre but now is recognized the most popular type of drama among the young, this special local TV production–trendy drama—for meeting the middle-class audience thereupon led to popularity and became the most fashionable cultural artefact in East Asia [5]. Yet, why does genre matter? ‘Genre’ was first used to label Hollywood movies to indicate the scale of film production [6]. Then it functions as categorizing similar styles of media products as groups within the media form. According to Neale, genres provide a guideline “of working out the significance of what is happening on the screen”, including “why the characters are dressed the way they are, why they look, speak and behave they [sic] way they ...” [7]. Apparently, genres act as a mode through which audiences can search for specific cultural messages portrayed within their expectations of the genre. Turner contends that “genre is the product of a text- and audience-based negotiation activated by the viewer’s expectations” [8]. Put another way, the composition of a genre also involves the audience’s desires and expectations. More specifically, the assumed audiences for a genre participate in its composition by understanding, recognizing and being involved in its text. Therefore, the presence of a genre is generated from the interaction between the TV industry and the audience, as well as being acknowledged by both of them.

Trendy drama as a specific genre of TV drama in East Asia portrays and highlights a new popular cultural formation in the modern age of East Asia. Through the function of genre, the audience knows what they would receive and relate to their lifestyle with expectations. This is due to trendy drama was designed to address distinguishing elements that represented the middle-class youths’ lifestyle. For this target, trendy drama was set to encompass the essential elements including a mini-series format, a focus on the theme of love, diverse storylines and topics, a new styling of scenes and presentation of the metropolis, photogenic characters, and high production values, such as high-profile theme songs and camera strategies [9]. Besides, trendy drama also needs to register at least one ‘new’ cultural value. Therefore, new cultural values are conveyed as contemporary fashionable ideas in trendy drama. Three key contemporary fashionable ideas conveyed as new cultural values of the genre are: new attitudes towards love relationships, a rise in women’s self-conviction and a rise in individualism [5]. For accentuating the spirit of the age and the exquisite arrangement as a whole, costume becomes essentially important to reinforce the specific cultural references in trendy drama. For this, Stadler and McWilliam approves that fashions signify “the cultural milieu in which the story is set is necessary to get such details right for each character” [10]. The costume that is arranged to showcase on the characters in trendy

drama is thereupon a visual metaphor for the admirable taste of the modern Asian femininity at the contemporary society.

Appearing as an up-to-date genre, the factors of trendy drama soon becoming a popular cultural reference for the Asian young middle-age class, are also involving cultural proximity. Straubhaar proposes cultural proximity to indicate that “the ethnic makeup of a television program’s cast affects its visual appeal to audiences”. The TV programs possess cultural proximity when Asian audiences can identify themselves with the “ethnic type on screen” [11]. Straubhaar continues that “ethnic appeal can come from actual ethnicity or ethnic ideals”. Based on this, popular culture represented in trendy dramas is closer to most Asian people. In particular, “the physical appearance” and “skin color” of Asian (more specifically East Asian) performers are quite similar to Asian features [12]. The casting based on physical and ethnic appearance was then adapted by the Taiwanese and Korean TV industry to become the indispensably basic element to attract Asian audiences which can identify and recognize their similar cultural or ethnic background. As a result, Iwabuchi points that “Asian celebrities’ fashions, hairstyles, and attitudes, which subtly localize [sic] American influence are much more stimulating to Asian viewers than [are the] American original stars” [13]. Therefore, cultural proximity adds to the popularity of Asian idols who were deemed to possess the features of beauty modeled on trendy drama and the costume arranged on them shapes the Asian-owned fashion.

Mentioned previously, the costume arranged in trendy drama has become a certain influence in the Asian society. For the instance, the Korean style has developed into a specific popular fashion in the region due to the popularity of the Korean trendy drama. The phenomenon of Koreanization highlights the young people’s pursuit of Korean characters’ stylish costume in Mainland China, including make-up, dressing and hairstyles. This also explains the popularity of ‘made-in-Korea’ goods circulated in the Asian region in the recent years. To sum up, in the Korean and Taiwanese adaptations of Japanese TV production, trendy drama has not only played a role as being a particular TV genre, but it has acted as the symbolic form which has been conveying, repeating and circulating certain cultural meanings within the Asian TV market. With the popularity of trendy drama, the cultural meanings conveyed in this genre have become part of popular culture in Asia and created fashion in accordance with Asian preference. The Taiwanese trendy drama, *My Queen* as the first Taiwanese female-led trendy drama conveying a single woman’s social status in the age for marriage, represents the specific, contemporary fashionable ideas to stereotype a new image of Taiwanese women. The drama serves as a specific symbolic form enabling certain cultural meanings to circulate within the Asian TV market. In particular, these cultural meanings become legitimised thence the learning materials about life and lifestyles for modern Taiwanese woman. In such a situation, this new genre has the function of being a media frame, which mediates social reality, providing a social experience. This viewpoint is further evident in the costumes used in this drama.

3 Me, Not a Defeated Dog

‘Defeated dog’ is originally from Japan with a certain cultural meaning in Asia since late 2008. A beautiful, talented woman who is more than 30 years old is called a defeated dog if she is still single [14]. The heroine of *My Queen*, Wu-Shang is a 33-year-old, beautiful, unmarried journalist. In the drama, her mother uses the term, ‘defeated dog’, to imply her negative perspective toward her daughter being a single woman based on her own traditional background. However, Wu-Shang acts like a modern woman who does not care about what the society define her status, but cares about her journalistic profession. For this, the Director highlights the rise of Taiwanese single women’s self-conviction through Wu-Shang’s costume arrangement. As a result, the Wu-Shang is successfully molded to represent the new attitude towards being a bachelorette in the Taiwanese society.

First, Wu-Shuang being a journalist has diverse choices to express herself by fashion. She usually wears fine apparel, often a two-piece outfit or long skirt so that, even when she wears a dress, it is matched with another piece of clothing, such as a shirt worn inside the dress, with the collar folded out over the dress. For example, in her first appearance in the drama (Episode 1), she is wearing a white blouse and white shirt. The belt, the cuff of the sleeves, the collar and a big bow on the chest are all black. This combination of colors is significant, firstly, because black and white are the most popular foundation colors matched as a set, signifying that Wu-Shuang is professional. Wu-Shuang’s costume represents the latest fashion even though it signifies her profession, which is deemed to lack a fashionable sense in clothing. According to Barthes, “professional models are poor” fashion; however, “psychological essences are … rich” [15], and they can be conveyed in clothes. For Barthes, “the woman of Fashion is a collection of tiny, separate essences”; this means that a woman’s fashion could show her profession and her self-conviction at the same time. Therefore, Wu-Shuang’s professional costume still exudes her characteristics of being a modern woman. There are some elements of fashion design on Wu-Shuang’s professional, black and white colored clothes, for example, a frill on the bottom of the white garment and a big bow abate the sharpness of Wu-Shuang’s image of being a journalist. This fashionable design represented by her appears in some sequences, thereby highlighting her image as a modern Taiwanese woman.

In Episode 2, Wu-Shuang appears in a white blouse and black skirt. The white garment is a lumberjack (short, thick jacket) with a ruffled collar, popular during the 2000s, and the jacket is of cotton-like material. Its thick texture signifies her taste for high quality goods because the thickness implies fineness; and the ruffled collar adds femininity. Wu-Shuang appears as a distant, austere image in terms of the color of this outfit, but the design makes her appear more relaxed and feminine. This logic is close to the notion proposed by Barthes that she personalizes the effect of fashion, the fashion that is a myth so “we see the woman of Fashion dreaming of being at once herself and another”. In other words, a person who molds themselves according to a particular fashion, the ‘fashionable self’ then represents both ‘him/herself’ and ‘others’ because fashion is established by a common appreciation and norms of beauty in Taiwanese society.

In Wu-Shuang's costumes her image as a modern, fashionable woman is highlighted. The costume represents the sharpness in her profession but it also signifies her femininity. Therefore, her image of sharpness connected to the fashion design provides a dual image, a phrase of Barthes being descriptive: "You're demanding, and you're sweet, too". In Barthes's perspective of fashion, people can live a dual identity through fashion. He argues that wearing 'fashion' seems to be "with the couturiers [and then] you discover you can be both, you can lead a double life". In this sense, when a character is categorized by a specific style of fashion in the drama, they are specifically designated as a model representing the group in a similar style of fashion. Furthermore, Barthes suggests that fashion "multiplies the person without any risk to her of losing herself" because "for Fashion, clothing is not play but the sign of play". Consequently, Wu-Shuang's costume could signify the image of a modern woman, and represents the fashion that can be identified by the audience group who are mainly single women of a similar social class.

In the scene, Wu-Shuang's costume includes black high-heeled shoes and a white leather bag. The colors of these two accessories suggest harmony. In particular, Lu indicates that the bag has a dumpling shape, which has been popular since 2002. Accessories worn by Wu-Shuang also include a set of silver jewelry, and a necklace and a bracelet of the same material and design. This is similar to the sterling silver jewelry of Tiffany & Co., an international fashion brand. This particular design has been the mainstream fashion choice for jewelry since the 2000s; it is simple but eye-catching. Significantly, the trendy drama producers chose the metal silver for Wu-Shuang's jewelry. This signifies that her conservative nature does not care about money and jewelry, and that contemporary women dismiss the "jewelry myth" that jewelry can only comprise of diamonds, gold, crystal or jade [16]. In the current fashion, charms are removed from necklaces, and gemstones or diamond are not embedded in necklaces and bracelets. This popular, anti-conventional design also infers an image of a modern woman.

It is apparent that the analysis of Wu-Shuang's costume derives from knowledge related to the latest fashion trend. Therefore, all these elements of fashion, including Wu-Shuang's clothes, bag, shoes and jewelry are gathered to portray the image of a modern Taiwanese woman. Furthermore, as Barthes (1983) suggests: "Fashion 'play[s]' with the most serious theme of human consciousness (who am I?)", and the audiences seek self-identification when they perceive fashion as appearing in trendy drama. In this sense, Wu-Shuang's costume scopes the perceptions of fashion for the particular audience group whose background is similar. The fashion shown in the drama becomes the main material for the audiences to learn about fashion. Couldry (2000) proposes this when he says that the media function of framing mediates ordinary people's social experience. Therefore, framing of trendy drama enables it to act as the symbolic form for conveying ideas of fashion.

A trend in the Taiwanese society led by Wu-Shuang's fashion can also be seen in fashionable hair creations. Her short, straight hairstyle with a center parting has been popular since the drama aired in 2009; it is therefore termed a 'defeated dog hairstyle', and usually adopted by single women over 30 years of age [17]. Moreover, this hairstyle represents the significant attitude of a single woman toward her single life – able to be herself, pursue her dreams as well as happiness rather than getting married.

This is another example of the implications of trendy drama in society, legitimizing certain cultural meanings in order that they become part of popular culture.

As discussed about trendy drama conveying at least one of 'new' cultural values, in *My Queen*, the representation of Wu-Shuang's image includes all the three key ideas I propose – new attitudes towards love relationships, a rise in women's self-conviction and a rise in individualism. These three ideas have been portrayed in this drama and addressed in different ways. They make the storylines of the genre seem diverse, and also enhance the idea of trendiness in the genre. This outcome actually relies on the multiple-integrated producing strategies; costuming seems important. Wu-Shuang's costume shows the spirit that indicates a modern Asian woman should own. On the one hand, a woman can choose to show their bodily curves to be attractive; on the other hand, she is liberal in expressing herself in a less womanly way, free of traditional social expectations. Through the costume, Taiwanese female audience believe they can express themselves in a dual identical way with the fashion represented.

4 Double Triangular Relationship Highlights Social Class

In the costume arrangement, the director highlights the rise of Taiwanese single women's self-conviction through Wu-Shang but also reflects the two younger generations' fashion via contrasting different social classes. A double triangular relationship is often described in the love story of trendy drama; *My Queen* is not an exception. The four characters in *My Queen* include Wu-Shuang, Jia-Jia, Lucas and Leslie. Wu-Shuang and Leslie are of the older generation and Jia-Jia and Lucas are from the younger generation. However, Wu-Shuang and Lucas fall in love and become involved in the complicated love relationships with the other two main characters.

In the drama, Jia-Jia represents her generation and her social class in fashion displaying the relevant elements of street fashion: the mix and match, and multi-layered design. Her free and unsystematic dress style can be related to young female liberation, and contrasts with Wu-Shuang's professional clothing. Jia-Jia does not wear tight clothes to highlight the shape of her body; additionally, she does not wear feminine accessories to emphasize her gender. The costume style makes Jia-Jia appear neutral and childish. In a scene, Jia-Jia wears a fringed scarf similar to the style worn by Lucas. The style of the scarf is neutral, can be worn by both genders, and indicates the same generation and neutrality. Barthes contends: "the *boyish* look itself has more a temporal than a sexual value; it is the complementary sign of an ideal age, which assumes increasing importance in Fashion literature: the *junior*". Further, "the junior is presented as the complex degree of the *feminine/masculine*: it tends toward androgyny; but what is more remarkable in this new term is that it effaces sex to the advantage of age". In other words, age is more important than sex in fashion to account for Jia-Jia's appearance.

Lucas represents a young male who falls in love with the mature woman, Wu-Shuang; his costume in the drama often appears to be 'boyish', so as to highlight the tradition-inspired, incompatible love between him and Wu-Shuang. In the drama, he is often costumed as depicting youth fashion, being of liberal bent and diversity. However, his style is not as chaotic and mixed as Jia-Jia's neutral style. In the context of the

story, a young man like Lucas is liberal in fashion; yet neutral or even feminine-oriented in clothing. This situation corresponds to Barthes's (1983) perspective of fashion: "There is a social prohibition against the feminization of men, there is almost none against the masculinization of women"; therefore, "Fashion notably acknowledges the *boyish look*".

The other main male character, Leslie, also embodies male fashion as represented in *My Queen*. In the story, Leslie and Wu-Shuang were formerly a couple; they are in the same age group and social class. Leslie is a well-known professional photographer, so his costume represents middle-class fashion for men. In addition, his costume contrasts with that of Lucas, in order to show his higher status in the triangular relationship among Wu-Shuang, Lucas and himself. For example, in a scene, Leslie attends the re-union of the climbing club, wearing a purple shirt covered with a coat of military-uniform fashion in khaki fabric and color, yellow pants and boots. His appearance in these eye-catching yellow trousers, coat, belt and boots are all representations of vintage design. The matching of his clothing based on yellow and purple colors recalls the imagery of a forest [18]. The costume of his first appearance in the drama fully represents his class and artistic taste; he is a professional photographer with a good reputation earning a high salary. His image is in accord with the so-called "yuppie" [19], which refers to the group who are "young, urban, and upwardly mobile professionals". Yuppies are always dressed in stylish clothes, and additionally their clothes are usually expensive because, "They like to flaunt their good taste" [20].

As discussed above, the costuming arrangement used in *My Queen* is primarily to heighten the two different social classes and to enhance the incompatible love between Wu-Shuang and Lucas. Through this cinematic device the popular tastes of the younger generations in the 20s and 30s are conveyed. It is clear that the female and male characters' costumes have different functions. Male costumes are used to highlight the dramatic development of the relationship between Wu-Shuang and Lucas. The female costumes of the two generations assist in emphasizing incompatible love, while expressing the rise of women's self-conviction in Taiwanese society.

5 Conclusion

This article has shown that *My Queen* does not merely show female fashion; it also conveys the latest ideas about male fashion. Lucas and Leslie are respectively costumed to represent the fashion styles of the two generations, which also signifies their different social classes. Moreover, they both belong to the younger generations in their 20s and 30s, both of an era where the media crosses borders within Asia. This situation is as Straubhaar indicates in the sense of cultural proximity, namely that younger generations are more active to relate global cultural patterns to their lifestyle than the elderly [21]. In particular, both Lucas and Leslie display various choices relating to their tastes in clothes, thereby showing that the drama's context is a wealthy, modern and liberal society. In such a way, the drama becomes a media frame to disseminate cultural messages as to how a modern man becomes fashionable.

This article also demonstrates that regarding symbolic power, trendy drama performs as a specific symbolic form, enabling the Taiwanese TV industry to exercise its

encoding strategies. Accordingly, the relevant and preferred social resources are transformed into specific cultural meanings, wherein an imagined community existing in Asian societies and based on cultural proximity is constructed. Based on this new-found symbolic power, the Taiwanese TV industry is able to integrate all relevant elements to show the leading fashion ideas in trendy drama, which enables local cultures to be exchanged within the Asian TV market. Such as *My Queen* highlighting self-conviction and social class of the Taiwanese modern woman through costume, which also shows the Taiwanese TV industry’s symbolic power of framing fashion in the ordinary world. In consequence, Asian TV industries reciprocate media’s symbolic power thereby maintaining the cultural sphere with the result of strengthening specific fashion in Asia.

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The Consumption Side of Sustainable Fashion: Understanding the Attitude-Behavior Gap Among the Spanish Consumers

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Abstract. Sustainable fashion has gained significant interest among both scholars and society in recent years. Several studies have pointed out that consumers have a positive attitude towards sustainable fashion but fail to translate this attitude into behavior. This has been called as the Fashion Paradox. Thus, the currently on-going research aims to understand to what extent do Spanish consumers care about sustainable fashion, deep into the causes of the attitude-behavior gap among the Spanish consumers and to profile the different kinds of socially responsible consumers considering demographics, attitudes, and motivations. Even though, in recent years, sustainable fashion brands have flourished in the Spanish market and no researches have been conducted to understand the fashion consumers' behavior in Spain.

To reach our purpose, we will conduct several focus groups and a survey in which we will apply a conjoint analysis to simulate real marketplace situations and to minimize the social desirability bias. We will use a cluster analysis to profile the different kinds of potential sustainable fashion consumers, and we will compare the results to previous researches from other markets.

Keywords: Sustainability · Sustainable fashion · Fashion consumption · Consumer behavior · Spanish consumer

1 Introduction

The impact of the human being on the environment is a source of concern and debate. The increase of pollution, the decline of natural resources and the visible risks for the human health and well-being have made the environmental issues and the sustainable development a global concern for individuals, industries, and institutions. The implications are not only environmental but moreover economic, social, and cultural [17].

The fashion industry is one of the most polluting productive sectors [12] due to the extensive use of water resources, the high levels of carbon dioxide emissions, the use of hazardous chemicals and the high amount of waste generated by the constant discard of fashion garments [9, 31]. The mass production of fashion garments has existed since the mid nineteen centuries; however, the advent of fast fashion in the 1980 and the globalization of markets have disrupted the pace both of fashion production and consumption.

Although the term ethical fashion has been used since 2003 [1], it has been only after the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh in 2013, where over 1130 fashion workers were killed, when the global concern about fashion and sustainability has emerged. Since then, associations like Fashion Revolution have been established with the aim to create consciousness about the way we produce and consume fashion. A global fashion index has been defined, The Global Pulse of the Fashion Industry, to measure the level of sustainability of the market and the different brands, and more companies and consumers have started to consider the importance of sustainability in their fashion practices [6, 26].

Currently, several terms, such as ethical fashion, eco fashion, green fashion, and more coexist and are used among scholars and companies to describe the same concept. In the present research, we advocate for sustainable fashion because it is a holistic term, which encompasses all the aspects of the matter. The first definition of sustainability and sustainable development dates back to the United Nations Brundtland Report in 1987, in which it is defined as “Sustainable development (...) implies meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. In 1994, Elkington [8] translated the aforementioned definition into the industrial world forging the expression ‘triple bottom line’ or 3P model. This expression synthesizes sustainability into three categories: people, planet, and profit. People refer to the social dimension; it is the well-being of the workers and the community. Planet considers the environmental sphere, taking care of and preserving the world for present and future generations. Profit accounts for the economic dimension; the companies have to ensure their earnings to keep the harmony of the three pillars.

The current awareness of fashion and sustainability has led to new business practices in the fashion industry and new ways of consumption. One of them is slow fashion, a term introduced by Fletcher [10] in 2007 to define a shift in the production and consumption of fashion garments from quantity to quality. Thus, slow fashion means finding a personal style more than following the mass trends. This movement was born following the path of slow food, founded in 1986 by Carlo Petrini, and as opposed to fast fashion, which is defined by Fletcher [11] as: “mass-produced and standardized. The unbeatably cheap top, dress or pair of jeans, like the hamburger, is traded in large volumes, is globally ubiquitous and is homogenously served or styled”. Two concepts characterize the slow fashion movement: consistency [23], which implies the production of garments with materials, which can be reused, recycled or degraded, and sufficiency [30], which means learning to live better with less. Other forms in which companies and consumers are engaging in sustainable fashion are the circular economy and the sharing economy. The circular economy applies for a long-life cycle of the fashion garments, with techniques such as recycling, upcycling, down cycling or second hand. On the other hand, the sharing economy is based on the principle that we do not have to own things to use them, this applies for forms of collaborative consumption or leasing or renting clothes [3].

In the consumption side, fashion consumers have evolved. On the one hand, the neo consumer is active and informed thanks to global internet access and social networks. On the other side, the daily presence of media outlets in our lives and the rise of

social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, has led to an image-driven culture which has triggered the need to express ourselves with our body and therefore with our outfits [2]. Consumers have a constant appetite for novelty and a need to follow the trends. This is due to the fact that people use clothing not only for functional reasons but also for satisfying emotional and hedonic needs, and symbolic and social communication [7, 15, 27, 28, 36]. Thus, consumers are continuously driven by two forces; through fashion, they try to create and express their individuality but, at the same time, they need to fit within the bounds of social norms [19, 24, 25, 35].

Regarding sustainable fashion, previous research has found that consumers have a positive attitude and increasingly care about unethical behavior [26, 34] but, frequently, this attitude does not translate into action [4, 6, 7, 13, 14, 24, 29]. This conundrum has been termed by some researchers as the Fashion Paradox [6, 24]. Fashion consumers have become more environmentally conscious, but few of these consumers are willing to spend their money on sustainable fashion garments [6, 14, 24, 26]. Some have tried to explain this gap arguing that it could be caused by the limited availability of such products, their high price, the lack of appealing of sustainable fashion garments, a weak brand image or even due to socially desirable answers when surveyed. Others have pointed out that fashion consumption has a close relation with personal values and motivations and that could be the cause of the attitude-behavior gap [6, 14, 16, 20, 22, 24].

Furthermore, several studies have tried to identify the socially responsible consumer in terms of demographic characteristics. Thus, past studies have shown that in general women tend to be more involved in sustainability issues and practice more often than men [18, 32]. Other studies have pointed out that the ethical consumer is characterized by a relatively high income, education, and social status [5, 21, 33]. Nowadays, it is believed that the younger generations are the most engaged in sustainable issues but, at the same time, due to their lack of purchasing power is possible that more aged consumers are the ones who actually behave sustainably. In any case, researchers agree that demographics only are not enough to explain the socially responsible consumer and the attitude-behavior gap and that a further understanding of the consumers and their purchase decision process is needed [20, 26, 29].

The currently on-going research aims to understand to what extent do Spanish consumers care about sustainable fashion, dig into the causes of the attitude-behavior gap among the Spanish consumers, and to profile the different kinds of socially responsible consumers considering demographics, attitudes and motivations, and actual behavior. The Spanish fashion market is defined by fast fashion, which influences both production and consumption patterns. It has been demonstrated that the cultural context affects the purchase behavior [14, 26, 29]. Even though in recent years sustainable fashion brands have flourished, such as Ecoalf or Latitude, no researches have been conducted to understand the sustainable fashion market and the fashion consumers' behavior in Spain.

2 Methodology

To gain a deeper understanding of Spanish fashion consumers, we plan to combine qualitative and quantitative methodologies of research. On the one hand, a series of focus groups will be carried out. Specifically, we aim to execute three focus groups. The first will be for 6–12 participants already involved with sustainable fashion, reaching them via the Slow Fashion Movement in Spain. A second focus group will target younger consumers, and a third one will include more aged consumers to try to understand the different attitudes and behaviors between the generations. The aim of the focus groups will be to identify the drivers and barriers for the participants to engage in the consumption of sustainable fashion, as well as, their consumption habits and preferences. All focus group will be audio recorded and then transcribed. They will be held in Madrid at the beginning of July during weekdays. With the focus group, we hope to gather insights and qualitative data which will be useful to create a questionnaire for the quantitative part of the investigation.

On the other hand, an online survey will be implemented with the aim of profiling the different kinds of fashion consumers in the Spanish market and of unveiling their inner characteristics. In the survey, we will first ask for demographics, such as age, gender, income, and level of education. The second part will try to deep into the habits and attitudes of the consumers regarding fashion in general and sustainable fashion in particular. After that, a conjoint analysis will be used with the aim to emulate a real marketplace situation, which we hope will help us to minimize the social desirability bias when questioning issues of ethical consumption. In a conjoint analysis, consumers are asked to indicate their preferences for products with varying attributes. A systematic literature review and the focus groups will help us to define which attributes are the most relevant for the consumers.

As sampling method, we will opt for a chain sampling strategy, which is a non-probabilistic sampling method. The simple random sampling, which would be the best one to describe the Spanish consumers and the market accurately, is not applicable in our case due to the lack of resources to carry it out. The chain sampling strategy, also known as snowball sampling, consists in identifying some of the potential subjects in the population and ask them to spread the word to their connections thus creating a sort of snowball effect. Furthermore, most of the previous researches about sustainable fashion consumption have focused on students or young generations, and with the snowball sampling, we hope we could reach a more heterogeneous group of people.

To analyze the data, we will use Knime, an open source data science tool which incorporates all the SPSS¹ functionalities in addition to advanced machine learning and analytics algorithms. Besides, it is useful to produce visually attractive graphics and plots. We will try to run a cluster analysis to identify and classify behavioral patterns among the individuals. The aim would be to profile different kinds of socially responsible consumers in the Spanish fashion market based on their demographics, consumption habits, attitudes, and behavior.

¹ SPSS Statistics is a software package used for interactive, or batched, statistical analysis.

3 Expected Conclusions and Discussion

Some possible conclusions, to be validated by the analysis, are:

- (1) The cultural context of fast fashion has a strong influence over the Spanish consumers, and because of that the price attribute is one of the most relevant for them in the purchase decision process.
- (2) In general, in Latin countries aesthetics are important and for this, it is possible that Spanish consumers tend to prepend aesthetics to ethics.

Finally, after having analyzed our data, in the discussion we will contrast our results with previous researches. In particular, with those running in other markets such as the United Kingdom or Hong Kong, among others, which have shown a specific research interest in sustainable fashion consumption [6, 7, 13, 14].

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Key Opinion Leaders' Influences in the Chinese Fashion Market

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Abstract. With the continuous evolution of information and media technologies, Chinese users spend a large portion of their daily lives on social media sites/apps, such as WeChat, Sina Weibo and Tencent QQ. Through social media, KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders) are of great importance for fashion designers and brands, in attempting to dominate the fashion industry market. In this study, the phenomenon of KOL marketing in the Chinese fashion industry is analyzed, based on the development of a web celebrities' economy, a media celebrity economic chain, as well as media celebrity commercial value.

SNA (Social Network Analysis) methodology was chosen to analyze the current KOL marketing in China, based on the data collected from four Chinese databases, these being Tencent Data Lab, China Internet Network Information Center, Luxe.Co and Jingdong Financial Research Institute. In addition, focus group interviews were conducted, to gain further insight via qualitative analysis. Data were then considered and measured, to generate suggestions on the application of KOL in terms of image promotion, fashion marketing strategies and promotion methods.

Keywords: KOL marketing · Social network analysis · Social media effects · Chinese fashion industry

1 Introduction

The concept of a Key opinion leader (KOL), is intended to indicate a respected individual, who can influence the thoughts and actions of others [1–4]. Opinion leaders, who express the views of the public, often strongly influence other customers in general [5]. Opinion leaders, as acknowledged information resource who propose innovative ideas and possess rich interpersonal skills, can have an impact on the decision making of others [3]. Similarly, the importance of opinion leaders cannot be ignored, in the environment of new media [6]. Moreover, the people who share their real-life contents on social media, are also perceived as opinion leaders [6].

The social e-commerce market has, in recent years, rapidly developed in China. Social media, such as WeChat and Sina Weibo, has played a vital role in fashion e-commerce. Under the influence of social media, KOLs have shown relatively high sales conversion rates, with corresponding high return on investment. According to the

2018 Annual Survey Report on Chinese Fashion Consumption by Luxe.Co [7], significantly, 43% of female respondents purchased fashion brands having been influenced by KOLs recommendations, while 36.6% of male respondents were encouraged to purchase by short videos or vlog (as shown in Fig. 1). Among all the information channels, recommendations by KOL accounts for the second largest preference pathway to obtain fashion news, followed by fashion shows.

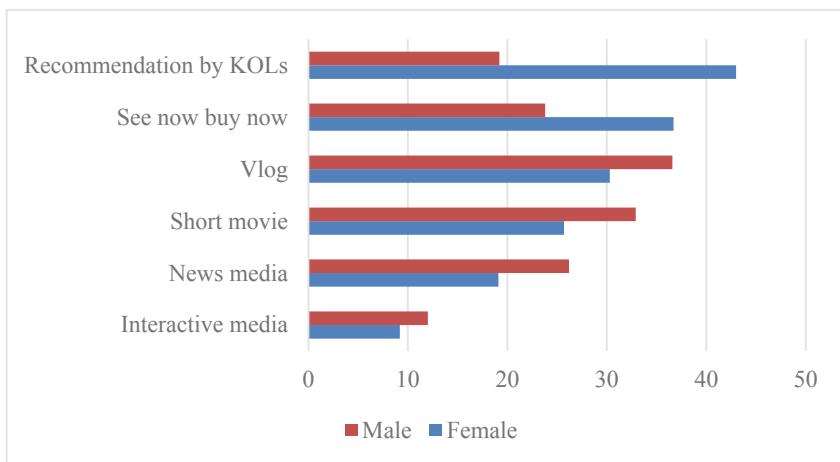


Fig. 1. Preference of access to fashion information by different channels

Due to information overload, consumers are compelled to decide how to choose from a large number of diversified information sources. Currently, consumers make decisions based on one or two information resources, from various digital platforms. The issue of preference, therefore, seems to concern not the need for more information but for the perceived right information that consumers and marketers need to communicate [8]. KOLs are more knowledgeable and experienced in a particular field, therefore, KOLs' followers trust their recommendations [2].

KOLs are easily recognized through their strong personal design styling and personal identity. Through various social media platforms, with their unique styles, they actively interact with their followers and they attract millions of fans. Through such high-frequency, benign interaction between KOLs and their fans, the distance between them is narrowed and the trust between them is built up more easily, which has improved the purchase conversion rate. Fashion change agents, as the driving force of fashion change, can be fashion innovators who are pioneers in buying and wearing new fashions, Fashion opinion leaders are those who can convince others to buy and wear new fashions or creative communicators, who play both roles [8]. As a 'product label', the KOLs significantly represent the brand standards. By broadcasting the characteristics of their lifestyle through mass media, to inspire their followers, they improve the conversion rate.

This project aims to analyze and demonstrate the influence of KOL marketing in the Chinese fashion industry. Moreover, this research will provide insight into independent designers, in terms of marketing and strategies. To date, very few academic studies have been made to investigate how the implementation of social media influences consumer satisfaction in B2C sales in China. The paper, thus, aims to fill this gap, by introducing digital fashion communication by KOLs and recent scholarly advances about industrial selling through social media. Although many studies have been made on the trend of social media, the new name, ‘influencer’ has only appeared over the past two years and, as yet, has not been the subject of much research of literature. The research findings of this project, together with the practical implications, will be insightful for future research.

2 Why Key Opinion Leaders Are Critical to the Fashion Industry

In recent years, social blogs have provided an effective channel for Word-of-Mouth (WoM) marketing and promoting both products and services. The bloggers having become widely popular. In the WoM marketing, opinion leaders, who usually have more social relationships and higher social positions, can deliver product information, give personal suggestions and recommendations, as well as supplementing professional knowledge. It is beneficial for fashion companies to promote their products and services through fashion opinion leaders [9]. Opinion leaders are the influencers of opinions, beliefs, attitudes and behavior. This is a simple definition but it reflects the findings in an extensive range of literature, as regards a definition of leadership [11]. Through the complicated network, equipped with a real-time communication system, people are able to such as information, beliefs and even rumors. According to del Fresno García [12], some individuals or groups who play formal/informal roles as opinion leaders, due to particular positions in the network and they can also affect the perceptions and views of other network participants. Furthermore, opinion leaders have more access to or contact with more external information sources, compared with their followers, especially in the mass media [2].

KOL, with more knowledge and novel ideas in a certain field, are followed by others because they are trusted in their ability in this field. According to Valente and Pumpuang [10], opinion leaders can protect against intervention, help change social norms and speed up behavior change. For all industries, especially, the fashion industry, social media is no longer an auxiliary tool but has now become a powerful marketing strategy that is necessary for the current market [11]. According to Cho and Workman [8], fashion leaders who can influence the race and track of fashion adoption are divided into three categories. The first category is fashion innovators, who are willing to adopt the newest fashion styles in the fashion world. The second category is fashion opinion leaders, who are a type of information resource, who are able to give suggestions and influence others’ decisions. The third category is creative communicators, who act as both fashion innovators and fashion opinion leaders. Since fashion leaders are pioneers who are willing to adopt new styles and communicate information about new products, they are more sensitive to changes in fashion than other groups.

Fashion followers do not buy a new-style product until the later stages of fashion adoption, where the fashion has been filtered through social media and advertising.

Consumers' choice of channels was and is, affected mainly by the opinions of fashion innovators and fashion opinion leaders. Those who have high requirements of fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership are prone to adopt two or more shopping channels [12]. The world has been changed by social media. With the appearance of various social communication tools and channels, information is more accessible than ever before. Consequently, consumers are better connected with sellers, more knowledgeable about the selection of products and more powerful in the relationship between buyers and sellers [13]. Social media may also have some implications for consumer satisfaction [14]. Since the online social networks have been rapidly developing in recent years, WoM has become a powerful and attractive marketing tool in China, however, to use WoM effectively, marketers should first identify the opinion leaders in these networks [9]. In general, younger generations are more familiar with online shopping than their elders [14]. Moreover, China's market for young customers is enormous, with many opportunities for marketers, therefore, the paper provides valuable insight into China's younger customer market, which is one of the more critical markets in the world.

3 Methodology and Methods

The conceptual framework for this chapter draws on a methodology for applying SNA (social network analysis) (Fig. 2). SNA is defined as a method to distribute social network relational ties and it also infers the whole network and its branches [15]. It draws on current network promotions and entertainment-oriented structures in the fashion industry. SNA offers a conceptual framework and a set of methods for understanding, analyzing and representing the pattern of fans engagement that forms a fans economy tie [16]. The conceptual framework provides both insight and applications regarding relational structures, which may be consequential for fashion designers and independent fashion brands. Specifically, are the relational frameworks that depend on KOL's image promotion relevant in terms of mediating effect? This study aims to investigate how a brand's ability to attract consumers may be related to a customers' engagement toward brand-hosted media. By using the data of consumers who use Chinese online shopping, this study makes some contribution to the literature on social media influence.

The methods used in this research include both quantitative analysis from the survey and qualitative research from three focus groups, plus interview. For the survey, the data was collected by four Chinese authorities, which are Tencent Data Lab, China Internet Network Information Center, Luxe.Co and Jingdong Financial Research Institute (Table 1).

The qualitative research took place in Chongqing and Guangzhou, China. In-depth interviews involved 14 participants (6 in Chongqing and 8 in Guangzhou). The focus groups involved interviews with fashion buyers, independent fashion designers and consumers aged between 18 and 47 years. The data collected was 'cleansed and processed to remove duplicates and converted into a usable format' [16]. The objective of

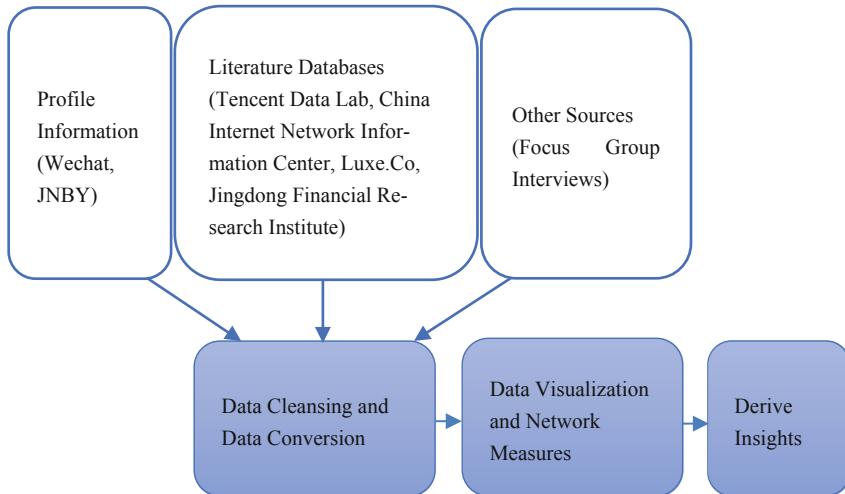


Fig. 2. Social Network Analysis Methodology for this project

Table 1. Survey details of chosen authorities.

Chinese social media authorities	Year	Sample size	Themes
Tencent Data Lab	2018	1923	APPs usage among “young generation” in China
China Internet Network Information Center	2018	500 million	Chinese customers’ adaption of e-commerce
Luxe.Co	2018	1828	The “young generation”: China’s new consumers of fashion products
Jingdong Financial Research Institute	2018	3000	Chinese consumers’ general consumption habit

the analysis was to demonstrate the pattern of users, by means of visual graphics. The use of data visualization and network measures could then provide rich, contextual information.

4 Discussion

4.1 Consumption Variation and KOL Marketing

According to the 42nd China Statistical Report on Internet Development [17], the majority of Chinese netizens are teenagers and middle-aged people (see Fig. 3) and the Chinese netizens who were born between 1989–1998, account for more than one-quarter of all online users. As shown earlier, youngsters are willing to buy products and

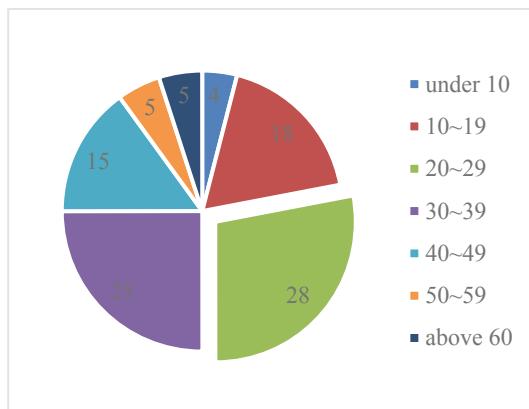


Fig. 3. Age composition of Chinese E-commerce consumers 2018

services and tend to dominate the market [18]. To understand their lifestyles, help guide the brands to deploy their marketing strategies.

Marketers should always be conscious of the evolution and changes in consumption patterns among young Chinese customers [18]. Due to the transformation of the mainstream of consumption, the consumer group has been transformed from generation X (born from 1965 to 1979) to generation Z. The generation Z (Gen Z-ers for short), who were born after, have become the mainstream consumers in e-commerce. According to the data statistics of Penguin Intelligence, Generation Z group are characterized as having typical preference for live broadcasting, short videos, and more fragmented and visual content consumption, these being the main force of future consumption. Gen-Z customers can easily affect many customers, by sharing their shopping experience. In the paper, the literature was extended so as to study the driving force and motivation behind their activities, especially the self-enhancement of customers [19]. In addition, customers are more willing to pay for personalized content and value identification. KOLs have their unique characteristics and marketing channels.

According to del Fresno García [11], the interconnection in a society is more and more close and varied and as a result, everything including people, events, time and places are linked, which helps to build up various relationships, thereby forming a vast complicated social network. Social media refers to a form of media with interactive communication characteristics based on digital technologies, through the Internet. Chinese social media mainly comprises blogs, Weibo, WeChat and other network platforms with interactive communication characteristics. In the era of the Internet, cross-cultural, pluralistic and interactive features have prompted changes in the economy and culture. By sharing behind the scene stories, the faces behind the brand, as well as the creation process of products through social media, KOLs can create unique bonds with their customers. This soft, yet powerful factor can keep customers loyal and even turn them into strong advocates for issues such as Luxe.Co man rights and the environment, as well as the conscious living. McKinsey, as a global consulting firm,

recently released, ‘New Trends of Chinese Fashion Consumers’, which detailed some of the latest trends. The demands of Chinese fashion consumers are being upgraded and are changing, which affects the development of the fashion market. Xiao Mingchao, the CEO of Zhimeng Consulting, said that, “The Redbook of Chinese Fashion Consumption Trend in 2018” [20] introduced several changes in Chinese fashion consumption. One change is that, with consumers’ increasing demands for a better life, the fashion industry has changed from being a simple one to that of diversified and multiple crossovers and it has also been said that, “consumers have changed from material consumption in the past to spiritual consumption at present, and they are increasingly pursuing spiritual pleasure”. Fashion celebrities create themselves as a KOLs, or intellectual property, that is, an individual’s ownership of an achievement. In the Internet era, this can refer to a symbol, a value, a group of common characteristics and even a piece of content. In particular, new media forms an implied relationship chain for web celebrity designers and their fans. Through KOL marketing, those who influence in a specific field can help the brands to establish a relationship with the audience and maintain the interaction. This kind of KOL marketing may enhance credibility to the public and attract more potential customers through well-functioning broadcasting.

4.2 Fan Economy and Marketing Strategy

In reality, consumers are interested in the opinions of others and form certain relationships with the opinion-providers. Consumers who are attracted by the opinions of others are called fans, while consumers who attract others are called friends [5]. The Fan economy generally refers to business income-generating behavior based on the relationship between fans and followers. It is a business operation mode that can enhance customer loyalty and obtain both economic and social benefits, through WoM marketing. KOLs who are more knowledgeable and insightful than others in a field and are always preferred and followed because followers who believe in KOLs’ abilities in this field [13]. A fashion design KOL aims to transmit high-quality content marketing through screen and media. When the identity of network celebrity highly corresponds to production quality, the personal image of the network celebrity realizes the branding.

The excerpt below depicts a focus group conversation between the interviewer, Yu, Zhou, Zhang, Cai and Li. The excerpt draws attention to the consumption of Chinese fashion products.

Interviewer: “What changes do you think there are in Chinese consumers’ consumption habits”?

Yu: “Definitely consumerism. Consumerism is guided by someone. Do customers really know what is suitable for them or what they want? Most people do not know, I think the business model is a star effect mode”.

Zhou: “That’s right! Stars, web celebrity, bloggers. It’s not just in China. It’s over the world. Just like my independent designer brand, this one is more obvious, if there is no star effect, no one is willing to buy the domestic independent designer brand”.

Zhang: “This is a limited way to find some items of good design nowadays in China”.

Yu: "As far as I know, Angela Chen's brands are all promoted by star effects. Her designs are rather gimmicky, which are not what ordinary people are willing to buy. Most of the money she earns is used for public relations".

Li: "I've bought Fendi's Fried pills for only a few hundred yuan, under the influence by fashion celebrities".

Cai: "I am really interested in good-design products, if I see it, I will buy it".

Yu: "Before, the brands of Japan and South Korea were quite popular. That's because of the celebrity's influence and promotion".

In this focus group, KOL marketing in the Chinese fashion market has been recognized by all of the interviewees. The investigation results showed that, customers who prefer sensory innovativeness tend to be influenced by fashion celebrities. Zhou, as a Chinese fashion designer, regards celebrity exposure in the media as contributing to the main promotion mode. 'Web celebrity economy' in the fashion industry is emerging in public, in a relatively new way.

Social media has changed the interactive way between buyers and sellers. Social media, which helps to increase participation, may also help sales organizations to deliver positive results, if it is well utilized to encourage customers' purchase behavior [13]. Social media has changed how Gen Z-ers communicate with each other and obtain and spread information. The Gen Z-ers have a favorable neutral impression of the highly interactive live broadcast, which is in line with the requirements of its 'visual control'. Social media could show creative content, such as pictures and, by using electronic facilities [14]. Consumption intention depends on consumer preference, which is in turn, is influenced by the interests and hobbies of customers. With the continuous evolution of social media technologies, sharing one's life with others through different social media platforms continues to be popular. To the main group of consumer variation, the Internet media can also accelerate the mutual contagion of group emotions, which leads to the acceleration of group formation.

The White Paper on Insight into Apparel Consumers Report [21] indicates that, the Chinese main consumer group is of about 28 years, with an average salary of RMB 10,743 per month. The data from 1,923 samples at the Tencent Data Lab shows that, the main media feature in daily use of APPs is social media (as shown in Fig. 4). Compared with the general public, brand consumers use APPs more for entertainment such as video, music, short videos, games, and photography.

Among all social media, WeChat is the most preferred from the top 5 social media, followed by QQ, Weibo, Zhihu and Xiaohongshu, respectively (Fig. 5). The results indicate that, if agents intervene with opposing opinions, the diffusion of information can be influenced, to a certain degree. Sometimes, different opposing opinions are distributed, compared with which, a polarized view, which can be reposted by more and more agents and spreads more quickly to a broader range. WeChat has a huge user base, with hundreds of millions of active users. Tencent published big data about WeChat users in Tencent Global Partner Conference. 60% of WeChat users are aged between 15 and 29 years old. Those users have an average of 128 'friends' Contact with friends, will increase by 20% after work. 58% of users who make long-distance calls, are young people. The peak shopping time for young people (15–29 years old) is at 10:00 in the morning and 22:00 in the evening.

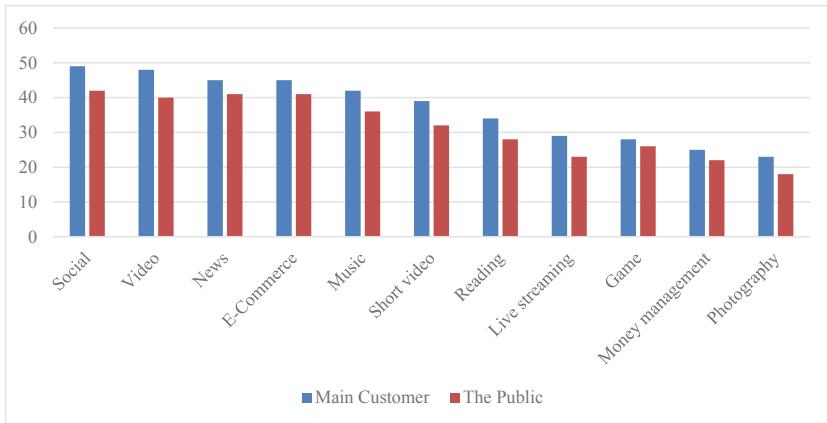


Fig. 4. The Comparison of daily use APP between main customer group and the public (Sample size 1923) unit %

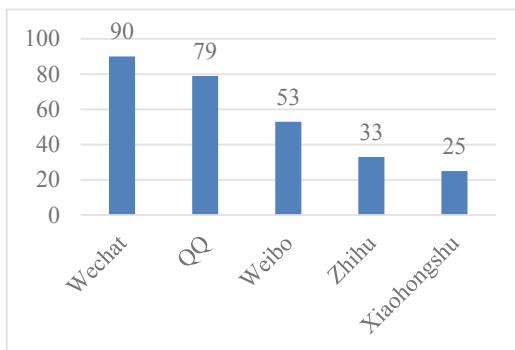


Fig. 5. Social media preference for main consumer group in 2018 (sample size 1,923) unit %

The Taobao live streaming platform also has a high commodity conversion rate, on the Taobao e-commerce platform. KOLs can make use of various media platforms to boost sales, thereby ultimately obtaining their profits.

4.3 KOL's Image Promotion and Marketing Strategy Suggestions

The development of the entire Internet industry is changing rapidly and the mass media is deemed to be ecologically upgrading. According to data and media analysis in SNA, fashion marketing in China needs to satisfy customers by continuously drawing lessons from the past. KOLs must adjust to the quick development of the market.

Some researchers have pointed out that, a KOL, as a web celebrity, should meet three objective criteria [22–24]. They must be labelled by themselves, have sufficient corporate finance and capital utilization and positive images. For consumers, their

consumption behavior is more than merely the exchange of goods and money. The brand value, which includes brand identity and BVA (Brand Value Added), needs to consider both aspects equally. In addition, it is found that, the improvement of content quality is also significant in the market, where perceptions of ease of use and convenient access to brand content influence hedonic value [16]. As mentioned in the White Paper on Insight into Apparel Consumers in 2018, one of the consumption trends of the Chinese fashion industry is that there are a lot of, ‘Slash Youths’, who have more professional interests and intrinsic value in the vertical field. The opinion leader who is focused on fashion research should, thus, have more expert knowledge in the fashion field. In the future, KOLs in the vertical field will become an important factor in marketing communication. Both researchers and practitioners should understand how to make the influence of digital opinion leaders more effective and improve or build up real-world connections, through online interactions [25]. In addition, KOLs should provide more opportunities to the buyers to reciprocate, to demonstrate that they are highly engaged with social media [26]. By creating the KOL image, to endow the product with more resonance to a certain extent, fashion brands with media exposure attract their followers in China. More research should, therefore, be done to provide guidance for future KOL marketing [2].

Marketing Strategy Suggestions

Keep Interaction With the Audience and Show Their Professional Knowledge About Fashion. First, to be a KOL, it is necessary to be professional and competent in a specific field, where they will play a leading role and can give valuable suggestions. The research in the focus group also indicates that, the brand personality characteristics of products can exert a positive influence on the purchase intention of customers. The strategy-makers should, thus, deploy a branding strategy with high competitiveness and communicate the strong personality characteristics of the brand products to customers, through active promotion including spreading information via social media tools (i.e., chat rooms, web pages, TV, MTV channels, etc.) and developing their own smartphone apps to personalize their products and services [27]. KOL celebrities are evidenced by the, ‘FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) cultural symbol’. Interaction can satisfy the psychosocial experience of users, thus, when users have a sense of interaction with KOLs, they tend to remain loyal to their choices. KOLs can broadcast live fashion shows to the audiences instead of uploading online videos. This kind of living show coming along with the stimulation of vision and hearing, which usually encourages the consumer to buy. These temptations replace the controllable purchasing capacity of consumers and the instinct of filtering and self-reference of customers disappears, which eventually disturbs the system of the consumption. It is suggested that, KOLs can be successful by means of e-commerce, brand endorsement, various shows and other forms of commercial operations. According to the White Paper on Insight into Apparel Consumers Report [21], it is easier for customers to purchase the products of a brand through promotion on social media. In particular, KOLs are recommended to post their sense of fashion and styling in wearing, to lead fashion. Independent fashion designers are those who are most inclined represent the brand by KOL, with their personal IP. The professional operation mode assists the development and liquidity of the web celebrity economy, therefore, there will be more and more professional teams

creating personal ID in the future. To achieve the maximum propagation effects in e-commerce, it is essential to improve the credibility of opinion leaders [4]. In addition, fashion opinion leaders perform well in terms of personality [28], therefore, blogs and other social communication tools are used by key opinion leaders, to share pictures about how their consumers fashionably mix and match their products in their daily life, which also provides information about apparel styling. By controlling the quality of the content that is distributed, short-term benefits can be avoided. Cultural branding includes extensive customer service offerings and education on the following buyers, about the labels that they may purchase.

Focus on Content and Cultural Branding. With the development of consumer minds, functional consumption with natural attributes has been changed into cultural consumption, such as lifestyle, social identity and satisfying emotional needs. Although the majority of normal web celebrities can make profits in the short term, they do make profits continuously. In the network, the purchase decision of participants is affected by fashion innovators and fashion opinion leaders [12]. The results indicate that, the wise recommendations from social media help to improve media trust and increase the willingness of followers to follow more news from the particular media channel. Furthermore, if a friend, as an opinion leader, shares a story about a unique lifestyle on a social media platform, the related effects will be amplified [6]. KOL interest points can range from the sharing of high-quality PGC (Professional Generated Content), to the same small elite with strong personal identity, to pleasing prospective customers, which drives sticky consumption and commercialization.

Construct Fan Culture Based on Social Media. Celebrities, as KOLs who have many followers, are more able to influence the opinions of the public than experts [29]. At the Tencent smart conference (2013), the wired co-founder Kevin Kelly pointed out that, the future trend of the Internet is about screen, sharing, attention and traffic. During the wide spread of new media, KOL plays the role of image spokesperson for products, brands or online stores. Due to the influence of web celebrities on their fans, the value of image endorsement begins to appear. Firstly, web celebrities can improve the market recognition of products, brands and online stores. In addition, KOL's unique personality or taste, also brings some added value to the brand. For example, Zhang Dayi, as an image spokesperson for a Taobao shop, is loved by many fans for her taste in fashion. On the Double Eleven Shopping Day in 2017, her brand's new arrivals in the Taobao online shop were sold out in 2 s, and the shop's monthly sales volume exceeded one million yuan. Social media, consumption and culture are the cornerstones of KOL marketing. Moreover, apparel marketers may save the information they send to and receive from customers because all such can be stored as knowledge and experience. This kind of knowledge and experience can also be utilized by consumers for their future shopping and as a result, the information that is sent to or received from the customer can also be regarded as an opportunity for the marketers to build up strong and long-term brand or product images [8]. Social media recommendations of KOLs can raise media trust, so that people are more inclined to follow them. It can be seen that, in order to develop consumer culture in the long term, web celebrities need to consider long-term solutions.

Coordinated Development of Various Platforms. It is suggested that social media, which plays a crucial role in the communication of information to consumers, act as a pre-improvement of salespersons' behavior, in enhancing consumer satisfaction, instead of a direct enhancement factor. This makes managers set their social-media-based sales goals carefully [13]. Entgroup pointed out that currently, the most prominent marketing strategies include the mobile terminal entrance and mass media as well as the creation of high-level quality. WeChat and Weibo, are the two main forces of mobile terminal entrance. In the future, a multi-channel approach is likely to be employed for the promotion of products. To influence public thinking and consumption behavior, new consumption behavior will correspond to conversions and network traffic. In the future, live broadcasting, social media and we-media can all be platforms where KOL is able to interact with fans. The modes of communication should be diversified, such as timing, targeting a customer's position and other technical means. KOL can learn from the development of pop star strategy, that packaging has its professional characteristics and issues, in order to broaden platforms and become a, 'Creator – Influencer – Superstar', therefore, the flexible use of celebrities is going to facilitate the sales of products in the future.

According to Cho and Workman [8], high visualizers may prefer visual information, as opposed to. Traditional texts and pictures, videos have unique advantages. Video bloggers can quickly attract their fans with their humorous words and reliable performance in the video. After the foundation period, short videos with high-quality content, has in the development period. Ever more celebrities participate in this industry and rather than traditional advertisements, fast-emerging social media can catch the eye of Generation Z more efficiently. Online and offline information should be updated in time, through various digital channels. The State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television pointed out the importance of, 'accelerating the development of media convergence' in the Development Report of Audio-visual New Media in China (2015), to integrate traditional and new media. For live broadcasting platforms, linkage and integration with other industries can help them to deal with the current social background. With the deepening of 'pan-entertainment', cross-culture has become a normal phenomenon to meet the trend of the fashion market. The live broadcast can also be linked to the film and television industry, which also relies on the development of network media and multi-media marketing. Chinese live broadcasting has tried to concentrate on multidirectional development and star effects. For instance, 'Fashion Masters', as a large-scale fashion design variety show of CCTV, has put the designer's design process, as well as front and back stages, onto the screen. The audience may be attracted by the designers' personal IP. Furthermore, designers can also attract some audiences through TV programs. Wang Yutao, a famous fashion designer, has cooperated with many TV shows. Idols participating in fashion shows may achieve a win-win situation of fan sharing and marketing. The results indicated that consumers' choice of channels was affected only by the opinions of fashion innovators and fashion opinion leaders, so those who have high requirements of fashion innovativeness and opinion leadership, are prone to adopting two or more shopping channels [12]. As the network continues to permeate all aspects of people's lives and the network profit model continues to develop, the web celebrity economy will be more diversified in the future. In addition, there will be more and more different platforms in

the future, so it is suggested that, KOL in the fashion industry, could spread their contents on multiple platforms, which makes multiple platforms become the trend of the promotion. Coming to terms with multichannel marketing is important for brand consistency, as it does in the fashion industry.

5 Limitations

Data as such, besides WeChat and Weibo in China, the generalizability of the framework concerning overseas social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube, can be explored in future research [16]. Despite the paper giving some suggestions on marketing strategies, there are still some limitations. For example, the research results may not be sufficiently generalizable. Most of the data is second-hand information and resources are limited. The data was collected from the largest microblogging platform in China – Sina Weibo and the data of sellers in our samples came from the largest C2C online shopping platform in China – Taobao.

Social media should not be excessively utilized. The research findings imply that, the social needs of customers cannot be overlooked in social media marketing. The paper suggests the best practice of social media marketing is to find a balance between the social needs of buyers and the economic needs of sellers. That is, a seller may be penalized with less popularity for being too aggressive and hence, crowding out customers' social content in the limited social media space [30]. Although KOLs have great influence on the Chinese Fashion Market, the negative impacts of KOLs should also be noted. A healthy monitoring system for KOLs is necessary, to oversee them, in order to avoid any misleading broadcasting. Some further detailed research into the activities of KOL marketing still needs to be carried out. Future research can focus on: how do bloggers give recommendations that make their short-video vlogs or fashion shows appeal to consumers the most? What forms of fashion information do male consumers prefer? What kinds of images of clothing can increase the consumption of the brand? How often does the WeChat public account release information that benefits the most? Which form of content distribution is better? Finally, further studies can test forecasting, as a part of new developments, which can enrich the theoretical and managerial insight in this regard.

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Socio-Demographic and Cultural Issues



Ageing in Style: Can We Spot the Values of Age in Digital Fashion Branding?

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Abstract. The present study examines the visual rhetoric of a small set of international fashion brands that cater for the clothing preferences of an ageing cohort of fashion-conscious consumers. The purpose of the examination is to show whether the digital branding of fashion garments showing aging models relies on the values that an older segment is expected to naturally adhere to. In contrast to early values theory, the study adopts the position that human values change with age. The study takes the form of a qualitative analysis, using a set of pictures that employs aging models of both sexes to address an international audience of fashion-savvy consumers. The analysis and discussion are intended to raise awareness in the industry of how values may ideally be configured in visual fashion communication to avoid a situation where significant consumer segments may feel misrepresented or alienated. The analysis suggests that fashion communication has adopted social and personal values that resonate with aging consumers, but warns against potential complacency as those who want to age in style are arguably “moving younger”, substituting their focus on social values with the personally-oriented values of their younger peers. However, to our knowledge, extant values theory does not account for how value configurations may alter once older individuals’ identities change and become more youthful and less predictable.

Keywords: Fashion · Ageing · Values · Older models · Visual communication

1 Introduction

The business of fashion is widely regarded as an exponent of youth in marketing and branding. As fashion may be considered *the* most central player in the lifestyle industry, and as Western societies admire the central features of being young, the industry’s practice of using young models is still the overriding norm. However, in recent years, older models have become increasingly visible. The older models are not used for the marketing of products from brands targeting mature segments exclusively, but appear in the branding from popular brands that attracts numerous followers.

The much-hyped *greynaisance* of fashion is possibly not just a momentary fad, but rather the industry’s commercial reflection on a marketplace where a generation of resourceful baby boomers, now coming of age, expect a meaningful conversation about their dressing styles. This market was to a great extent pioneered by baby boomers during the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, and they defined the trends of

consumer cultures during the following decades [17]. It is a rebellious generation that responds negatively to any “lazy stereotyping” of ageing women and men by their preferred brands [19]. Professor of communication studies Susan Douglas argues that we are seeing a “demographic revolution”, adding that “older women are now saying ‘No, I’m still vibrant, I still have a lot to offer, and I’m not going to be consigned to invisibility.’ These women are reinventing what it means to be an older woman” [1], and they will expect the fashion industry to match that.

While some recent research has accounted for older consumers’ relationship with fashion [10], we do not have a clear picture of ageing adults’ expectations of fashion communication and what they think counts as lazy stereotyping. However, fashion communication is imbued with emotions and generally exposes flawless youth and photo shopped faces in the attempt to build high consumer involvement. Emotional communication is guided by universal values which determine our behaviour and shape our goals. In other words, fashion communication is a discourse of emotionally-driven human values. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the values communicated through a set of photos taken from a handful of predominantly mid-market, international fashion brands addressing also the so-called Silver Spenders.

In this qualitative study we assume our data to contain values which, according to extant theory, is distinctive of this age group and therefore partly or wholly traceable in fashion communication. However, we observe that while value theorists have gradually come to realise that human values develop and change with age, they have not yet begun to account for whether values “backslide” and become less distinctive and age-dependent as older adults respond to and perhaps reject the clichéd values of age.

First, we discuss some recent observations about digital fashion branding and its relationship with ageing. Then, we introduce a values perspective on fashion communication and explain how current values theory and related empirical studies support and inform this perspective. From this position, we introduce examples and discuss central observations from our analysis of values in fashion communication.

If we can begin to map the fashion industry’s approach to an ageing segment of fashion-savvy consumers, then we can more reliably proceed to ask these consumers if they feel misrepresented by ageing models in fashion communication.

2 Digital Fashion Branding

In a study of how the values of fashion models are generated in economic markets, Entwistle [3] argues that the aesthetic content in cultural production is continuously changing. She explains that the aesthetic values are generated internally in the institutions of modelling, responding to the fashion system and the needs of their clients [3]. Consequently, we regard our case material to represent the selected fashion brands’ conscious choices and interpretations of the dominant values of ageing, and how they want their brands to be represented at that particular time.

For our framework of study, we adopt Entwistle’s distinction between *commercial modelling* which uses conventional looks to appeal to large consumer markets and *fashion modelling* which relies on more extreme and edgy characteristics for a more fashion-savvy market. Entwistle [3] observes that “while fashion models cross over

into commercial work, older commercial and lifestyle models generally do not do fashion". Consequently, it is a significant change that we now see an increasing number of older models on the fashion scene, and it becomes relevant to record the inherent values communicated in a sample representing the greynaisance of fashion.

It is also relevant to contemplate the relationship between fashion products, the model, and the fashion brand itself. The fashion model is more than just a body carrying a garment that would otherwise be shown out of use. The numerous possibilities for selecting types of models and contexts for representing the brand visually gives an idea of the extent of brand personification in a model's body. Entwistle and Wissinger [4] say that the model embodies the brand's image, which suggests the precariousness of choosing an older model. While the preferred look of models varies from one decade to the next, the demography of models is still managed within very narrow parameters of suitable ages ranges from teenage years to the mid-twenties, while always observing the exclusive standards of height and weight [4].

Apart from the habitual editing of contents in fashion branding, also the significance of digital media is relevant as a framework in the mediatization of fashion. Whereas mediation is only concerned with conveyance of meaning, mediatization entails that the media hold transformative power [7]. This transformative power influences the design as well as the communication of fashion where the ageing model is also a part. In this respect, it needs to be considered which values age communicate and how the identity of age is illustrated. As social media have developed into a state where the platforms are integral parts of the industry, and of many people's identity construction [2, 7], it is reasonable to assume that also the appearance of ageing models has an impact on the perceptions of age. In addition, many consumers and followers experience fashion mainly in its mediatized form on social media in a constant stream. Consequently, it is relevant to consider if the large amount of mediatized fashion may create room for more diversity and counter the predominant ageism and its exclusion.

3 The Stereotypes of Fashion and Age Digital Fashion Branding

The stereotypical presumption about old age in relation to fashion is that ageing is a phase which affects people psychologically just as much as physically. Nevertheless, Sadkowska et al. [10] have found that men do not necessarily lose interest in fashion with age. Instead, the subjects in their study say they take more pleasure from their engagement with fashionable clothing in their older years than earlier in life. The potential disengagement from fashion was not experienced by the participants in the study. Thus, Sadkowska et al. [10] conclude:

... this tells us about where the participants in this study perceive themselves within the hierarchy of the fashion system, i.e. their clothing choices are not dictated or determined by fashion trends, instead fashionable clothing is integral to their manifestations of who they are. In this, our participants consider themselves as collaborators with fashion who exercise their own agency, not blind followers who are submissive to the tastes of others, ...

These observations and the increasing number of ageing models on the fashion scene challenge stereotypical assumptions about our relationship with fashion in old age, but also the definition of age. As the notion of being *young* is changing and sixty becomes the new forty or fifty, the existing perceptions and boundaries of age are affected and relocated [18]. However, to our knowledge, that this has not yet been accounted for by values theorists.

Consequently, the industry may consider that older adults engage with fashion on different terms than previously. Ageing adults' positive motivation and ability to appear stylish may be associated with a different prioritization of human values that will distinguish them from younger age groups and make them receptive to a different brand narrative. Thus, to achieve a positive brand attitude among ageing consumers, marketers will want to respond adequately to any developments in ageing customers' value orientations.

4 Human Values Research

Human values have been carefully researched and modelled over the past several decades. This comprehensive work has produced a range of typologies to render probable that there exists a finite set of universal values and that these values remain almost constant over a person's lifetime [8, 9]. Values are arguably steady and less apt to change than one's more malleable and transient beliefs, opinions and attitudes. These assumptions have been challenged, also by recent research, to suggest that different life stages may be accompanied by different value priorities.

Schwartz [16] has expressed reservations about the assumed constancy of individuals' values, suggesting that people's *social focus* will grow stronger with age. Thus, ageing individuals supposedly put a premium on tradition, security, broader societal issues, maintaining relationships, and protecting the welfare of others. This contrasts with the early years of one's life where a *personal focus* predominates with emphasis on pleasure, excitement, personal success, achievement and independence. Since the late 1980s, Schwartz and his colleagues have worked to refine their values taxonomy into a powerful instrument for discerning between human value priorities across a variety of dimensions, including gender, education, income, worries, and age [12–16].

Schwartz's [16] modelling of universal values identifies four macro clusters of values that we have adapted in Fig. 1 to better suit our research approach: *Self-enhancement*, *Self-indulgence*, *Self-preservation* and *Self-transcendence*. The first two clusters share a personal focus for which Schwartz has identified a subset of 'themes', e.g. *Achievement* and *Power*. The next two clusters have a social focus and again subsume their own subset of themes.

Figure 1 reflects that with age, men and women develop a closer affinity with socially-oriented values (bottom row) at the expense of personally-oriented values (top row). These two value orientations share two sets of characteristics. The first set can be described as *inward-looking* as it is concerned with the individual's personal ambitions and goals and her/his fears of personal loss or social failure. The second set of characteristics is *outward-looking* as it captures the individual's self-confidence, self-fulfilment, self-realization and her/his social engagement and desire to include or embrace others. Thus, on an age-contingent journey away from personal values and

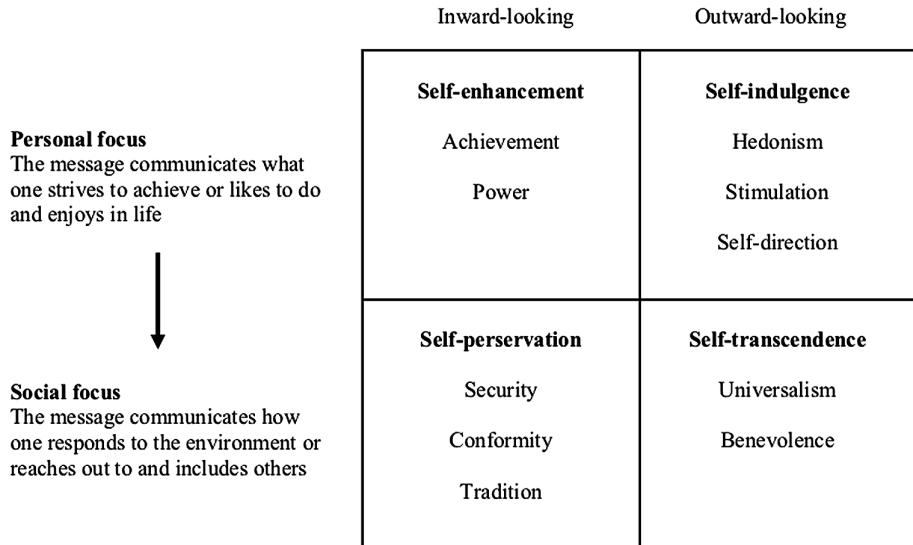


Fig. 1. Personally-oriented vs. socially-oriented values (adapted from Schwartz [16])

towards social values, the individual will continuously navigate her/his predilections by inward and outward-looking beacons. This is captured by Robinson [6] who writes:

Theories of lifespan development argue that personal values change normatively with age, and that such age-graded change is an adaptive process. As a person grows older, they encounter a changing balance of age-related gains and losses, each of which brings new transitions to navigate, new tasks to fulfil, new roles to inhabit and new challenges to overcome.

Robinson [6] explains how Schwartz and colleagues' value structure has been foundational for a recurring mapping of human values across geographies, including the *World Values Survey* and the *European Social Survey*. Using two such samplings from the European Social Survey (from 2002 and 2008), Robinson [6] addressed a gap in the literature by tracing variances in universal values across life stages in more than thirty European countries, allowing also for gender differences across age cohorts. Robinson [6] could report (a) an increase in values placed in the model's *Self-preservation* quadrant; (b) a decrease in the *Self-indulgence* quadrant; (c) an increase in the *Self-transcendence* quadrant both in midlife and for older adults; and (d) a decrease in the *Self-enhancement* quadrant. This gives support to the argument that a personal focus early in life is gradually replaced by a social focus with age. From a gender perspective, it is salient that only the two latter quadrants are gender-sensitive on age difference, showing a stronger increase in socially focused self-transcendence values among women and more resilient personally-focused self-enhancement values among men.

Similar observations are brought to the table by Gouveia et al. [5], using an elaborated model of six instead of four value quadrants to empirically test the age-values relationship. The study provides value profiles for a large sample of Brazilian males and females aged from 12 to 65 years. It shows that the importance respondents attach to each value cluster shifts moderately across life stages, with both sexes trying

to adapt to changing circumstances and ageing. The study concludes that “life events and physical aging [are] powerful forces that can reshape people’s values” [5]. The study again argues that men and women follow complementary trajectories from personal towards social values as they age, confirming Robinson’s observation that men are persevering in their pursuit of personal goals with women veering more towards social values [5].

It follows from this discussion that fashion brands promoting luxury or lifestyle items should pay close attention to the socially focused values if they want to engage older consumers. This rests on the premise that older people have reconciled themselves with their life stage and situation and its dominant values. However, it is possible that some older but fashion-conscious consumers still identify with and thus entertain values ascribed to a younger age cohort. This could possibly, but not exclusively, be because they reject or challenge their life situation, identify with a younger generation and regard old age and consequently themselves from a different perspective from what was previously the norm.

The current study adopts Schwartz’s [16] modelling of individual values in our adapted format. Other dominant typologies mostly rank values according to importance, but do not specify how values are different from or relate to one another. With its four clusters of values, Schwartz’s Universal Value Structure is deemed suitable as an empirical instrument for the type of visual analyses conducted in this study as it allows us to record instances of age-related values in fashion communication, presumably addressing an older cohort of fashion-conscious consumers. In Schwartz’s modelling, each macro cluster of values and its subset of themes is further specified by a layer of concrete human values. Together, the model includes 57 specific values allocated across the ten domains or clusters representing all four macro clusters in Schwartz’s model [16]. These specific values are shown in Tables 2 and 3 below.

In Sect. 5, we examine the visual rhetoric of a small set of international fashion brands that use pictures that portray aging models of both sexes in order to capture the attention of an international audience of fashion-minded consumers. The subsequent analysis and discussion explore a set of digital fashion artefacts with a view to raising the fashion industry’s awareness of how values may ideally be branded in visual communication. This may help the industry to steer clear of a situation where important consumer segments feel misrepresented or alienated. It is important to note that mainstream values theories do not account for how value configurations of older individuals’ identities change as they take a more youthful approach and thus become less predictable.

5 Methods and Data

The current study takes a qualitative approach in order to provide a thick description of salient values in the brand communications of fashion brands employing both young and older models.

The data consist of a set of photos selected from the international brands La Paz, Mads Nørgaard – Copenhagen, Ermenegildo Zegna, Moons and Junes, and Mango that are listed in Table 1 together with the models. The photos are from the brands’ Instagram profiles and from news media sites, but coming from the brands’ own press material.

Table 1. Brands and models.

Company	Origin	Established	Distribution	Websites
La Paz	Portugal	2011	6 international markets	http://lapaz.pt/
Mads Nørgaard - Copenhagen	Denmark	1986	Several international markets	https://madsnorgaard.dk/
Ermeneigildo Zegna	Italy	1910	500 shops worldwide	https://zegna.co.uk/the-history.html
Mango	Spain	1984	2200 shops worldwide	https://press.mango.com/company-profile
Moones and Junes	Denmark	2016	5 international markets	https://moons-junes.com
Models	Age	Company	Details	
Jacky O'Shaugnessy	67	Moones and Junes	https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/fashion/news/american-apparel-reveals-62-year-old-jacky-o-shaughnessy-as-underwear-model-9099206.html	
Lyn Slater	65	Mango	https://www.accidentalicon.com	
Peirera	67	La Paz	https://theconversation.com/cardigans-and-anoraks-wont-cut-it-why-there-should-be-more-fashion-for-older-men-92201	
Wang Deshun	82	Ermenegildo Zegna	https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/wang-deshun-80-year-old-chinese-runway-model-fitness-regime-gym-health-youth-swimming-skates-a7654231.html	
Ulla	Not known	Mads Nørgaard - Copenhagen		
Hans	Not known	Mads Nørgaard - Copenhagen		
Andre Parker van Noord	54	Mango	https://models.com/oftheminute/?p=114193	

The models in the data are all in the selected fashion branding material because of their mature looks. Consequently, elderly celebrities modelling for a brand maybe as a consequence of their celebrity status and not for their mature looks, are not part of the corpus. Having said that, the elderly fashion models attract substantial media attention, and a number of them have acquired iconic status within their own field.

Besides, it has been a criterium of the corpus that the model has not undergone cosmetic surgery to a visible degree, has coloured hair or has been subject to detectable photoshopping with the attempt of making the him or her look younger. The photo may have undergone editing in other ways than trying to alter the impression of the model's age, just as it may have been photoshopped for enhancing other desirable characteristics not apparent to the general follower or customer. This article has a focus on models well after middle age as the models are between 54 and 82 years old.

Although the development of conditions for male and female models have not been entirely parallel and despite of the different conditions still existing for men and women in the modelling industry, the present data regard male and female models not as representatives of their genders but as representatives of older age. This allows an exclusive focus on age as a phenomenon in the youth focused industry of fashion.

A number of criteria was used to guide the selection process. The set of pictures was digitally captured in the fall of 2018 and archived into one database for analysis by two trained coders. First, each picture was coded for its social focus by gleaning its content for values of Self-transcendence and Self-preservation. Next, each picture was

coded for its personal focus to determine its content of values representing Self-indulgence and Self-enhancement. Both the model and the picture background were subject to analysis.

Two instruments of analysis were designed to guide the analysis and ensure consistency across the dataset. Table 2 shows values representing a social focus, while Table 3 shows values representing a personal focus. The instruments are a rework of Schwartz's various modellings:

Table 2. Values representing a social focus (adapted from Schwartz, 2006).

Self-transcendence vs. Self-preservation values: the two clusters share a social focus with values guiding how one responds to the environment or reaches out to and includes others.

Self-transcendence (the individual's social engagement and desire to include or embrace others)

Universalism: Defining goal: understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.

Wisdom, World at peace, World of beauty, Unity with nature, Broad-minded, Social justice, Protect environment, Inner harmony, Equality

Benevolence: Defining goal: preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group').

Loyal, Responsible, Meaning in life, True friendship, Mature love, Honest, Forgiving, Helpful, Spiritual life

Self-preservation (the individual's fears of personal loss or social failure)

Security: Defining goal: safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.

National security, Sense of belonging, Reciprocal favors, Clean, Social order, Family security, Healthy

Conformity: Defining goal: restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.

Obedient, Honor elders, Politeness, Self-discipline

Tradition: Defining goal: respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides.

Accepting my portion in life, Moderate, Devout, Respect for tradition, Detachment, Humble

Table 3. Values representing a personal focus (adapted from Schwartz, 2006).

Self-indulgence vs. Self-enhancement values: the two clusters share a personal focus with values guiding how to communicate what one strives to achieve in life or likes to do and enjoys.

Self-indulgence (the individual's self-confidence, self-fulfillment, self-realization)

Hedonism: Defining goal: pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself.

Pleasure, Self-indulgence, Enjoying life

Stimulation: Defining goal: excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.

Exciting life, Varied life, Daring

Self-direction: Defining goal: independent thought and action--choosing, creating, exploring.

Self-respect, Privacy, Choosing own goals, Creativity, Independent, Curious, Freedom

Self-enhancement (the individual's personal ambitions and goals)

Achievement: Defining goal: personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards.

Ambitious, Influential, Successful, Capable, Intelligent

Power: Defining goal: social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources.

Preserving public image, Social power, Authority, Wealth, Social recognition

6 Analysis

The data samples are coded in pairs with each picture being analysed against two or three values under a particular values theme and cluster shown in either Table 2 or Table 3. In this way, all themes and clusters are included in the analysis. The Stimulation value was not recorded in the data.

6.1 Social Focus → Self-transcendence → Universalism

In the first instance, we are gleaning one picture for human qualities of Universalism such as understanding, appreciation, tolerance and concern for the welfare of people

and the environment. In Fig. 1 Jacalyn O’Shaughnessy models for Moons and Junes. In our modelling, such values are representative both of the models’ innate qualities and their goals in life (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Jacalyn O’Shaughnessy models for Moons and Junes. Courtesy of Moons and Junes

The model has an air of wisdom about her expressed by her calmness and the greyness of her hair. O’Shaughnessy’s loose-hanging hair imbues her with goddess-like quality. She is relaxed, signalling inner harmony and an experience-based self-confidence. The calmness and harmony are underscored by consistent and subdued colour range. Gazing across the cityscape, O’Shaughnessy is elevated, undisturbed, and contemplating the world around her.

6.2 Social Focus → Self-transcendence → Benevolence

The same two pictures are analysed for the theme of Benevolence. O’Shaughnessy is open and relational with her direct gaze and smile, hands in her back pockets and exposing herself. She offers something, with a note of helpfulness or engagement. This is underscored by her call to “stand for something”. In contrast, Slater avoids establishing a relation with the viewer on whom she has turned her back.

6.3 Social Focus → Self-preservation → Security

For the theme of Security, we refer to two pictures from La Paz and Zegna. Models Pereira and Deshun clearly also connote some of the same qualities of wisdom

and calmness. In addition, Pereira is in harmony with the elements of nature. Both models suggest inner harmony by way of their calmness and focused gaze, underlined by them being casual, yet well-kempt (Figs. 3 and 4).



Fig. 3. Pereira models for La Paz. Courtesy of Jose Miguel de Abreu, La Paz



Fig. 4. Deshun models for Zegna. Courtesy of Erica Fava

6.4 Social Focus → Self-preservation → Conformity

Here we examine Pereira and Deshun once more, gleaning the pictures for behavioural qualities such as obedience, politeness and self-discipline. Neither of the two models impose themselves on the viewer, but signal a certain politeness or restraint. This is so, even though they violate social norms that fashion is the preserve of youth, and that ageing gentlemen keep their hair and beards short. Through their fit appearance they demonstrate some self-discipline.

6.5 Social Focus → Self-preservation → Tradition

Again, we highlight Pereira and Deshun for how they are situated through the theme of Tradition. Pereira's placement at the ocean shows a oneness with nature and the sea. Deshun comes across as being less tradition-bound in a modern cityscape, but both models, while wearing traditional colours, are stylish without appearing as peacocks.

6.6 Personal Focus → Self-indulgence → Hedonism

Our analysis of the themes and values associated with a personal focus begins by exploring the cluster of Self-indulgence, looking at models expressing the theme of Hedonism. Here, we use two models, Ulla and Hans respectively, from the Danish fashion brand Mads Nørgaard Copenhagen (Figs. 5 and 6).



Fig. 5. Ulla models for Mads Nørgaard. Courtesy of Claudia Angelsø



Fig. 6. Hans models for Mads Nørgaard. Courtesy of Mounir Hammoumi

Ulla is taking a break, slouched on her bed on top of a creased duvet, resting and enjoying herself. She is indulging herself in an inviting and carefree manner, almost basking in the rays of the sun. Hans is also taking a break from his chores with his hands deep in his pockets, showing that he is comfortable, happy and ready to meet the viewer.

6.7 Personal Focus → Self-indulgence → Self-direction

To unfold aspects of the theme of Self-direction, we continue the analysis of Ulla and Hans as they represent the label of Mads Nørgaard. Ulla casually exposes her body's features, which suggests that she is free and unconstrained in the privacy of her home. Hans is informal and equally unrestrained with his hands in his pockets, taking a break from some activity he is engaged in.

6.8 Personal Focus → Self-enhancement → Self-achievement

For the theme of Achievement, we use a male and a female model who carry themselves with a confidence that connotes goal-orientedness and competence. Both André van Noord and Lyn Slater who both model for Mango are focused and projecting success as they display their intelligence and prowess with some sternness (Figs. 7 and 8).

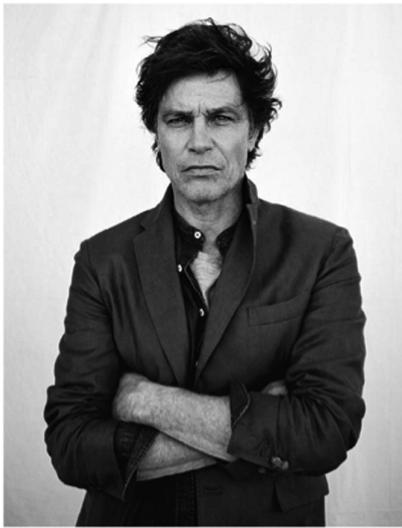


Fig. 7. André van Noord models for Mango. Courtesy of Mango



Fig. 8. Lyn Slater models for Mango. Courtesy of Mango

6.9 Personal Focus → Self-enhancement → Self-power

In the same two pictures, van Noord demonstrates his social status through an unpolished masculinity and a posture of no regrets. Slater is also playing with the symbols of the masculine and referencing the financial power and executive role represented by pinstriped pants and black braces.

7 Discussion

In fashion communication, the virtues of youth represent the traditional focus, while the advent of age and maturity represents innovation. Our analysis of a series of seven pictures taken from five international fashion brands explores the more recent phenomenon of using ageing models in life situations where they are cast to display their age in unfiltered ways. First and foremost, the analyses based on Schwartz's modelling of personal and social values suggest that innovative fashion communication addressing an older age cohort has a richness of inherently social values.

When we unfold the configuration of social cues in our visual data, we see brush strokes of wisdom, calmness, harmony, self-confidence across the canvass. We also encounter a discourse of benevolence where the models are inviting and seeking engagement with the viewers or the world at large. This is complemented by some preoccupation with the casual, yet quietly groomed appearances of the models situated against backgrounds stressing the same mood. Interestingly, while the models are generally restrained and polite, they challenge the social norms of youth in fashion. They exhibit a contemporary chicness combined with self-discipline and self-composure. The models are tradition-bound in an updated way as they wear subdued colours distancing them from being overtly peacocky, even with unusually long hair for their age.

Our analysis shows that the values of hedonism and self-direction are less conspicuous in our sample, suggesting that self-indulgence is less salient and only complementary to a social focus. The models are relaxed and carefree but in a grounded way. In like manner, the themes of achievement and power are peripheral if not entirely ignored for this age cohort. Still, the models have an air of self-confidence and competence serving to underscore a life-long accomplishment and a certain masculine impetus.

In sum, the collective picture book tells a story of a serenity that is immediately authentic and clearly defiant of the invisibility that is often a presupposed and experienced by those who are ageing. It is also a picture book which is neither boisterous nor controversial, but creating an upbeat, "life-loving" mood to court the sensibilities of a generation that will not be lightly dismissed. The mediatized story of fashion and ageing creates a determined narrative to confirm the visibility and worthiness of an age group with money to spend.

8 Conclusion

The agenda for this study was to identify the values of age in fashion communication in a context of increased media attention to older consumers, with some older models attaining status and stardom. This is captured by the rise of star model Lyn Slater who has become the "accidental icon". It is not immediately apparent whether the fashion industry's response to this development is intuitive or deliberate when selecting the messages that may resonate with an older age cohort of fashion-conscious consumers. Twigg [17], who has studied that significance of bodily and cultural ageing in relation to older women's clothing styles, notes that research has largely ignored the role of

clothing in establishing the identity of the ageing, adding that age is one of the “key or ‘master identities’ [that is] reflected in ideas about clothing”.

When we try to deconstruct the industry’s visual discourse using older models, we obtain a very good indication that such discourse is communicating themes and values that are important and meaningful to an older audience. There is a body of values research documenting which values are most central to ageing individuals, but it is entirely possible that the phenomenon of greynassance is impacting on and gradually shifting the values of age, as the cohort of “new old” are “moving younger” [18].

The values research of Robinson (6), Schwartz (16) and Gouveia et al. (5) is comprehensive both in relation to geography, scope and occurrence and gives a solid base for exploring manifestations of age in a variety of communicative domains, including fashion communication. With its qualitative approach to digital branding in the fashion industry, this paper contributes with a focused and more particular analysis of a trendsetting, but very exposed area of business. Thus, the limited scope allows for more detailed reflections, highlighting a variety of idiosyncratic perspectives regarding the values of age in fashion.

As the notion of age is building momentum at all levels, the industry is participating with innovation that adds content to and experiments with the value narratives of age. However, digital fashion branding that wants to target the values of the Silver Spenders with any precision must be sensitive to the shifts and turns in the experiences and value configurations of all ages and demographics. A next step for innovative fashion communication is therefore to address its “moving target” on a foundation of values that is relevant and authentic. Sadkowska [11] has recently contributed to this knowledge base by interviewing five older men about their experiences with fashion. This is where fashion communication researchers can continue to make an informed contribution by collecting new insight about changing values, having a conversation with a maturing generation that is refusing to become marginalized and excluded from an attractive life-style.

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Fashion as a Medium of Communicating Faith: A Phenomenological Study of the Sikh Identity

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Abstract. Fashion has mostly, if not always been used as a means of establishing identity. Identity is not an entity frozen in time. Whether linked to culture, tradition or faith, it keeps evolving and changing. ‘Who am I?’ is a question which leads not only to moments of spiritual epiphany but is also the *raison d'être* for pursuits like appearance, looks and fashion. The current era of globalization is driving the world to a kind of amorphous system where identities are getting dissolved and recreated. Individuals today are following each other’s lifestyle, fashion, clothing, appearance and attitude more liberally. In the circuit of culture, people are often creating and communicating via hybrid identities. The products of fashion have a huge global reach and acceptance. Getting influenced by them is a common experience. However, when the experimental and ephemeral object called fashion comes in contact with traditional beliefs, faith and identity there can be many possibilities. It can demolish traditions and prevail, the traditions and faith can become more resilient and reject it, or tradition and faith may become little more generous and create space for new expressions.

In the light of the above, the proposed research seeks to closely investigate this phenomenon from the perspective of Sikh faith and identity. Sikhism is arguably India’s only religion today which prescribes a definite identity for its male followers in terms of their looks and appearance. Adherence to that is a sine qua non for the followers. Notwithstanding that, Sikh youth today are among some of the most fashionable and flamboyant individuals who are open and willing to accept new experiments in fashion. They are both the creator and consumers of contemporary fashion. This research thus proposes to study whether the traditional Sikh identity as described in the faith is undergoing any significant fundamental transformation due to the global impact of fashion or is the male Sikh youth reinventing new and contemporary identity within the framework of the traditional faith itself. This points towards viewing fashion as a medium of communicating faith, formulating the kernel and chief point of the research.

Looking at the issue through the lens of fashion, this research seeks to discuss Sikh identity – its origin; its continuity; and its contemporaneity. Within the analytic palette of investigation, the study aims to locate the sartorial Sikh, since the inception of Sikh identity in the 16th century to date. Anchored in the domain of phenomenology, the study examines the phenomena of faith-related consumption and communication of fashion.

The study is informed by an interdisciplinary approach in analyzing the psychosocial dimensions of both fashion and identity, formulated by faith.

As the identity is a social construct that connects with human psychic demonstrations, these underpinnings help understand the Sikh identity that is seen oscillating from tradition to modernity, from ascribed to avowed identities.

The research adopts the constructivist paradigm and focuses on lived experiences of urban Sikh male youth who are seen grafting a regional fashion culture attuned to social adoptability. Owing to the Sikh diaspora accounts, the research looks at cultural translation and communication of fashion and dress identities within and beyond the Sikh homeland (i.e., Punjab, India).

Keywords: Fashion · Identity · Sikh identity · Fashion communication

1 Introduction

Sikhs were formed as a clan of warriors in 16th century AD to stand up against the atrocities of the Mughals. *Sura so pehchaniye, Jo lade deen ke het*: this verse finds its place in the sacred text of Sikhs, *Guru Granth Sahib*. The Sikh tradition has a total of ten Gurus which started with Guru Nanak Dev, and concluded with Guru Gobind Singh. Thereafter, the sacred text is revered as the Guru, as indicated in the verse: *Sab sikhan ko hukam hai, Guru manyo granth*. The Sikh doctrine talks about two important tenets called *Miri Piri*, which means the Guru being both spiritual head and political head. In between there has been a tradition of sacrificial warriors who were also the Gurus and revered for their leadership and messages.

With the inception of *Khalsa Panth* in 1699, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh created the Sikh identity so that the Khalsa be special. Thus, the beginnings of the Sikh identity are embedded in exclusivity and distinctiveness; in virtue and valor.

Sikhism has two important dimensions. One is its widely accepted spiritual messages and the other is its concept of purity vested in the Khalsa, which manifests in the physical appearance of the baptized (*amritdhari*) Sikh men. Though the faith does not proscribe women to become *amritdhari*, the tradition is largely prescriptive for the men to adhere to the identity as prescribed by the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh. And, that is from where the male Sikhs find their unique identity with which they are recognized all over the world.

Falling back on art history of the medieval period, we find visual references that give us the idea of clothing of the Sikh warriors and the acclaimed first five baptized Sikhs (popularly known as *Panj Pyare*) chosen by Guru Gobind Singh. In accordance with painted accounts, the five beloved ones are seen wearing choga/tunic extending up to the knees, with a waist sash/cummerbund, coupled with a pair of breeches, and the main marker of identity: the turban. The silhouette is anti-fit, rather voluminous allowing enough room for movement and ease for martial activities. From then to the present day, the Sikh identity has shifted to a more Eurocentric code.

The ‘*Nai Manzil*’ report (January 2014), prepared by the Ministry of Minority Affairs mentions the enlisting of Sikhs as one of the six minority communities in India. National Sample Survey (NSS) 68th round mentions Sikh population as 2.1% of the total population of India (225 billion people). Despite the minority status, the social visibility and social standing of the Sikhs is very high. There is a large number of diaspora Sikh population which is permanently settled in different parts of the world.

particularly in USA, UK, Canada. This has exposed the Sikhs to global attitude and preferences for new fashion and changing identities.

Because of this global connect and exposure to evolving fashion, many young Sikh men are seen constructing and negotiating their identities, both in India and abroad. So much so that they have become iconic figures for the Sikh and other youth alike. They are seen experimenting with their hair, turban tying styles, wearing accessories and make-up, body art etc.

In the context of the above cited trajectory followed by the Sikh identity, this study aims to explore whether the global exposure creates any significant incongruity in terms of traditional faith and the present identity. Through the Symbolic Interaction Theory (SIT) Stone discusses appearance as a dimension of communication, usually as a precursor to verbal transactions. This allocates significance to the individual's bodily identity, transmitted through clothing. Thus, before two individuals enter a verbal dialogue, it's the clothing that initiates the non-verbal communiqué.

2 Objectives of the Study

The study proposes to propel forward with the following objectives:

- To understand the connect between Sikh faith, identity, and fashion
- To study the evolution of the visual appearance of the Sikh male from the historical to the contemporary era in terms of clothing and fashion
- To explore the issue of identity cultivated by fashion from psychosocial perspective
- To investigate the influence of fashion in formulating hybrid identities
- To study the phenomena of fashion and identity as a cross-over of tradition and modernity
- To grasp the nature of fashion in the globalized context with special reference to the urban male Sikh youth.

3 Research Questions

The study broadly seeks to answer the following questions:

- Is the traditional Sikh identity undergoing any transition in terms of faith, cultural values and appearance?
- How has the visual exterior of the Sikh man shifted from the 16th century to present day?
- Do Sikhs prefer to nurture their original or bicultural identity in distant lands?
- Are the global trends in fashion inspiring the contemporary Sikh youth to reinvent their traditional identity?
- Are the changes in their culture (both implicit and explicit) creating any identity crises for them?
- Is fashion becoming a new medium for the Sikhs to reinterpret their identity and faith?

4 Literature Review

The literature review is being conducted in three tiers in order, accommodating: the classic; the interpretations/commentary; the applications.

4.1 Fashion

This segment of the paper, looks at the ‘sine qua non’ of fashion, assessing its essential elements to arrive at a holistic understanding of the term in the context of the study.

The paper probes into fashion in terms of its historical tracings; philosophical foundations; systems and theories set in the societal frame; its evolution as a discipline; its qualitative and multidisciplinary nature; its remedying quality. In the context of male Sikh identity, the proposal moves forth by acknowledging the gap in fashion studies wherein the “written (Sikh) clothing” as put forth by Barthes [2] has no significant trace in the literature. Thereby creating a valid platform for the research prospect.

Moving forth, the research reviews more recent discourse on fashion. Li Edelkoort’s Anti_Fashion Manifesto [14] claims that men are in top form and that the word fashion is now related to men. The above construal by Edelkoort, provides a significant boost to the study and formulates the kernel and chief point of the research. Edelkoort’s Anti_Fashion Manifesto also asserts that the anthropology of the present brings us back in time and back in space.

This points to reviewing the occurrence of the open forum titled ‘Fashion and Faith’ hosted by University of the Arts London (UAL) in May 2014. As an invited speaker in the panel discussion on Men, Fashion, Faith: The Missing Link?, Pardeep Singh Bahra discusses his new suit line for men. He elaborates that his suits for baptized male Sikhs are constructed with a leather patch in the pocket so as to accommodate the *Kirpan*. This aspect finds a rather strong connect with Edelkoort’s Manifesto indicating that the designing of garments will have to become more involved, ultimately leading towards the rise of couturiers catering to men’s fashion.

4.2 Identity

One of the main reasons for looking at identity is to explore the idea of its construction, in the context of the study. It is common assumption that identity-formation is a universal feature of human experience. Castells [5] seems implicitly to take this view when he writes: identity is people’s source of meaning and experience. Lemert [35] and Mennel [40] account for a more subjective version of some kind of unique “self”.

For the purposes of the study, identity is scrutinized from psychological angle (as the identity under scrutiny is that of youth, hence the theory of identity development is critical); from sociological angle (since the identity is social construct which is dynamic, ever-shifting); and, from spiritual angle (viewing identity as prescribed and avowed appearances related to Sikh faith).

Thus, the researcher delves into understanding the concept of identity utilizing the three probes mentioned below.

Sociological Probe into Identity

Identity is a social construct. Sociologists believe that identity is a dynamic feature of social life. That is, it is something that is constantly evolving and changing. Identities are ‘en route’ and constantly changing their nature under the influence of the global world system [48]. This understanding is integral to the research prospect, wherein the Sikh male identity has followed an evolutionary trajectory from its inception to date.

Psychological Probe into Identity

At this point, it is critical to understand Erikson’s fifth and sixth stages of human development i.e., identity vs. role confusion and intimacy vs. isolation. During the fifth stage, adolescents search for a sense of self and personal identity, through an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals.

Spiritual Probe into Identity

Who am I?, the signatory query amongst youth finds ample trace in the literature surrounding identity and faith. Erik Erikson who worked extensively on human development, considered spirituality/religion as an important factor in the formation of one’s identity [21, 32].

Therefore, the search for one’s self during identity exploration will likely result in questions regarding spirituality learned as a child or taught by his/her parents (Good & Willoughby 2008). This understanding is critical to the study.

4.3 Fashion as Identity Architect

One of the notable turns in fashion studies has been the understanding that fashion is not strictly a ‘western’, white, young heterosexual female bourgeois phenomenon, but rather that there are multiple fashion histories and systems, as well as modernities [33]. Thus, relating the concept of fashion as identity builder to this study based on Sikhs.

According to Roman Meinhold, fashion is not only bought due to classical dress motives: protection, propriety, adornment, but also to symbolize attitudes, intentions, social affiliation and/or non-affiliation etc. Thus, fashion is a tool used by the individual to drive the identity of every person. Evidence in the literature presents accounts of how fashion imagery has led to positive pronouncements in the case of Christianity and Islam. This study aims to view fashion as an apparatus in not only volleying positive affirmations related to Sikh identity but also to gauge the present day manifestations of the identity amongst Sikh youth. This presents the main challenge in the research as the gap in literature is indicative of the missing “written clothing”, as discussed earlier in the paper. Moving forth, the next segment discusses the Sikh identity.

5 Sikhism and Sikh Identity

5.1 Sikhism

The Origin

The Sikh religion is one of the youngest of all world religions. It began about 500 years ago [51]. The origins of Sikhism lie in the teachings of Guru Nanak and his successors.

Sikhism, a monotheistic religion was founded during the 16th century in the Punjab region of the Indian subcontinent, by Guru Nanak and continued to progress through the ten successive Sikh gurus (the eleventh and last guru being the holy scripture Guru Granth Sahib [4]).

The Gurus

The term guru comes from the Sanskrit *gurū*, meaning teacher, guide, or mentor. Ten gurus from 1469 to 1708 established the traditions and philosophy of Sikhism. Each guru added to and reinforced the message taught by the previous, resulting in the creation of the Sikh religion.

The Sikh

A Sikh is a follower of Sikhism, a monotheistic religion. The term “Sikh” means disciple, student, or (*śikṣa*) ([6], p. 15). A Sikh is a disciple/subject of the Guru (discussed above).

According to Article I of the “Rehat Maryada” (the Sikh code of conduct and conventions), a Sikh is defined as “any human being who faithfully believes in One Immortal Being; ten Gurus, from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind Singh; Guru Granth Sahib; the teachings of the ten Gurus and the baptism bequeathed by the tenth Guru” (SGPC - Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee).

5.2 Sikh Identity

The Sikh identity is asserted by five articles (5 Ks) or *Panj Kakkar* of faith that were commanded by Guru Gobind Singh at the time of initiation of Khalsa Panth. As per BBC e-listing of religions (2009), for a Sikh the fact that the Guru has instructed the Sikhs to wear the 5 Ks is an entirely sufficient reason, and no more need be said. The five Ks (5 physical symbols) are: *Kesh* (uncut hair); *Kara* (a steel bracelet); *Kanga* (a wooden comb), *Kaccha* - also spelt *Kachera* (pair of breeches); *Kirpan* (steel sword).

Thus, in terms of visual appearance, the unshorn hair crowned with a turban formulates the most striking/most pronounced part of the male Sikh identity. The turban has been interpreted as the badge of Sikh identity ([54], p. 13). From 1699 to the present day, the Sikh identity has transformed in the circuit of modernization, fashion consumptions and modish pronouncements. This formulates the main research area as presented through the research questions.

6 Research Gap

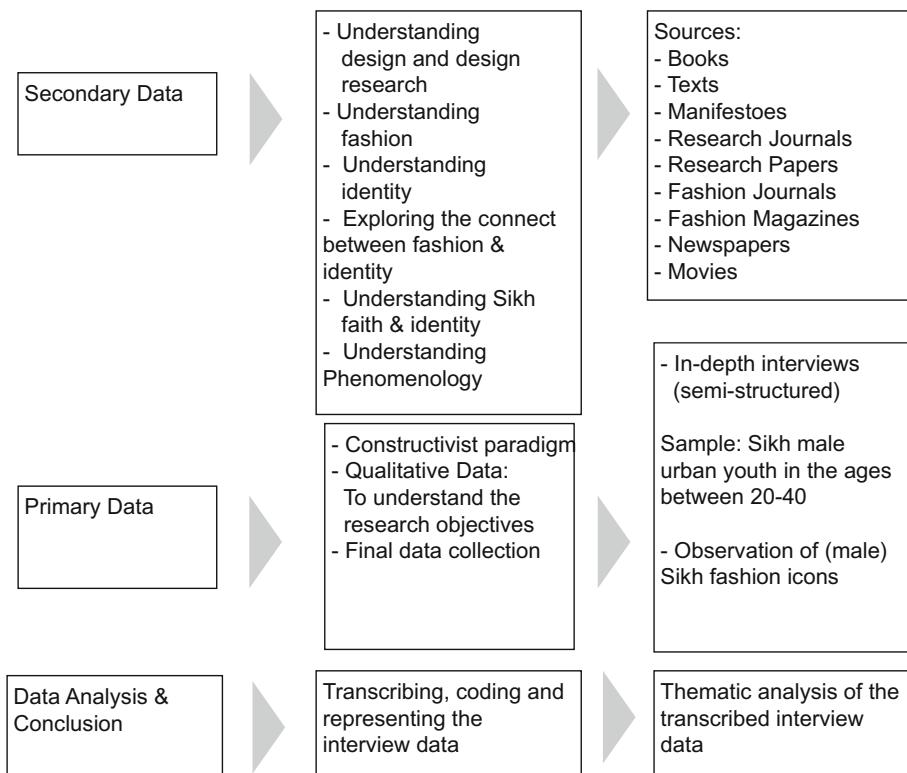
In the context of the Sikh identity, seminal voices that of Cunningham [11], Singh [50], McLeod [41], Oberoi [46], Singh [53], Nesbitt [45], Singh [52], Grewal [26], et al. have probed into the matter mostly from a historical perspective. Their accounts highlight issues related to history of Sikhism; racial matters and concerns; checkered past of 1984 genocide; Sikh temples - Gurdwaras; Sikh rituals and ceremonies; translations of the sacred text; Sikh feminism; Sikh empire. Details pertaining to the clothing of the male Sikh from the times of inception of Khalsa Panth (1699) to date find no significant trace in the literature. Also, research pursuits following academic

rigor are centered around the above listed topics of study. Yet again, pronouncing a gap in the literature wherein details of the sartorial Sikh man are almost absent. Furthermore, the male Sikh identity does not find significant account of being investigated through the lens of fashion design. In the academia, while much has been written and debated about fashion and faith in relation to Christianity and Islam, the literature finds no elucidations relating to studies such as the current research prospect thereby emphasizing the research gap.

7 Research Design

This section of the research proposal is put forth through the Table 1:

Table 1. Research design



8 Relevance of Study

The study is envisaged to have many meaningful outcomes. First of all, it may provide new insights to analyze the interaction of fashion with people, society, culture and traditions from an interdisciplinary perspective. In more specific terms, the findings may help unravel the impact of fashion on faith and the creation of new identity. The study may also create a broad framework to explore how other contemporary systems of faith are coping with the changes in their identity infused by fashion. It will also help understand whether the identity given by faith and the identity created by fashion will be mutually compatible or conflicting in the long run. Eventually, this will enrich the study of fashion, make it more inquiring and help develop new pedagogy for fashion studies.

9 Expected Outcome

1. Development of a new pedagogy for fashion studies relevant for design schools
2. Closer integration of fashion with other academic disciplines
3. Suggest methods for evidence based fashion studies and practice
4. Provide new insight to appreciate the linkage between fashion, faith, tradition and identity
5. Give insight to appreciate the evolutionary process of fashion.

Against a worldwide setting, multiple identities exist, co-exist, influence or get influenced by the other. And, in this setting, as one of the proposed outcomes, the study proposes to arrive at a set of actionable insights, a set of guidelines that can apply to other hybrid identities that also contain a distinctive and pronounced exterior and are seen consuming fashion and materializing piety (such as the Jews and Muslims, for instance). The research outcome may create new forms of dialogue about fashion and identity in the modern world.

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Fashion Communication: A Thread Connecting Students to the World

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Abstract. Globally, Fashion Communication (FCO) remains a relatively new discipline in higher education, acknowledging a need to train more in effectively communicating messages for fashion businesses and consumers. At a Mid-western school, the discipline is the focus of an undergraduate degree program that takes an interdisciplinary approach, combining courses in fashion, media, business, and graphic design. Within the major's course curriculum, opportunities exist to infuse concepts about international affairs to heighten awareness and engage communicators in responsibly interpreting and disseminating information such to audiences. Through the lens of significant-learning pedagogy and the contextual model of intercultural communication, this case study describes an assignment in a Fashion Journalism course, where students self-reflect on their own identity and practice intercultural communication skills to interview wearers of the hijab for a story. The analysis will include observations and semi-structured interviews with the students, a textual analysis of their stories, and a reflection of my experience teaching the course.

Keywords: Media education · Intercultural communication · Fashion communication

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Globally, Fashion Communication remains a relatively new major in higher education institutions, acknowledging a need to train more in effectively communicating messages for fashion industry businesses and consumers [1]. A program exists at a Mid-western college, where a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Fashion Communication (FCO) is an undergraduate interdisciplinary degree, which combines the disciplines of fashion, media, business and graphic design. Knowledge gained from these areas can be used to help lifestyle brands to build and relay their messages across multiple communication channels such as print, broadcast, and internet. The FCO major contains numerous courses that allow an instructor to infuse concepts that heighten awareness about international affairs and engage communicators in responsibly interpreting and disseminating information regarding such to audiences.

The curriculum enables me to align with one of fashion program's student learning outcomes, global learning, which demonstrates "an understanding of complex, inter-dependent global systems and their implications for people's lives and the earth's sustainability, completing projects that consider the world's pressing issues and associated ethical decisions" [1]. Several course-related assignments aim to uphold this student-centered approach. There is Fashion Journalism, where students learn to report and interview women who practice Islam and wear the hijab; Current Issues in the Global Fashion Industry, where students work on a simulated consulting project that requires them to advise a major brand about business expansion into a chosen country; and Fashion Communication Capstone Research and Project, where students work on a senior capstone that captures skills and knowledge gained into a professional-level project, evaluated by industry critics. Several students look to themes currently in the global sphere and synthesize findings into their independent and group assignments.

To achieve this structure, the major's course content primarily uses a backward instructional design method [2]. Fink (2013) states that "creating assessment activities first greatly clarifies and facilitates answers to questions of what learning activities need to be" [2, p. 71]. Scaffolding throughout the course enables me to build the student's confidence and competency in these cultural explorations.

This remains important since students in the Fashion Communication major are part of a complex system in the textile and apparel and media business, where collaboration and innovation exist on a global scale. In the fashion and media world, educating students to be change makers and influencers across borders requires additional training and little has been done to explore the process. Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to describe intercultural communication exchanges and the pedagogical features of a Fashion Journalism writing assignment, where students interview wearers of the hijab. This study aims to discuss the contextual model of intercultural communication in the context of student interactions; to examine the pedagogical features of an assignment designed to create a significant learning experience; and to reflect on my role and experiences in teaching this assignment.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Pedagogical and Communication Frameworks

Because of increased global tensions, there is a need for more "effective and competent intercultural communication" [3, p. 4]. Neuliep (2012) argues that the need goes beyond existing political, religious and ethnic conflicts, for being skillful in this type of communication can be of benefit from a personal, social and professional standpoint. And, while these conversations might be uncomfortable; when done well, they can be beneficial in exploring important angles, unveiling truths and providing necessary context to situations [4]. These quality conversations across cultures illuminate and can be at the core of journalism's mission: "To provide people with information they need to understand their world" [4, p. 20].

To explore such worlds, exchanges between cultures helps to build this significant experience. How this occurs can be analyzed through the contextual model of intercultural communication. The model relies on the significance of context, which looks to consider what occurs when a person from one culture interacts with another [3]. The environment, the micro cultural and the cultural context play a role in these exchanges [3]. Furthermore, the socio relational context connects the perceptual context, which helps to explore the relationship between the participants in the communication [3]. Through intercultural communication, also known as cross-cultural communication, people realize their own cultural differences and begin to shift their attitude and to explore being open-minded, empathetic and flexible [5].

Education has a similar mission to journalism. And through significant learning experiences, students can increase their “capability for living life fully and meaningfully” [2, p. 7]. This process of learning can be two-fold: It can assist students in expanding their understanding and interpretation of “discipline-related information,” and it aids them in developing their “life file” rather than a “course file” [2, p. 7].

Communication, journalism or strategic communication students must know how to not only do the work but also communicate well with people to create the work [6]. While Fink (2013) discusses a robust taxonomy of significant learning experiences, two emerge as being beneficial for this study: foundational knowledge, which includes certain principles and conventions of a discipline; and human dimension, which enables students to learn something not only about themselves but also others.

In journalism, specifically, knowing norms such as objectivity and key principles about the construction of a story through researching, interviewing, and writing serve as foundational. Then, the writer layers the piece with elements of the human experience, which remains important as well. To do so, understanding fault lines, a concept developed by Robert C. Maynard, helps the communicator to consider what perspectives and assumptions they bring into the story and use knowledge gained across fault lines to help inform their work [6].

2.2 Fashion Journalism Framework and Definition

For fashion journalism, this intercultural communication concept helps to provide depth and focus to its content. I have begun to explore the definition of fashion journalism in an effort to further define it in a digital and print field. A working definition has been developed. Wylie (2012) argues that “fashion journalism is the practice of writing about the textile industry. News stories, feature articles, analyses, business reports, consumer reports and ‘eye candy’ articles are all forms of fashion journalism” [7, p. 47]. While this list might be exhaustive, it does not denote “what is good fashion journalism?” and “what are best practices for writing about it effectively?” [7, p. 47]. Nevertheless, the following definition considers its various dimensions to begin the evaluative process of studying content:

Fashion journalism is the activity of ethically crafting and producing verified news that discusses dress through frameworks of class and culture; human social phenomenon; and the life cycle.

The working definition aids in further strengthening assignments in a course focused on fashion journalism.

2.3 Research Questions

How does a fashion journalism course assignment heighten intercultural communication skills for students at a Midwestern college? How do fashion journalism students interpret and understand their own fault lines and biases to help inform their approach to a story? How do the final stories feature foundational knowledge of storytelling and elements of human dimension about wearers of the hijab?

Methodology. The “Cultural Analysis” assignment is done later in the semester in an effort to as Rios and Perry (2016) note to create “excellence, which means stories have context, complexity, voices, authenticity and proportionality” [6, p. 5]. The assignment has been framed in ways to allow students to seek interviews with people who wear the hijab. I brought in speakers to onboard them to the culture, then students went out and found their own sources and interviewed them.

Students will be interviewed about their answers to a questionnaire, developed from researching the concept regarding “fault lines” and bias. The sample will include students from two years in the Fashion Journalism course. I have been teaching the assignment unit for several years and will include a textual analysis of some of the papers produced for the course.

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Mapping Mobile Apps on Batik: A Journey Across Heritage and Fashion

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Abstract. As one of the leading clothing exporters in the world, Indonesia has the chance to promote the richness of its textile heritage, particularly hand-drawn Batik textile, in the global fashion industry. Batik is an Indonesian fashion heritage, recognized as a UNESCO Intangible Heritage of Humanity since 2009. Apart from its historical production technique, Batik contains outstanding universal values associated with the socio-cultural aspects of Indonesian lives. These include philosophical and spiritual meanings contained in its distinctive motifs, the rules for its wearing, as well as social empowerment. The advances of digital communication can play an important role in communicating and shaping Indonesia's Batik usage values between tradition and contemporary fashion. This research is presented to identify how Batik is communicated through mobile apps in terms of their contents, functionalities, apps' purposes, as well as their alignment with UNESCO's safeguarding narratives.

Keywords: Batik intangible cultural heritage · Mobile app · Digital fashion communication

1 Introduction

As the fourth largest population country, Indonesia is home to 633 ethnicities [1]. It has a rich cultural diversity of textiles in terms of forms and motifs [2]. Batik is one of them. It is produced by wax resist dyeing technique, which has existed since 5000 BC–2600 BC [3, 4]. The denomination of “Batik” is derived from Javanese words “amba” (“scribing”) and “tithik” (“dots”). In other words, “Batik” means “writing down dots”. It could have been derived also from the phrase “mbathik manah”, which means “to draw with the whole heart” [5]. This production technique entered the Indonesian archipelago through merchants from India (Gujarat), who got in contact with local artisans during the heyday of the Silk Road maritime trading period (2 CE–15 CE). In 6th–8th centuries, Batik textiles were restricted for use to royalty and nobility, especially in Java. From then on, it has been preserved as fashion heritage from generation to generation [6].

The evolution of Indonesian civilization can be traced along the Batik motifs and symbols drawn on the textile. Each of these motifs and symbols represent a specific historical period. The motifs of Indonesian Batik are developed according to the prevalent philosophical ideas that characterized each period. The philosophical meanings, which show the historical and cultural values of each colour and symbol, are

incorporated in the rules for its wearing [7]. Certain Batik motifs are dedicated for special life events (weddings, funerals, etc.) and certain social statuses (king, queens, middle-class, commoners, etc.). However, the usage values of Batik has evolved and differed from one era to the other. With such inherent outstanding universal values, Batik was inscribed in the List of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009 [8]. After one decade since its recognition, today Batik has been adapted into Indonesian modern lifestyle, not only as uniforms for traditional ceremonies, but also as modern ready-to-wear for fashion purposes and business attires (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The motif of Batik *Sidomulyo*. It is one of classical motifs, which is specifically used for the bride's costume in Javanese royal wedding. It symbolizes good wishes for the wearer to achieve glory, harmonious family, and highly respected social status [32].

The recognition of Batik as UNESCO intangible heritage has benefitted national Batik small and medium enterprises (SME), and allowed them to grow to a higher level. In order to support local producers and increase the domestic consumption of Batik textile heritage, in 2009 the Indonesian government initiated a policy that encourages the use of Batik attire for civil servants on every Friday [9]. Furthermore, Indonesian government encouraged all Batik-related stakeholders to promote and provide information in terms of Batik products, origins, history and usage values through digital platforms (such as websites and mobile apps) [10]. As the motifs represent the cultural uniqueness of each region, this initiative was conducted in order to increase their market share and to promote their tourism. These major initiatives to support Batik, its culture and related businesses, have raised the issue of the relevance of Batik textile heritage within the contemporary fashion narratives: *to what extent have the usage values of Batik been interpreted and re-adapted into modern lifestyle (also) through online fashion narratives?*

While there are already studies about Batik in the digital fashion domain, however, an analysis of how mobile apps do cover Batik and its heritage is still missing. Hence, this study is intended to:

- a. analyse the online communication of Batik through mobile apps, both in Indonesian and in English language;
- b. assess to what extent Batik is presented within relevant mobile apps in line with UNESCO's safeguarding goals;

- c. see how Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) may communicate Batik usage values in modern lifestyle.

This study provides a twofold contribution in the field of digital communication of cultural heritage in textile: it offers a methodological model of how to map Batik-related mobile apps, while at the same time providing a first map of them. Moreover, it might be also of interest for practitioners, both in the field of Fashion, and in the field of Tourism, who might be interested in leveraging on mobile communication in order to promote a more extensive knowledge of Batik, and awareness about its value and heritage.

2 Literature Review

2.1 ICTs, Fashion, and Intangible Cultural Heritage

The role of digital technologies is paramount in fashion industry in terms of promoting, disseminating information, teaching and learning of clothing and textiles [11, 26]. When it comes to promoting textile heritage as fashion product, we need to include also information about the production technique, semiotic meanings, as well as the socio-cultural aspects of such fashion heritage. In this case, fashion heritage is regarded as an ensemble of materiality of objects in combination with intangible elements, such as sets of local knowledge, social processes and cultural practices. A textile heritage has undergone an intergenerational selection from the past, it has been passed to the present, and is being transmitted to the future [12]. In order to preserve the inherent values of Batik intangible heritage, ICTs may help to promote safeguarding practices, raise awareness, and communicate important messages, in line with the goal of UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage. Furthermore, according to Cantoni [13], ICTs could enable stakeholders in the tourism domain in five main areas, which can be adapted to the fashion heritage. (i) Access. Provide access to quality information on fashion heritage; (ii) Better. Improve the actual experience of such textile; (iii) Connect the three main players: heritage, locals, and fashion stakeholders; (iv) Dis-intermediate. Streamline some relationships, so to ensure that local communities can benefit from fashion production and distribution; and (v) Educate. ICTs provide learning platforms to facilitate relevant stakeholders to learn about Batik design and fashion production. According to Jesús Martin Barbero, communication media is perceived as ‘mediator’ between tradition and modernity which gives birth to new cultural perceptions [27, 28]. In this process of mediation not only cultural bodies, but also recipients contribute to add new perspectives on a cultural legacy. There are many ways in which people appropriate media and use it to produce meaning and create their own identities. This present paper also gives an example about a case of cultural mediation through digital communication, which illustrates the shift between traditional and new cultural perceptions reflected in Batik mobile apps. The study aims at observing the digital foot-prints of the immense variety of Batik usage values adapted to contemporary fashion and popular culture, while few are still conserving its traditional wearing rules and fully display its philosophical roots. In addition, this research examines the mobile apps covering Indonesian Batik by using the Online

Communication Model [14]. The model introduces four main pillars and a fifth element, which are the key points to be analyzed in communication media, namely: (i) contents and functionalities; (ii) accessibility tools and publication outlets; (iii) people managing the online resources; (iv) people accessing them, and (v) the relevant information market. This study focuses on the first pillar (content and functionalities) and the second one (accessibility tools and type of publication outlets) of such model.

2.2 ICTs, Batik Textile, and Fashion Branding

According to Sproles, fashion refers to aesthetic expression of clothing style and adornment, which changes over time and is culturally endorsed within a social system or group of associated individuals [29]. A brand in fashion means the non-tangible attributes, codes, and a set of symbols, which allow consumers to learn the intrinsic characters and the quality of a fashion product [15]. Given the fact that textile heritage encompasses a pattern of identity, rich of meanings and philosophical symbols, authentic, and credible at the cultural level, the branding management of a textile heritage should emphasize the intrinsic values and cultural importance of such product [16]. In terms of communicating Batik fashion-related values, its wearing rules are categorized into two dimensions of time: ancient and modern/contemporary style.

Communicating fashion brand identity can be effectively done by using digital technologies and online channels, as it allows fashion-related stakeholders to promote their products and lifestyle in an attractive way [17]. Indonesian Batik has been extensively promoted online since its inscription as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage. The success of its branding and positioning cannot be separated from domestic and global factors. As one of world's top ten clothing export countries with the total export values of 8.2 billion USD [18], Indonesia's fashion products have achieved important gains in terms of domestic and global market shares. It is noted that the export values of Indonesian Batik textiles reached 58.46 million US dollars in 2017, with the main export destinations such as Japan, USA, and certain European Countries [19]. In addition, in 2015 there were 47'755 Batik SMEs in Indonesia [20], which provided job opportunities to 199'444 people (local artisans, designers, etc.).

In order to support local producers and increase the domestic consumption of Batik textile heritage, in 2009 the Indonesian government launched a policy, which requires that all Indonesian people, especially those who work in public offices, to wear Batik attire every Friday [9]. This policy helps to boost Batik fashion branding and revive the Batik industry. Regional tourism also receives benefits, since promoting fashion-related content (Batik culture and its producer regions) as an attraction, could potentially boost their destination [21]. The Indonesian government launched different initiatives to encourage all Batik-related stakeholders both in tourism and fashion to provide relevant online information concerning Batik cultural practices in their respective fields. Well-informed consumers are encouraged to buy original handmade Batik products instead of printed ones, as it gives economic benefits to the local producers. However, such positive participative branding by different stakeholders might result in diverse narratives about Batik usage values. This online content analysis will provide a better understanding of Batik usage and its transformation in terms of fashion, from

traditional to modern twists. Previous studies providing a content analysis and a map of the online presence of intangible cultural heritage, have been conducted, for instance, about Indian Sari [22], mobile apps devoted to World Heritage Sites [23], cyber-branding of Batik [16], Indonesian tourism and Batik: an online map [30].

3 Methodology

A Mobile Application is a type of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) which consists of a program/software operated on a handheld/mobile device (smartphone, Personal Digital Assistant, etc.) and performs certain tasks for the user [31]. Mobile apps are developed by certain mobile application developers, publishers and providers [31]. The main objective of this study is to observe how mobile apps do cover Indonesian Batik. Data collection was conducted from 3 until 25 November 2018. In order to map Batik online narratives, both a top down and a bottom up approach have been used. While already defined dimensions have been adopted, additional ones have been defined through a bottom-up process [24]. The research aims at investigating three main questions as follows:

- (1) How are Batik intangible cultural heritage and its fashion related narratives presented within relevant mobile apps?
Particularly in terms of: (a) Types of mobile apps publishers; (b) Contents provided in the General Information page of the apps; (c) Media used; (d) Features; and (e) Content of textual information (e.g.: Batik production; Types of Batik products; Batik usage values; Outstanding Universal Values)
- (2) How are the UNESCO key-points addressed within Batik mobile apps?
- (3) To what extent Batik usage values are interpreted and adapted into contemporary fashion? As Batik is associated to intangible heritage with a rich tradition of cultural significances, what are the new meanings of Batik in the contemporary fashion world?

This research combines qualitative and quantitative methods in order to identify the presence of specific contents within a given set of online data sources.

First Phase. The research was initiated by finding all relevant mobile apps through searching for the keyword: ‘Batik’ on iTunes and on Google Play (the platforms collecting iOS and android apps, respectively). Due to the fact that on iTunes only 5 apps were available, such platform has been discarded, and only Google Play results have been further considered. On this platform, the search has provided a list of 164 mobile apps covering Indonesian Batik in the two studied languages: English and Indonesian. Such sample was determined after filtering out few results of Batik mobile apps referring to other countries (e.g.: India, Malaysia, etc.). If a developer published two Batik mobile apps with different purposes and for different audiences, both apps were included in the research. The collected data refer to those mobile apps specifically developed to communicate information and activities related to Batik intangible cultural heritage online (commercial, tourism, fashion, etc.), excluding social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, etc.), and webpages/websites (even if they are accessible via smartphones).

Second Phase. In order to content-analyze the apps and their description on Google Play, some indicators were defined *a priori*, from the Online Communication Model and the universal values according to the UNESCO inscription of Batik in 2009 [8], also some indicators used in a research on mobile apps dedicated to World Heritage Sites [23] have been adopted/adapted. Such indicators are listed in Fig. 2.

Online Communication Model	UNESCO Inscription Text of Batik Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2009:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Contents and functionalities; (ii) Accessibility tools and publication outlets; (iii) People managing the online resources; (iv) People accessing them (v) The relevant information market <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Type of publishers - Formats (Photo, Video) - Features - Types of intended users - Batik mobile apps based on its type of information - General Objective of the apps - Language (English, Indonesian) - Location - UNESCO related contents (acknowledgement, reasons of UNESCO inscription) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Batik production B. Batik products (fabric, non-fabric) C. Usage values (fashion, tourism) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> UNESCO Outstanding Universal Values 1. Traditional motifs 2. Socio cultural values (wearing rules) 3. Meta discourse 4. Historical context 5. Safeguarding goals 6. Philosophical values
Contextual Modern Usage Values of Batik	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Batik fashion apps based on clothing categories: - Couple/family - Kids - Men - Women - Mix (Men, women, couple) - Muslim women apparels - Traditional gowns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Batik mobile apps based on different purposes: - Batik textile catalogue apps - Batik fashion and clothing apps 	

Fig. 2. Main indicators of Batik mobile apps research

Each app retrieved from Google Play was downloaded to be examined and classified based on the defined indicators. Beside them additional indicators were added iteratively based on found characteristics. This set of new indicators was added into the table of indicators, and the corpus was re-analyzed until thematic saturation was reached. The qualitative analysis was performed by a human coder to annotate each content to relevant indicators. In order to complement and clarify the qualitative assessment, the quantitative method was conducted by assigning grid value of “1” and “0”. The value “1” is added to indicate the presence of the indicator, on the other hand, “0” when it is absent.

4 Results

4.1 General Information, Features, and Main Functionalities

Please refer to Table 1 for a synopsis of results.

Table 1. General Information and Functionalities of Batik Mobile Apps (*how many apps, in %, are presenting a specific indicator. Sum doesn't always correspond to 100% due to the fact that some indicators are not mutually exclusive*)

Indicator	(%) n = 164	Indicators	(%) n = 164	
A. Type of Publisher		D. Formats		
1. Batik SME	10%	1. Photo gallery	100%	
2. Research Center and Museum	3%	2. Video	3%	
3. Others (independent developers)	87%			
B. Contents of General Information		E. Features		
1. General Objective of the App	100%	1. Add to favorites	19%	
2. Language:		2. Download Picture	17%	
- English	18%	3. Online Transaction	7%	
- Indonesian	82%	4. Product Description (for e-commerce)	7%	
3. Location:		5. Functionality to set the Batik image as smartphone wallpaper or Whatsapp's profile picture	26%	
- Indonesia as general location	86%			
- particular location/cities in Indonesia	14%			
4. UNESCO related contents:		6. Sharing menu for photos	38%	
- Acknowledge Batik as Indonesian Heritage Legacy	60%	7. Social media (FB, Twitter, Instagram)	15%	
- Reasons why Batik is inscribed in UNESCO's list	7%	8. Tools (Photo montage/frame, Batik motif recognition tool, games)	4%	
C. Types of Intended Users:		9. View Counter	13%	
1. Batik fashion followers, Designer	70%	F. Batik mobile apps based on type of information		
2. Batik textile lovers	21%	1. Batik products visual representations (these apps only display pictures, without in-depth information about Batik)	85%	
3. Learners (Batik practitioners, researchers, students)	7%	2. Informative and Educative apps (these apps display all needed textual and visual information about Batik)	15%	
4. Tourists	2%			

When it comes to mobile apps publishers, there is a minor contribution by Batik SME (10%) and researchers (3%). However, it was not possible to define suitable categories for all other app developers, since most of them merely put their personal email without further information about their activities or services. It can be assumed that these developers are independent ones or students, who aimed at creating a Batik-related mobile apps for fulfilling their passions or for any lucrative purpose.

82% of the found apps are in Indonesian language, while 18% in English. All apps do provide some general information on themselves on the Google Play platform, which might tackle the intrinsic values of Batik, facts about Batik inscription as UNESCO intangible cultural heritage, as well as app's goals and intended users/audiences. The apps were created for Batik fashion followers (70%), Batik textile lovers (21%), Learners (7%), and Tourists (2%). In addition, 85% of apps present visual representations of Batik clothes, textiles, and diverse motifs, intended for giving ideas of Batik usage values in fashion and additional references for the users. On the other hand, 15% of apps could be named "informative ones": they provide less photo collections, but better quality of Batik information for users.

While it is noted that all mobile apps display images of Batik textiles, dresses, etc., only 3% offer also video materials. The major found features were the following ones: photo sharing (38%); Functionality to set the Batik image as smartphone's Wallpaper or Whatsapp profile pictures (26%); add to favorites (19%); download pictures (17%), share on social media (15%); and view counter (13%). The study found some further functionalities, which could enhance user interaction. For instance, some apps provide a Batik photo montage feature, which allows users to create composite photograph by combining their facial photo with an image of ladies/gentlemen wearing Batik apparels, or alternatively, the app offers some options of Batik textile to be used as digital photo frame.

4.2 Batik Intrinsic Values and UNESCO Key-Points

Analyzed apps cover information on original Batik (32%), Batik production (21%), and give some clue about printed Batik textiles (12%). This content are valuable piece of information for consumers who wish to buy the original Batik, or if they wish to distinguish the real Batik with the fake ones.

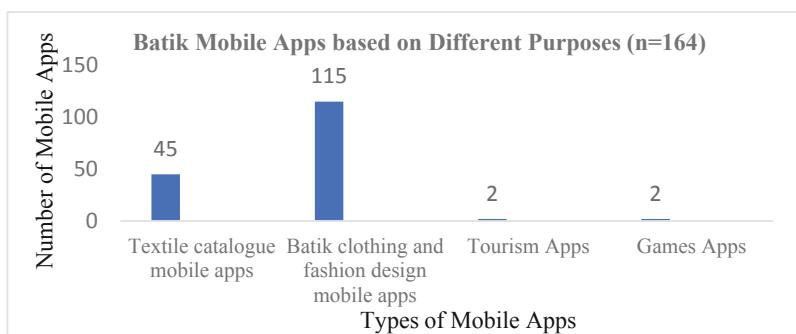
The most common pieces of information about Batik values do cover Socio-cultural values in terms of 'Modern wearing rules' (49%), which refer to Batik *prét-à-porter* or ready-to-wear clothing and designs adapted to contemporary fashion and modern lifestyle, in addition to its traditional motifs (41%). Apps do present also meta discourse (nature, animal interpretation in Batik motifs) (22%), and Batik historical context (20%). In less cases, one can find also in-depth explanations of socio-cultural values in terms of ancient wearing rules (17%), and philosophical values (11%). Likewise, only 13% of the mobile apps present an explicit statement of UNESCO's safeguarding goals (Table 2).

Table 2. Content of Textual Information within the Mobile Apps

Indicator	(%) n = 164	Indicators	(%) n = 164
A. Contents related to Batik Production		D. Outstanding Universal Values	
- Batik producers	21%	1. Traditional motifs	41%
- Original Batik (using wax-resist dyeing method)	32%	2. Socio-cultural values (spiritual, wearing rules, etc.)	
- Printed Batik Textiles	12%	- Ancient wearing rules	17%
		- Modern wearing rules	49%
B. Types of Batik Products		3. Meta discourse (nature, animal interpretation in Batik)	22%
- Fabric	94%	4. Historical context	20%
- Non-fabric (leather, wood, etc.)	3%	5. Safeguarding goals	13%
C. Batik Usages Values		6. Philosophical values	11%
- Fashion	87%		
- Others (tourism, interior art)	13%		

4.3 Contextual Modern Usage of Batik

Furthermore, the classification of 164 mobile apps based on their functionalities and features might shed a light on what kind of functions and visual information do these apps offer to the users. For instance, Fig. 3 illustrates the number of Batik apps which could be classified as textile catalogues (45 apps; 27%), Batik fashion and clothing images (115; 70%), and apps with Tourism purposes or providing Educative Games (2; 1% each). The textile catalogue apps only provide visual representation of Batik textiles and its distinctive motifs, with minimum textual information. Additionally, Batik clothing and fashion mobile apps contain visual representations in terms of Batik garments, textiles, and people (men, ladies, kids, couples, and family) wearing Batik in

**Fig. 3.** Batik mobile apps based on different purpose

many different ways. These apps are such a collection of fashion ideas and style references for specific audience such as fashion followers and designers. The two tourism apps provide Batik textile images, plus its motifs, history, origin, galleries to visit, and cultural tourism. The Batik games, on the other hand, offer new ways of learning the meanings of Indonesian Batik, such as Batik motif discovery games and coloring Batik app. The Batik discovery games “Mencari Batik” attract users to discover the meaning of each Batik symbol that they find along the game. While “Batik Colouring” game invites users to color the Batik motifs, yet it contains no textual information when it comes to Batik cultural-related contents and meanings.

When zooming into the 115 Batik mobile apps for fashion, the research discovered many new ways of wearing Batik traditional textile developed so far, which are also adapted to modern taste and style (see Fig. 4). For instance, the traditional wearing rules put Batik cloth as a sarong, which is an ankle-length wraparound skirt for male and female, the social status is shown from the motifs on the Batik cloth worn by each individual. Nowadays, Batik clothes are used to produce any garments for any type of person, purposes of social functions.

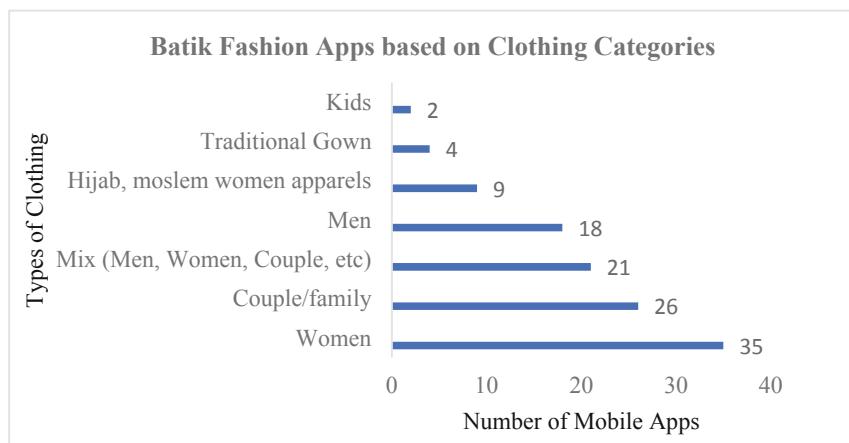


Fig. 4. Batik fashion apps based on clothing categories

As the largest Muslim population country in the world [25], there is a significant increase of ladies wearing hijab in the past recent years. This might be the reason why a number of Batik fashion apps promoted Batik apparels and design for Muslim women, in order to meet special needs of this new fashion market. The action of wearing Batik is not merely representing individuals, it includes couples and families. Indonesian people show trends of wearing the same Batik textile with similar patterns, color, and motifs for a couple and family while attending certain social function such weddings, gatherings, etc.



Fig. 5. The types of Batik fashion, from traditional (left) to modern ones (middle, right)

A significant number of mobile apps in Indonesian language promote new wearing rules of Batik for Couple and Family (26% of 115 apps in Indonesian language). We can assume that persons wearing Batik clothes as a couple and/or a family do want to convey the impression that they have a harmonious relationship and/or a sense of belonging among members of the family (Fig. 5).

5 Conclusion

The advent of digital technology has brought an impact in terms of promoting the usage values, significances, and raising awareness of Batik safeguarding practices in modern society. Since the participation of Batik related stakeholders has been improving significantly in recent years when it comes to communicate Batik online, this study has contributed to see how the values of Batik is interpreted, shaped and communicated in the digital society especially through mobile apps. Moreover, the study has also pointed out that there is a shift in terms of wearing rules of Batik, especially in the context of contemporary fashion world. In addition, only few apps communicate Batik outstanding universal values, as well as safeguarding goals and other key points stressed by UNESCO. Since the scope of this study was limited to the analysis of applications' contents and functionalities, this study can be improved by including usability analyses and a qualitative analysis of users' experience with the analyzed apps.

Addressing such critical safeguarding issues, it is deemed important to initiate a strong cultural policy regarding the strategy of communicating intangible cultural heritage through online communication media. In addition, while the study observed that the traditional wearing rules of the past are communicated much lesser than modern ones, it is also necessary to provide adequate online information about Batik cultural related meanings and usage values from the traditional perspective. It is deemed important for government and Batik-related stakeholders that produce contents and promote this textile heritage through digital media, in order to raise awareness and educate Batik fashion-related stakeholders, so that they can build a more sustainable fashion industry and continue to preserve the cultural identity of Batik's intangible cultural heritage.

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Sustainability



Communication of Sustainability and Ethical Issues in Fashion: The Lombardy's Experience

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Abstract. In the new millennium fashion is becoming an integrated system contaminated by many different sectors: from marketing to psychology, from economy to art, from music to technology.

There is a new subject in the communication field: the marketing Digital Mind Manager. This expert has to understand and use all the social networks that are going to affect all the fields of fashion and develop the brand DNA for the customers. The aim of the study is to show how respect for the environment and reduction in waste production are not against an idea of creativity development and trade in fashion, and how the use of online platforms can encourage the spread of new and virtuous experiences.

In a context of erosion of the “welfare state” in Italy and Lombardy, a number of circular economy trials have been enacted by cooperatives and associations. In particular, in the sectors of fashion and clothing we can see not only the reuse of clothes, jewels and accessories, but even their re-elaboration and relaunch, with the creation of a totally new stylistic trend and creativity in fashion design. In several cities in Lombardy we have many initiatives having two different objectives: the search for originality in the product and its uniqueness together with the reduction of consume and waste production, activating a virtuous circle of recycling and reuse. Many of them offer their products not only through the classical channels such as shops, but also through online platforms and apps. The methods used for the study are interviews and case studies.

Keywords: New technologies · Web-social · Recycling in fashion

1 Introduction

Today the world of fashion is an integrated system that is contaminated by many different sectors and dimensions. The relation between fashion and new technologies is very close, characterized by the fact that technologies have focused on the market problems [13]. Fashion market is not just “paillettes” and sequins but also costume and society [7]. Creative ideas are the basis for the innovation; today it's very attractive for the luxury market to be oriented to Multichannels [1].

Online shopping experience and the use of the web is becoming more and more appealing for the major brands of the Italian fashion system such as Armani, Diesel, Ferragamo, Valentino ect. [3]. Other brands are more involved in private clubs of web trading (Privalia, Vente-privee).

In this case internet is not going to overcome the traditional sales channel, but it will also complete the brand offer. Fashion is always a step forward and so is its communication strategy [17]. There is a relation between reuse and recycle in the fashion sector and the possibility for the involved companies to increase their visibility and so their trading chances using websites.

Europe is becoming more open to ecological problems and to the spread of a new taste for luxury, making it more accessible to everyone [19].

It is well known that textile and fashion companies are among the most polluting ones in the world, second only to the oil production [24]. In the latest years new environment policies have become more sensible to the need of managing resources in a more sustainable way. The legislation has introduced new daring objectives in prevention and re-use of waste.

The period from 2015 to 2018 was very rich in novelties in this respect.

The European Union, with the approval of the package on circular economy, has decided to shift from a model of linear economy (following a one-way direction from production to waste disposal) to a more forward-thinking model of circular economy based on the three Rs of Reduce, Reuse and Recycle [16].

Also Italy, with the law of 19th August 2016, art. 14, regulates the distribution of articles and clothing accessories used for charity [24]. The goal of 65% in 2035 should include both recycling and preparations for reuse. Vintage is now an emerging fashion which influences trends, tastes and groups, and it is able to condition the traditional channels by showing the cyclic nature of fashion [11].

It is important to notice a coming back of vintage, together with a new attention to a conscious and sustainable fashion, aimed at reducing usage and increasing awareness [10, 20]. The love for vintage is actually a very trendy fashion amongst young people, who want to create a contemporary style though still looking back to history, giving value to accessories or clothes which, coming from the past, become unique, non-reproducible [9].

The sociologist George Simmel writes: “People seem to feel the necessity to be social and individual at the same time; fashion and clothing are ways by which this complexity of wishes and necessities are negotiated” [25]. There is more attention to the quality of materials, whose age reveal a longer lasting life, responding to a need of slower rhythms, precious tissues, careful sewing in clothes cut by expert hands [5]. Together with the necessity of reducing waste, there are now more possibilities to earn something from what is being reused [27]. The accessibility to products and their low cost is also making possible to reach objectives of higher social equity [26].

The goal of this research is to show how fashion is increasingly focused on communication as well as on the product, and how in the field of recycle and reuse has proved its power.

2 Ethical Brands and Web-Interactions

Communication nowadays is more focused on the brand instead of the product, as a matter of fact internet is becoming the main channel used for brand storytelling and advertising; the first fashion brand websites date back to 1995 with the Diesel

experience. At the same time, social apps like Instagram, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn have become more and more powerful especially for the communication with young costumers.

Now fashion is told by bloggers and influencers, and a large number of people has been in contact with the world of fashion photography, thanks to the increasing success of digital technology and its ways to communicate.

Today advertising made by brands is for costumers with no time to waste, also less impressionable than in the past, but at the same time surrounded by images and information not so appealing.

Fashion brands are required to directly involve the consumer into the communication.

A social application quite useful for fashion is Instagram.

Instagram has a strong impact on the final costumer because it uses a more direct way of communication and it is related to a visual language. With the use of hashtags it's the consumer at the end to promote the brand and its products.

Instagram and social networks have made fashion open to everyone and accessible from everywhere thanks to Instagram stories and live ig: the interaction with models, stylists, designers and photographers is now possible without filters and in a more direct way.

The interesting applications for the millennials are now: Stylinity, 21Buttons, Twenty20, SlideThePie and Depop.

Depop is the first application for the re-use and re-sale of second hand dresses and accessories. All the most important Italian fashion bloggers, such as Chiara Ferragni, Veronica Ferraro, Chiara Biasi, etc. are selling their wardrobes through this channel. This application is used by seven million people all over the world with extremely high numbers of exchanged articles.

As for re-use, there are also many channels that want to interact with the market in a more ethical way. In Italy there are lot of realities characterized by collecting and recycling waste accessories and garments.

Lombardy has a considerably high number of experiences in reuse for charity purposes. There are historical realities with a long tradition which have shown high ability in producing important environmental results, such as: the cooperative Di Mano in Mano with its specialized sector of Vestiaria, the cooperative Senza Frontiere, the cooperative Mani Tese, the Isola del Riuso of Cauto, the centre for reuse of Occhio del Ricicione, Mandacarù in Brescia, ANT (National Tumors Association) with various branches in Italy and the net Riuso, Humana, Share second hand reuse, Vintage Garden, Trash to Trend Milano, East Market Milano and Riuso, a community net of supportive humanism with 77 operators of reuse in Lombardy. In this region the work of all the net members makes it possible to collect, repair and reuse approximately 16000 tons of durable goods yearly [28]. The net members are 285 workers (among them disadvantaged people and protected categories), with a sales volume of more than 25 million euros. The cooperatives Humana people, Occhio del Ricicione, Mercatopoli and Baby Bazar are part of this net.

In 2018 133,000 tons of textile waste have been collected (2.2 kilos per resident), and the trend is increasing. On average, 15% of this textile material is used as raw material, 68% for reuse [24].

Only in Lombardy, in the sector of clothing/accessories, each year 700,000 tons of goods are dealt with. This fact and its increasing trend gives a clear idea of the importance of this sector [8].

3 Data and Cooperatives

Greenpeace says: “It is about time that new regulations make companies more responsible, forcing them to recollect the products at the end of their life, so as to avoid dumping or incinerating, and rewarding companies that reduce the environmental impacts of their products [2, 4].” During these 20 years in Italy and in Lombardy in particular a great number of associations and cooperatives have taken this direction.

Di Mano in Mano is a cooperative that has been active for more than 20 years in Lombardy. It reutilizes durable goods thanks to the work of 110 people, among them 60 working partners, 15 employees and tens of working cooperators. About 50% of its workers are disadvantaged or have some forms of handicap. Inside the cooperative, Vestiaria takes care of the Fashion branch, recycling used clothes and accessories, but also adding value to them thanks to experts, new talents and new media such as social platforms, with the explicit goal of advertising the events for the various seasons and the website itself.

Mani Tese is a social Onlus cooperative, born in 2004, employing 21 people with disadvantaged subjects. It takes care of clearings and recycling of materials, using a wide net of volunteers who deal with a great quantity of products each year in the clothing branch.

The Humana Vintage shops have been created to let us discover clothing accessories, bijoux and other vanity objects which tell us about the Italian fashion. All the items, from the 60s to the 90s, are sold at low prices to sustain humanitarian projects of the association in the south of the world.

Every clothing item is unique, it is selected with care and attention and then given a specific price corresponding to a fair value [23]. Humana vintage shops are made up with recycled materials, used with skills and know-how, making it possible to be at the same time trendy and supportive. For ten years the social cooperative Occhio al Riciclide has been using the work of stylists and vulnerable subjects in order to create haute couture clothing accessories starting from scrap. It cooperates with Humana people to people Italia which offers great quantities of tissues that can't be reused but are perfect for Upcycling. Upcycling is not a synonym of recycling, which means transforming waste into a product fit for a new use [12]. The best translation for this term is “creative reuse”, since the dumped object not only finds a new life but it gets an extra value if compared to the original object or material [29]. Mandacarù Brescia, active since 1995, gives work to hundreds of volunteers. Clothes handed in by citizens are given a new value by being selected, catalogued, repaired and recycled. The best clothes and accessories are exhibited in the sales area in a weekly market on Saturdays. Unsold items are passed on to other charities which care for a further selection.

According to their ethics, dumping means to despise the environment and those who toiled to produce goods. One of their priorities is to give back to the poor what was taken to them through policies based on consumerism. The attention to young

people is implemented by proposing meetings with school students, promoting awareness on world matters, environment respect, recycling and volunteering. Second hand reuse is a project developed by Vesti Solidale, a social cooperative Onlus that opened its first Share Shop in via Padova 36, Milan, on 12th march 2014.

The goal of the project was to assess the sustainability of a new business, to offer high quality used clothes, to create new jobs and economic resources to be used for solidarity projects on the territory, together with the completion of the production process of recycled clothes [18, 21]. Their aim was to test the customers' possible changes in purchase intentions, and to explore an activity successfully taken on by several social businesses in Europe in the last 10 years, in order to open new SHARE sales points on the whole national territory. Cauto is a Brescia social cooperative [27]. Its goal is to implement new business activities for social cooperatives of type B, testing a trade branch for the big public, generating economic resources for the territory's social needs. It supports no profit activities and creates new jobs mainly for young women, closing the cycle of used clothing. Its customers should be ethically.

All these associations and cooperatives use their own websites for communication and sale.

4 Conclusion

This text provides an overview about ethics in the sustainable fashion field with a deep focus on the associations working in Lombardy (Italy).

Based on environmental ethics, we have first to consider the change level of the system, what is right for the ecosystem, societies and community as a whole in the context of sustainable development related with the new forms of communications [30]. Secondly, we should consider the human health issues in production, but also in the final distribution field [22]. Finally, we have to take into account the sustainable use of resources: emphasizing renewable and recyclable materials, considering efficient principles and further creating a slower system for the fashion industry and the upcycling and recycling of all the stuff and garments that, thanks to the fast fashion world, every year become waste [32, 33].

Companies have to improve the sustainability of their activities and they need to heighten customer awareness of where clothing comes from, how it is made and the social and environmental impact of its production [31]. Actually, there is a market for sustainability but currently consumers just don't know enough about it.

While there are some super-premium ethical fashion brands, the market lacks stylish, affordable clothes from well-known high-street brands [11].

One of the problems is that many ethical fashion companies do not have the visibility of the big, non-ethical brands because they cannot afford Instagram or social PR representation, which is the engine of the fashion industry nowadays. So the editors and stylists who would like to produce ethical fashion are not visible in the same way as big labels.

The best way for a company to advertise sustainability, ethics and responsibility, while staying true to its values and heritage, is to start by answering the question

“why?” And maybe seeking the collaborations with some ethical markets in the territory as well [14]. The values behind the product and company create the basis upon which a good design is built: a design that is founded on ethical consideration, with a low environmental impact and easy to fall in love with [6].

There is also another way to create sustainable fashion in the future: re-cycling and re-use, these two ways of work are not just for major brands, but most of the time they are taken into consideration by associations with ethical issues [14]. They all have the same goals: the environmental protection with the waste reduction, improvement of welfare in two ways: offering affordable good-quality garments and accessories and creating jobs for disadvantaged people [15].

The new communication and sales channels are surely going to improve these new promising market fields. A recent innovation in this field is the role of the Digital Mind Manager in marketing, a new professional figure.

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Sustainability in the Fashion Brands Websites: SEO Keywords Density Analysis and Consumers' Behavior

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Abstract. This paper is part of my PhD research, which I started in November 2018.

Sustainability is becoming one of the main trends within our society and there is the need to combine this value within fashion. The fashion industry is one of the leading industries, which produces the highest amount of pollution in the world. The production requires an immense use of water and chemicals and the pollution created with the textile waste has a tremendous negative impact on the environment [1]. Simultaneously, sustainability is becoming one of the main trends within our society, and there is a need to combine this value within fashion. Integrating sustainability, as a value within the fashion system, can be challenging; therefore, the perception towards sustainability has to be positive, has to be an opportunity [2]. Online communication is crucial to influence customers and to deliver sustainable purchase behavior. SEO keywords density analysis studies how fashion websites are implementing their online communication toward sustainability, focusing on specific keywords. The author chose keywords from previous literature and through online software, which suggests the most similar keywords to the word “sustainability” and “sustainable fashion” used online.

The objective of this paper is to observe and analyze the online keywords of fashion brands websites concerning sustainability. I plan to research its significance, taking into consideration the growing online marketplace.

Keywords: Sustainable · Fashion · Online · Website · Keywords

1 Introduction

1.1 Fashion Brands Online: The Impact of the Lexicon, Communication and Keywords on Customer's Behavior

Costumers' are becoming more aware and conscious about sustainability within the fashion system. The McKinsey report “The state of Fashion 2019” underlines the increasing need and attention of consumers regarding sustainability towards fashion. 32% costumers in Europe and the US, 65% costumers of the emerging markets such as India and China, research information about the fashion product they are interested in, also focusing on sustainability. Furthermore, although there is an unsteady trend, the

interest over time towards the Anglophone term “sustainable fashion” increased from March 2018 to March 2019.

It is clear that the fashion industry is trying to embrace the concept of “sustainability” with all the challenges that this evolution brings with it. Indeed, ethical fashion businesses have had a higher probability of survival during the recession in some countries such as the UK [3]. Not surprisingly, Pulse of the fashion industry report [4] says that if the fashion industry adopts the sustainable business model, they could generate 160 euro billion from 2017n to 2030.

McKinsey interviewed executives, who perceive the primary factor to influence costumers’ shift is technology, and after that, sustainability credibility, rating each from 7 to 6 out of 10 regarding business impact. Other surveys demonstrated that 66% of the customers are willing to pay more in order to buy sustainable goods, 42% millennials and 37% Generation Z show increasing attention to know how companies make the product and which kind of material they use. A large part of the sourcing managers (78%) assumes “sustainability” will be one of the main factors, which will affect the most customer purchasing behavior by 2025. Some 78% of sourcing managers responding to our survey believe that sustainability will also be a somewhat or highly likely key purchasing factor for mass-market apparel consumers by 2025 [5]. Online communication is crucial to delivering sustainable values and practices as many scholars underlined [6–11]. The online behavior of customers shows constant research through the web as a pre-stage before actual purchasing [12].

Ecology is one of the main intrinsic characteristics which sustainable fashion need to highlight within its online communication strategy, to gain consistent customers’ loyalty and attraction towards its fashion product [13–15]. Green marketing can increase eco fashion consumption [16].

“Green marketing” is a form of marketing which aims to create a minor environmental impact possible within the customers’ needs [17]. However, environmental sustainability has often been misleadingly promoted across fashion media. Fletcher [18] underlined how eco fashion communication is often used merely as a persuasive message, without its profound value, which should correspond to their corporate responsibility and their business model. This misleading message is often visible when some clothing claim to be environmentally friendly without any certification, which proves it, or with unclear information [19].

Sustainability requires ethical judgment, which is reached with consistent information, therefore these are crucial for business [20]. Industries should consider what their customers believe, which are their values and belief, focusing on these factors would allow a brand to meet customers’ needs and to influence more efficiently their purchase behavior [21].

As the internet allows fashion brands to spread awareness and brands characteristics, some of them implemented their collection based on a more sustainable process. These fashion companies deliver this new business model communicating detailed information [22] which can educate customers and train them to be aware of sustainable fashion products.

Therefore, information given by language and words can shape and affect people thinking and, consequently, purchase behavior. Chan and Wong [16] underline that green marketing can drive and increase eco fashion consumption. Thomas [23]

identified some of the most used keywords linked to sustainable fashion, such as green, environmental, fair trade, eco, eco-fashion, sustainable, ethical, recycled, down-cycled and upcycled.

Thomas gives definitions for each of these terms. “Green” means there is a positive attitude towards the environment. “Environmental” is closely related to Earth’s protection; Thomas cited the report *Well Dressed?—The Present and Future Sustainability of Clothing and Textiles* [24] which identified the term connected with the nature of the fibers used: they should have qualities which allow a fashion product to have long life span, ease of laundering and ease of recycling. The word “ethical” has a more vast significance straightly linked to responsibility, towards the economic, the social and the environmental area. “Organic” refers to the absence of pesticide or any chemical substance used during the entire growing phase of the plants or animal fibers. Recycled, down-cycled and up-cycled, refers to any product, which can have second life span from its first owner.

2 Methodology and Research Questions

2.1 SEO Keywords Density Analysis

There has implemented an SEO keywords density analysis of 53 fashion websites, providing other secondary keywords they are associated with. The author chose among the 100 best online fashion websites listed by The Independent [25], classifying and dividing them as High Street, Up-and-coming designers, Vintage, Discount, Boutiques (online platforms boutiques which allow purchasing multi-brand fashion product), Luxury, Lingerie, Menswear, Childrenswear, Sportswear. The domain chosen is “.com”, the language selected “English”.

The website are as listed in Table 1.

The analysis is conducted underling important keywords, and the use of particular descriptions which promote sustainability within online communication. The research has been taken in March 2019.

The paper analyses 16 keywords: Thomas [23] identified 12 keywords linked with sustainable value. Furthermore the author used an SEO software identified the other four keywords connected with the word “sustainability”: Sustainability, Sustainable Organic, Eco, Ecological, Eco-friendly, Ecology, Recycled, Down-cycling, Up-cycling, Ethical, Bio, Climate change, Fair Trade, Green, Environmental.

Furthermore, using a keywords suggestion software the author added other words connected to sustainability which are most used online, it is possible to identify other terms: Eco-friendly, Ecology, Climate change.

The paper investigates the use of keywords related to sustainability within the online communication strategy in fashion brands website.

Table 1. Fashion website

<i>Fast Fashion</i>	<i>Luxury</i>
https://www.boohoo.com/	https://www.modaoperandi.com
https://www.missguided.eu/	https://www.stylebop.com/
https://www.inthestyle.com/	https://www.ln-cc.com
https://lavishalice.com/	https://www.farfetch.com
https://www.linzi.com	https://www.net-a-porter.com
https://glamorous.eu/	https://www.selfridges.com
https://www.topshop.com	https://www.mytheresa.com
https://euro.missselfridge.com	<i>Lingerie</i>
https://www.dorothyperkins.com	https://www.bouxavenue.com
https://euro.wallisfashion.com	https://www.annsummers.com
https://euro.evansfashion.com	https://www.figleaves.com
https://www.newlook.com	https://global.rigbyandpeller.com
https://www.c-and-a.com/eu/en/shop	https://www.agentprovocateur.com
https://www.zara.com	https://www.victoriassecret.com
https://eu.riverisland.com	https://www.bluebella.com
https://shop.mango.com	<i>Men's wear</i>
https://www.stradivarius.com	https://www.mrporter.com
https://www.forever21.com	https://www.jacamo.com
https://www.uniqlo.com	https://theidleman.com
https://www.whistles.com	https://www_percivalclo.com
https://www.bershka.com	https://www.thread.com
https://www.pullandbear.com	https://www.hackett.com
<i>Up-and-coming designers</i>	<i>Childrenswear</i>
https://www.wolfandbadger.com	https://www.tobiasandthebear.com
https://www.youngbritishdesigners.com	https://www.trotters.com
https://www.notjustalabel.com/	https://www.turtledovelondon.com
<i>Boutiques</i>	https://www.tootsa.com
https://www.coggles.com	https://www.minirodini.com/en-uk/
https://seftonfashion.com	<i>Sportswear</i>
https://www.the-dressingroom.com	https://shop.lululemon.com/
	https://www.sweatybetty.com
	https://eu.gymshark.com

2.2 Research Questions

The analysis will focus on these following questions:

- (a) Do fashion brand websites promote sustainable fashion on their website?
- (b) Do fashion brand websites use keywords related to sustainability to promote their sustainable fashion products within their website for each category?
- (c) Which are the most used keywords related to sustainability for each category?

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Fast Fashion Websites

Analyzing the 22 fast fashion website, the SEO analysis shows that the keyword linked to sustainability most used within the high-street fashion website is “sustainable”, with a mean frequency of 0,18, a mean percentage of 0,39 and a relative percentage of 26,77 among the 16 keywords analyzed. Following the analysis, the second most used word is “organic”, showing a frequency of 3, with a mean frequency of 0,13 and a mean percentage of 0,02. “Organic” is mentioned 16,27% compared to the other 16 keywords. “Sustainability” has a mean frequency of 2, with a mean percentage of 0,01 and a relative percentage of 7, 79.

“Sustainable”, “Organic” and “Bio” are the most used words linked to sustainability, and are followed by “Recycled” and “Environmental”.

“Eco”, “ecological”, “eco-friendly”, “ecology”, “down-cycling”, “up-cycling”, “climate change”, “fair trade”, “green”, “environmental” are not mentioned as keywords.

Significant links are found with some of the main “one keyword” associated with more words, creating a subgroup of two or three keywords associated with the main sustainable oriented keywords.

C&A fashion brand 2017 has the keyword “sustainability” associated with “company”, identifying their brand identity with sustainable values. “Sustainable” is associated with “products”; one given example is the sentence written beneath one fashion product: “produced using sustainable methods”. It is also linked as “become sustainable” and “sustainable commitment first”. Textile Exchange Organic Cotton Market Report [26] affirms that C&A brand is “the world’s largest user of organic cotton”. Indeed the keyword “organic” within its website it is liked to “global organic textile” and “ocs”, which stands for “Certified Organic Cotton”. “Bio” is linked with “bio cotton retailer” Example written beneath one child wear product is: “Bio Cotton protects our environment and is safer for cotton farmers and their communities”. Certification can reinforce sustainable product’s attributes, affecting positively costumers’ purchase behavior [27].

Zara website has the keyword “organic” linked as “organic cotton”, whereas “recycled” is significantly linked with “recycled material”. Example of one environmental friendly sentence to describe one fashion product within the website is “Recycled polyester is made from recycled plastic bottles and consumes less water, less energy and fewer natural resources”.

It is possible to quickly find the word “sustainability” in the “About Uniqlo” section, where the company called its mission statement “Unlocking the Power of Clothing”. This slogan aims to a different goal, which the brand promises, such as: “Recycling Initiative, in which we collect articles of clothing in our stores. Other efforts by our stores include educational programs and initiatives to reduce environmental impacts: “Selecting the best materials while considering the environment”; “Eliminate all waste in manufacturing, and minimize our environmental impact”; “We respect the human rights of employees working at our group”.

Significant link within the Whistle website with the use of the word “sustainable” is “sustainable cashmere”. The description of these cashmere products is “Introducing our new sustainable cashmere pieces made from Re.Verso™, a regenerated cashmere yarn created from post-factory waste. Using a completely integrated production process, Re. Verso™ yarn is completely traceable and is 100% crafted in Italy”. Additional information which informs that the supply chain system of Re.Verso™ can save up to -76% of energy, -89% of water and -92% of Co2 emissions [28] are not written within the product’s description. Additional information can be useful for a brand, as customers search for information about the product before purchasing it, for this reason, it is crucial for fashion brands to deliver clear information about the sustainability of the product. When information about the product show sustainable characteristic, customers are more willing to purchase sustainable fashion [29].

3.2 Up and Coming Designer Fashion Websites

Among the three up and coming designer fashion websites, the keywords “sustainable” and “organic” have a frequency of 1 each. However, the word “sustainable” has a higher mean percentage (0,07). “Ethical” has a frequency of 1, but a mean percentage of 0,03, it is the third most keywords among the 16 (25%), following the word “organic” (22,5%). Significant link with other words is the three keywords “sustainable feature collection” within the “Not Just a Label” website.

“Eco”, “ecological”, “eco-friendly”, “ecology”, “recycled”, “down-cycling”, “up-cycling”, “climate change”, “fair trade”, “green”, “environmental” are not mentioned as keywords.

3.3 Boutiques Fashion Websites

The three boutiques websites examined do not show any of the listed keywords liked to sustainability.

Among the seven luxury fashion websites, the most used keywords are “sustainability”, with a mean frequency of 0,28 and a relative percentage of 71,42%. In the LN-CC website the keyword “eco-friendly” is linked with “conscious eco-friendly packaging”. This factor is crucial to influence purchase costumer behavior, driving it towards sustainability. Indeed, Nielsen global survey of corporate social responsibility and sustainability [30] shows the results of 30,000 consumers interviewed in 60 countries across the globe about the key sustainability purchase drivers. One of the factors which affect customers the most is the environmentally friendly product’s packaging characteristics. “Eco-friendly” is the second keywords more used with a mean frequency of 0,14 and a relative percentage of 28,57%. “Eco”, “ecological”, “ecology”, “recycled”, “down-cycling”, “upcycling”, “climate change”, “fair trade”, “green”, “environmental” are not mentioned as keywords.

3.4 Lingerie Fashion Websites

“Ethical” is the only keyword mentioned among the seven lingerie website analyzed. The SEO analysis found the same three keyword connected with “ethical” in the Boux Avenue, Agent Provocateur and Figueleaves websites it is linked with “ethical trading”. Boux Avenue, which is part of The Theo Paphitis Retail Group, claims that “it is fully committed to striving to ensure there is no modern slavery and human trafficking in any part of its businesses or its supply chains”. Agent Provocateur says “Agent Provocateur is committed to preventing slavery and human trafficking in all its corporate activities, and to ensuring that its supply chains are free from slavery and human trafficking”. Figueleaves claims “We are members of the Ethical Trade Initiative which looks out for those making our clothes and helps to improve our working conditions”. This aspect can be positively cited, as Yatish Joshi Zillur Rahman [31] reviewed 53 empirical articles about environmental purchase behavior and in six of them underlined that ethical value affect customer purchase behavior.

3.5 Men’s Wear Fashion Websites

The six men’s wear fashion website analyzed do not mention any keywords analyzed liked to sustainability.

3.6 Children Wear Fashion Websites

The five children wear fashion websites shows that the most used keyword among the sixteen is “organic” (67,58%), followed by “ethical” (14,06%) recycled (6,11%) and green (6,11%), sustainable (3,66%) and sustainability (2,44%). Tootsa website has significant linked keywords, such as “100% recycled paper”, Furthermore there is the two keywords “ethical made” Tootsa states: “All are registered with SEDEX (Suppliers Ethical Data Exchange) to ensure that they conform to ethical standards. Our aim is to produce beautiful, ethically made [...]. “Green credential” and “100% organic cotton” and “certified organic cotton” which are clarified and reinforced with the presence of the certification GOTS. Ottman [32] affirms women are more focused on environmentally oriented messages; therefore this meticulous attention and descriptions towards different forms of sustainability would allow those who are a mother to meet their shopping needs. However, Yatish Joshi Zillur Rahman [31] found a low level of trust towards brand which claims to be environmentally friendly even if they show eco-label certifications, by contrast, a possible solution to build a stronger trust can be creating an easy-in-use product label [33]. Therefore, trust is a crucial factor to influence customer sustainable purchase behavior, also confirmed by Nielsen Report which underlined “trust” as the most important purchasing driving.

3.7 Sportswear Fashion Websites

The three sportswear fashion websites do not mention any of the listed keywords analyzed.

Overall there has not been a high percentage of words which are linked to sustainability. The two groups which show more attention in terms of keywords communication appear to be the fast fashion websites along with the childrenwear websites. Further research on the reasons for these different use of keywords among fashion websites would be interesting. Another research which should be done is to verify if such communication which promotes sustainability is a merely “greenwashing” system or it is effectively a new a more sustainable business model.

4 Managerial Implications

This study provides an online analysis focusing on sustainability. The keywords content analysis is based on previous customers' purchase behavior studies, reports and literature. The main 16 keywords about sustainable fashion provided are the most used ones within the web and the literature. Merging customers' point of view and the websites approaches examples of how and if fashion brands are meeting actual customers' needs and attitudes regarding the complex concept of sustainability. Being the second industry which pollutes the most worldwide, certainly the fashion system has still to improve. The entire supply chain should aim to become more sustainable economically, socially and environmentally. However, this would not be sufficient in order to persuade and affect customer purchase behavior towards sustainable fashion. Sustainable business should lead to clear, transparent and easy-in-use communication, which would let consumers be aware of sustainable fashion products in all their characteristics. Furthermore, it is crucial not to create false messages supporting sustainability without concrete, consistent and true sustainable business' choices. Being sustainable fashion products full of ethical values, trust is crucial to purchase sustainable fashion products. Therefore, transparency and consistency are necessary.

5 Limitation and Further Research

This research has some limitations, one of these is the lack of internal companies' data regarding their purchasing rate of sustainable fashion products and the connections with the profit generated by sustainable products and the use of specific keywords to measure keywords efficiency. Another limitation is the impossibility to verify the authenticity of proclaimed sustainability, mostly because of the lack of complete transparency of the companies. The limited frame of time did not allow to monitor the evolution of the use of the keywords; it is suggested to monitor and analyze it over time. Future images and videos web content analysis will provide more sights about online sustainable fashion communication. Future research regarding the Future interviews with companies' managers is suggested to gain more information about companies' sustainability missions, their authenticity and transparency and how they intend to communicate it through the online platforms.

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Fashion Sustainability in the Digital Realm

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Abstract. Fashion is widely considered one of the most environmentally polluting industries. Massive production and consumerism have supported the crystallization of the “throwaway fashion” and the emergence of “take, make, dispose” mentality. In this context, the fashion industry started the transition to a different system – a more sustainable one - that not only provokes the old ways of creating textiles and clothes, but also of thinking about fashion, buying choices, and consumption impact. It is widely known that sustainable businesses relied on digital technologies to become popular in Western Europe. This exploratory study will analyze how some sustainable businesses from Romania utilize the new social media platforms, like Instagram, to generate awareness about sustainable consumption, promote ethical behavior, and consumption.

Keywords: Sustainability · Ethical behavior · Digital technology · Social media platforms

1 Introduction

Fashion is one of the most fascinating industries, but also one of the most polluting. In the context of environmental issues, the fashion industry is fighting to become more sustainable. Production and consumerism combined have created an enormous number of consumers who while mesmerized by collections, clothes, and cheap prices, unknowingly supported the crystallization of “throwaway fashion”.

In the context of “take, make, dispose”, the fashion industry started to transition to a different system, that through its framework plans to promote and enhance the regenerative power of reusing and recycling. This new framework offers a chance to the fashion industry to develop a more sustainable system, where garments are reused or recycled into new fibers.

This exploratory study investigates how second-hand boutiques, one of the most numerous and popular sustainable businesses in Romania, are using social media platforms, like Instagram, to generate awareness about sustainable consumption, promote ethical behavior, and consumption.

2 Theoretical Corpus

2.1 Sustainability and Ethical Consumption

In recent years the business environment and its marketing practices have been significantly impacted by people's increasing awareness on ethical consumption, as Oh and Yoon point out in one of their studies [12]. Newholm and Shaw [11] consider that ethical consumption is located in our consumer culture and it is an inevitable consequence of it.

Ethical consumption does not have a clear definition, but it has numerous interpretations. Crane and Matten [4] define it as "the conscious and deliberate choices to make certain decisions due to personal and moral beliefs", while Cooper-Martin and Hoolbrook [5] define it as a "decision making, purchases or other consumption experiences that are affected by the consumer's ethical concerns".

In many occasions the term was used interchangeably with or as a part of other concepts such as sustainable consumption, socially conscious consumption, and conscious consumption. That is why ethical consumption is typically defined through different kinds of behavior, relating to a broad range of ethical attitudes and values and its research entails many different areas of focus.

Since the concept of ethical consumption lacks a proper definition, some authors like Cherrier [3], focused the discussion on the individual consumers: "as the amount of information on ethicality in relation to consumption seems to be substantive but lacking a "grand narrative", it is important to focus on individual consumers, trying to identify the different ways in which they themselves define what ethicality stands for them in their own consumption".

The existing literature on ethical behavior indicates that one of the most relevant factors that influence an individual to adopt ethical behavior is self-identity, precisely when it is related to fashion. Lodziak [9] states that the general view today seems to suggest that the meaningfulness of consumption is based on the notion that it "speaks directly to the self". This means that if ethical issues have become a significant part of a person's self-identity, the person may also make consumption choices that are ethical.

The issue of sustainability will be approached from two perspectives, the ecosophical perspective, that can be used to explain the strategy and scope of the sustainable businesses and the productive perspective, that can be used to understand the sustainable business impact on consumers. Both perspectives will be used to analyze how sustainability is influencing the adoption of ethical consumption and the consumption of sustainable products.

The ecosophical perspective, as formulated by Henri Bateson and Felix Guattari, questions the "production of human existence itself in new historical contexts" [6]. From this perspective, sustainability represents an activation toward the self, the group, and the society and an opposition against capitalism.

Guattari formulated the theory of the three ecologies – mental ecology, social ecology, and environmental ecology – that can be used to analyze how sustainable fashion actually works. Drawing on Guattari's theory on the mental level, sustainable business models promote innovative practices, like recycling and reusing; stimulate autotomizing subjectivity by promoting an alternative consumption behavior and

lifestyle, also supporting the appearance of sustainable businesses. On the social level, sustainable businesses use the new digital platforms to disseminate information about sustainability and to create active groups of individuals interested in sustainability. On the environmental level, sustainable businesses promote recycling and reusing by offering an alternative to the existing consumption options, in this case “fast fashion”.

These three ecologies not only present as sites of negotiation and reconstruction, but also as Guattari argues present interchangeable lenses or style. In his view, singularization and subjectification are the responses that fight capitalism and promote ecology: “rather than remaining subject, in periphery, to the seductive efficiency of economy competition, we must re-appropriate Universes of value, so that processes of singularization can rediscover their consistency. We need new social and aesthetic practices, new practices of the Self in relation to the other, to the foreign, the strange – a whole programme that seems far removed from current concerns. And yet, ultimately, we will only escape from the major crises of our era through the articulation of a nascent subjectivity, a constantly mutating *socius*, an environment in the process of being reinvented” [6].

The productive perspective draws on the theoretical perspective formulated by Michel Certeau [2]. Focused on individual daily life practices and actions, he emphasizes how important are the ordinary or mundane practices. Grasping the logic of individual practices, he displays how these are in many ways connected to each other and are not random actions of people; on the contrary, they have logic to be grasped.

In analyzing everyday life, de Certeau begins with describing two significant concepts of his study: strategies and tactics. These two concepts bring a new approach for studying people who are part of a community. This approach puts the integration, adaptation, and cultural assimilation of everyday life and mundane practices to the forefront and emphasizes the daily routines of individuals, rather than cultural activities that have been frequently analyzed.

In the case of sustainable communities interested in sustainable fashion, the people that participate, both as consumers and producers, are provoking the norm by adopting a behavior that sets them in the marginality of consumerism. Adopting “transverse tactics” they do not obey the rule of the place – “make, take, dispose” – but an opposing one – “reuse, recycle” and create spaces of enjoyment on the digital platforms, where they meet, sell, buy, and engage.

In de Certeau view, these tactics come together and disrupt rapidly, becoming resistance acts stemming from daily life practices. He argues that all new forms of individual practices in which individuals are active agents of daily life practices are actually reproducing new forms of power relations as new schemes of practices, new forms of resistance against the predetermined ways of living.

The existing study will try to analyze how sustainable fashion businesses, like second-hand boutiques, are approaching and promoting sustainability. We will try to determine how the approach on sustainability appeals to the “self” generating ethical consumption and stimulating ethical behavior.

2.2 Digitalizing the Sustainability Experience

Digital platforms have been used as a medium for engaging people and creating communities with the same ethical beliefs. Along time, sustainable businesses relied on digital technology to spread information and create communities of consumers interested in sustainability, ecology, reusing, and recycling. Techno-cultures are known to be responsible of the movement around “ethical consumption” that has developed in the West.

Hector Postigo’s opinion is that in digital contexts “culture … is meaningless or increasingly alienated from a citizenry unless that citizenry can participate in its production” [14]. Postigo’s analysis (focused on the digital rights movement) concludes that, in all digital contexts, users must necessarily participate in order to become “citizens”, as he defines them; that is, to become active.

From Lippmann to Habermas and beyond, it is argued that there is a close relationship between democracy, configurations of communication and information exchange. John Hartley defined the digital environment as “infrastructure of democracy”, “technologies of democracy” or “the mechanisms through which democracy and the public are created, sustained, and operated” [1].

On a very immediate level, it has been argued that “varied properties [of the internet] enable new forms of participation, which may either change or replicate existing social relations” [1]. But on a more general level, our sense of self, our ways of becoming, our modes of expression, our practices of relating to others, are equally affected, and these elements are central to the development of the desires that drive us.

Bernard Rieder consider that it’s important to understand that platforms like Facebook and Twitter, and more recently Instagram, are institutions with “multifaceted systems incorporating symbolic systems, cognitive constructions, and normative rules which provide stability and meaning to social behavior” [1]. Similar, Hartley defined these platforms as “technologies of the public” that are shaping public discourse, for example by introducing socio-technical regimes of “issue visibility” [1].

Digital citizens are “those who use technology frequently, who use technology for political information to fulfill their civic duty, and who use technology at work for economic gain” [1]. Digital citizenship, understood in a wider and more fundamental sense that simply familiarity and functionality, means “to interrogate technology as a place where power and knowledge find mechanized expressions and politics are circumscribed by particular interfaces, information architectures, and modes of ordering” [1].

In this context it is interesting to determine how the new social media platforms, like Instagram, are used to create awareness, empower customers, and possibly create active communities in the case of sustainable businesses. This exploratory study tries to determine how these platforms can impact the perception of sustainable businesses, the adoption of sustainable consumption, and the construction of sustainable brand and consumer identities.

3 Materials and Method

3.1 Methodology

This research uses content analysis to explore the relationship between the second-hand boutiques and their followers on Instagram. According to Krippendorff [7], content analysis quantifies and analyzes the presence or absence of elements, based on a predetermined set of categories.

In order to analyze we created five categories of interest: products, clients, lifestyle and motivation, influencers, and commercial. Each of the five categories include different types of posts: products posts include any image that display the product and the brands, clients posts include any image with clients wearing products, lifestyle and motivation posts include images with the shops and the employees, motivational lines about recycling and/or reusing, influencers posts include images with influencers promoting the businesses (some influencers bought or sold clothes from/for these businesses and actively exposed themselves and engaged with the clients on Instagram), commercial posts include any image with functional information like schedule, discounts, incentives, events etc.

Using these categories, we tried to answer the following research questions:

1. How are these second-hand boutiques participating in the social networking, impression management, brand use, and community engagement using their Instagram accounts?
2. What are the brand personalities presented in the customer-created brand images of these second-hand boutiques?
3. Which types of images, explicit or implicit, prevail on the second-hand boutiques Instagram accounts?
4. How the use of these images provokes the notion of “self-identity” and promotes “self-promotion” as a tactic to promote sustainable behavior?

3.2 Data Collection

The case studies that are going to be analyzed are: Garderoba Infinita, ReSaleShop, Consignatia 7, OpShop. All four case studies are second-hand boutiques, that have the same business scope – “reuse and recycle” - but have different approaches in terms of brands selection - luxury, medium or unknown - and of target - adults or youngsters. These boutiques position themselves as “brands”, they have personalized logos, messages, and headlines.

Garderoba Infinita is an online boutique that sells new or slightly used clothes, from luxury or medium brands, which are obtained from members of the community; ReSale Shop is an online boutique, also with an offline presence, that sells slightly used or second-hand clothes, from luxury to medium brands, which are obtained either from anonymous sources or from famous people; Consignatia 7 and OpShop are two small online boutiques, also with an offline presence, that sell mostly second-hand clothes, from luxury to unknown brands, which are purchased from other second-hand boutiques.

These boutiques utilize Instagram to actively promote their activities, sell their products, and interact with their communities. In terms of popularity there are some significant numeric differences (Figs. 1, 2 and 3), but these are going to be considered for the interpretations of the engagements and will not affect the overall analysis (Table 1).

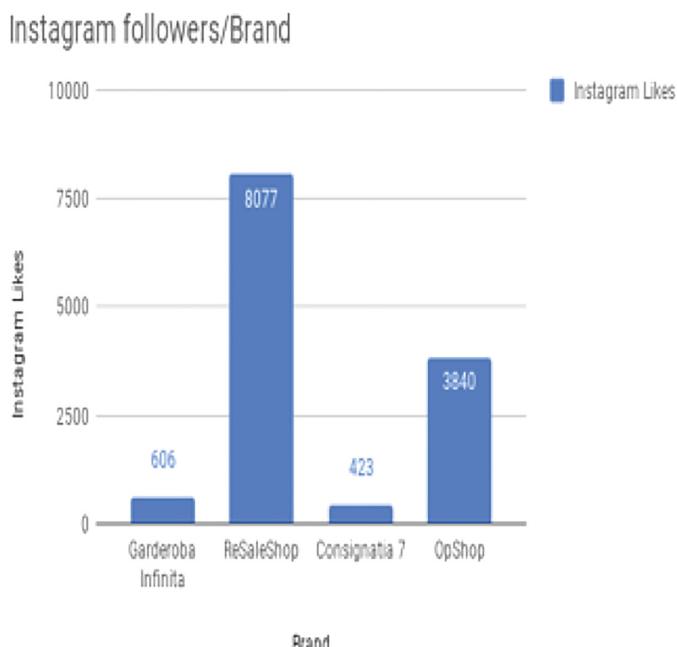


Fig. 1. The number of Instagram followers/brand

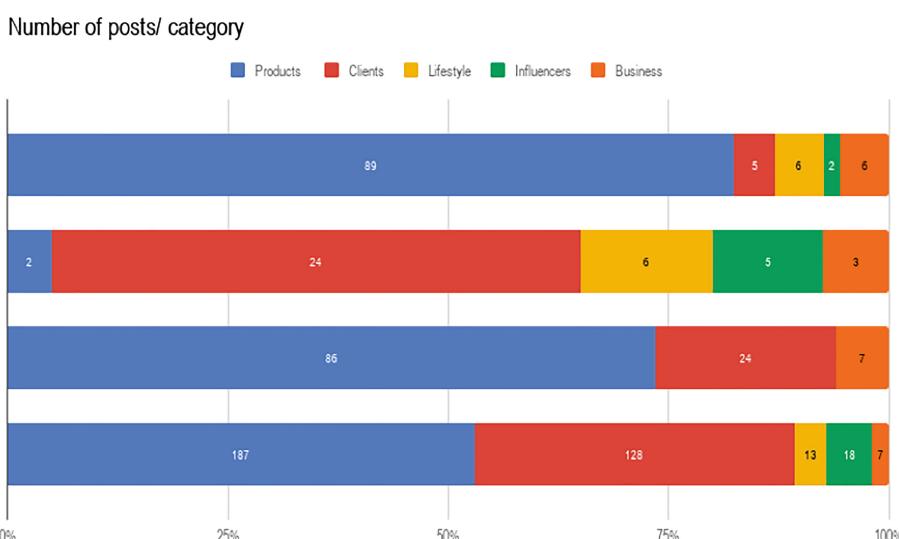


Fig. 2. The number of posts/categories on Instagram. Legend: 1st line: Garderoba Infinita, 2nd line: Consignatia 7, 3rd line: OpShop, 4th line: ReSale

Number of likes/posts

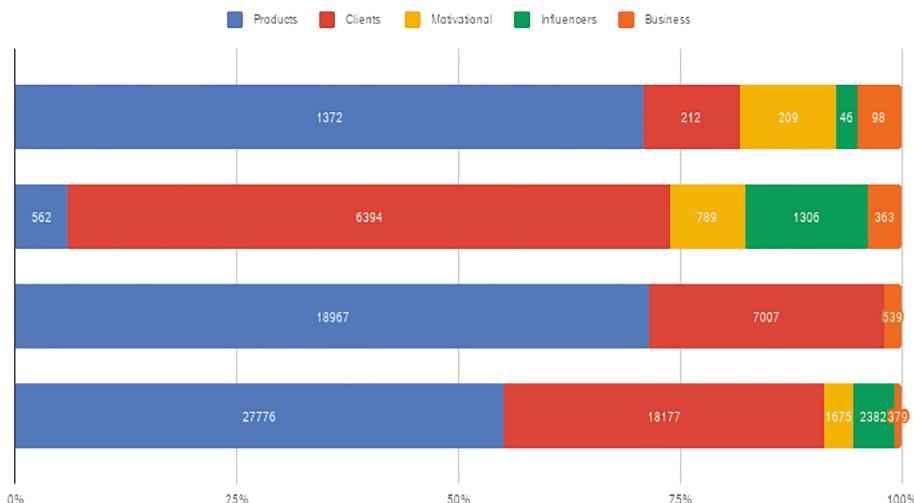


Fig. 3. Number of likes/ posts on Instagram. Legend: 1st line: Garderoba Infinita, 2nd line: Consignatia 7, 3rd line: OpShop, 4th line: ReSale.

Table 1. Summary of findings

Types of posts	Overall value category	Overall images usage	Overall personality traits	Overall engagement results
Product	Brand use & impressions management	Explicit	Sincerity, excitement	High
Client	Brand use & impressions management	Explicit	Sincerity, excitement	High
Lifestyle & motivational	Social networking & community management	Implicit	Sincerity	Low
Influencers	Social networking& community management	Explicit	Sophistication, excitement	Medium
Commercial	Social networking& community management	Explicit & Implicit	Excitement	Low

3.3 Discussion

To answer the first research question, we used the thematic categories of value creating practices in brand communities: social networking, impression management, community engagement, and brand use; to answer the second research question, we used the five brand personalities: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness; to answer the third we used the definitions of explicit images and implicit

images; and finally to answer the fourth research question we used the theories that explain how “self-identity” influences the adoption of certain behaviors.

Brand use value and impression management are expressed through product and clients posts, both being the most published and engaging. Product posts reveal how the products are personified by being photographed in special settings; in this way they are invested with symbolic meaning meant to stimulate the consumers perception. Personifying the products is a manner of making the product to speak directly to the self: “[...] The term “self” includes both the actor who thinks (“I am thinking”) and the object of thinking (“about me”)” [15].

Clients posts show the established relationship between the boutique and its’ followers. Images with clients photographed wearing the clothes they bought not only reveal the product uniqueness, but also define the consumers universe. Clients images seem to have more impact than the product images, because they reveal an authentic image of the consumers and of the relationship between the consumer and the brand – regular people buy products and become “brand ambassadors” on Instagram, supporting their beliefs and interests in an active manner.

Both types of images, product and consumer, generate impressive engagement, simply because they generate inspiration, which is extremely important when it comes to fashion and self-identity. The impression management is gracefully managed, images are constantly produced and shared, ensuring constant engagement.

Extrapolating to sustainability and sustainable communication, it’s important to determine the level of engagement with the product, but also the level of consumer involvement in the usage and promotion. In this context, Soron argument is extremely relevant: “[...] framing sustainable consumption in relation to the problem of self-identity enables us to confront not only the psycho-cultural factors that maintain demand for material goods, but also the difficulties faced by ordinary people as they try to understand and respond ethically to large-scale social and ecological problems within an everyday environment that is highly commodified and individualized” [15].

The images shared by both the brands and the customers contain the symbolic action of evangelization and the virtues attributed to the association with those brands and from buying those products. As Cherrier notes: “postmodern consumers can acquire, consume and dispose of ethical objects/services/practices that reflect who they are and who they want to be” [3].

Social networking and community management are less utilized, but they also add to the greater sense through influencer, lifestyle and motivational, and commercial posts. The association with fashion influencers is influencing the consumers perception, that perceive purchase and the products as something glorified.

However, the low engagement registered by influencer posts suggest that the individuals are more interested in promoting their self-identity, than in associating with influencers. They look up for inspiration – how to style the clothes – or motivation – to support their choice of second-hand clothes, but they are more motivated by the possibility of expressing their identities – they want to be in the spotlight and to be seen. As Leary et al. highlight: “the use of self is to make sense and make choices, using the self as an important perceptual, motivational, and self-regulatory tool” [8].

Lifestyle and motivational posts together with commercial posts fall in the same category, they are not driving engagement. Consumers don't react to motivational quotes, because they are not searching for words, and they don't react to commercial details, because they are not interested in functional information, they simply want to be in contact with the products – the ones relevant for confirming the “self”.

In order to answer the second research question, we used the five personality values to determine the “brand” personality these second-hand boutiques showcase. The finding suggests that all four boutiques are characterized by sincerity and excitement, that make these “brands” extremely authentic.

Sincerity is expressed through the presence of numerous images of products and clients wearing the products in different contexts, while excitement is expressed through the presence of numerous images of clients wearing clothes, typified by attributes such as daring, exciting, imaginative, and contemporary.

To answer the third research question, we tried to determine which type of image, explicit (hard) images or implicit (soft) images, is the most predominant. A widespread definition of “soft images” and “hard images”, accepted by advertising scholars, practitioners and consumers, explain that hard images have a direct approach, whereas soft images have a subtle and indirect approach.

The finding suggests that explicit images, that have an overt meaning are more engaging, because they convey the messages very directly via explicit communication. According to McQuarrie and Mick [10], the explicit images have a rhetorical approach that help expressing more effectively a message. On the other hand, implicit images, that have a latent meaning and use to convey figurative claims, as McQuarrie and Phillips indicate [13]. The use of implicit images seems not be effective for this specific target.

Through the use of explicit images, it is revealed that both the brand and the consumers communicate their intentions in a straightforward manner through images that enhance the personality traits – sincerity and excitement – confirming the authenticity and also enabling a type of relationship, based on sociality and customer empowerment.

This finding is strongly connected with the fourth research question, that tried to determine if self-identity and self-promotion are relevant triggers for engaging users, creating consumers, and changing behavior. As Lodziak stated, the meaningfulness of consumption is based on the self, on what we buy and what we wear. The new form of sociality and customer empowerment is enhanced through products and consumption, because as Oh et al. suggest, products are invested by symbolic meanings that have an enormous power in constructing and defining identities.

Drawing on the results we can argue that Instagram constitutes a relevant platform for the promotion of sustainable businesses. Through the use of this digital platform, these boutiques unify their ecological scope on all three levels - on the mental level by promoting reuse and recycle as a business reason, on the social level by creating an active community of members interested in reused and recycled clothes, and on the environmental level by contributing to the global efforts of offering a solution to “fast fashion”.

Through Instagram, these boutiques succeed not only in highlighting what sustainability constitutes as business strategy, but also what it constitutes as a consumer tactic. Through the creation and promotion of certain content, these boutiques are highlighting specific practices and routines definitory for sustainability. The use of explicit imagery it's placing these businesses and their products in an ordinary realm, that makes them more approachable for the consumer, that understands how he can integrate them in the everyday life.

4 Conclusion

This exploratory study tried to analyze and determine how second-hand boutiques, the most numerous and popular sustainable business models in Romania, are utilizing Instagram to promote their businesses, attract consumers, stimulate purchase, generate awareness, and hype around sustainable products.

The findings revealed that Instagram is an effective medium that can generate all these through the use of explicit images. Through Instagram the case studies analyzed transcend their old status and become trendy and fashionable places were fashion lovers find unique fashion pieces and come together into a unified community that shares the same interests.

The visual communication is essential for this medium, being also it's more defining characteristic. Through the use of impactful images, that position in an explicit manner the products and the clients, these boutiques succeed in creating a new form of sociality and customer empowerment extremely.

This new form of sociality and customer empowerment enables the "self" to be in the spotlight. Consumers are transcending and are becoming integrative parts of the business, actively engaging to generate awareness and stimulate purchase. All suggest that through Instagram the modern consumer, being able to involve himself, feels more empowered and adopts easily ideas and behaviors.

Taking all these into consideration we can conclude that the themes of self-identity and self-promotion provide great implications for future marketing techniques utilized by sustainable businesses, but also shows us the trends in digital communication that need to be studied in more detail.

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Sustainability of Apparels - Let the Labels Speak It All

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Abstract. This research paper discusses how ethical would it have been, had there been a label of “sustainability” on the second skin. “If the label speaks it all”.

Research problem identified is that in most of the cases customer does not know the sustainability count of Apparel by looking at the product labels and hangtags.

The Research Question being addressed is if a product is sustainable, what are the ways of communicating it to the customers so that all the efforts taken towards integrating sustainability are effectively communicated to the customers. Labels and hangtags might be one of the best ways of trickling down sustainability to the consumers. If the label of apparel talks of the Sustainability scores it shall be a giant step towards fortifying the basic tenets of sustainability.

The objective of this paper is to generate ideas as to how Sustainability of a product can be reflected on tag/label of an apparel to solve the problem identified by getting inspiration from other products which practice it so that it can be effectively communicated to the consumers increasing the availability of sustainable choices and possibility of conscious consumer purchase decision.

The story of creation of apparel begins with a fiber followed by its metamorphosis into apparel adorning a fashionista. Nowhere does it mention whether it had been crafted by tiny hands for the tiny tots or made by free and happy workers. Nowhere does it mention whether it is the culprit of polluting the rare elixir of life or is made the sustainable way. Nowhere does it mention if it was responsible for choking of millions living near the factories. Nowhere does it mention whether it has been made in the day of the light or in the darkness of a sweat shop. Nowhere does it mention if the leather and fur or shell etc., is stained in blood. Nowhere does it mention if the plastic pollution of the product has been suffocating the flora and fauna in the suburbs. Nowhere is its “ethical tale” documented.

The Research methodology adopted is learning from contemporary examples of brands and products using sustainability labels. This Research proposes the idea of having a “Sustainability Label” in addition to size/fit/country of origin/wash care instructions/brand name etc.- an additional label on an apparel item/product may help in effective communication of the sustainable efforts of the brand to its end users/customers.

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Keywords: Sustainability label · Sustainable purchase decision · Product Environmental Footprint · Sustainability score

1 Introduction

Elaborating a few contemporary examples of brands and products using sustainability labels, the research paper portrays how the “ethical tale” may be documented and effectively communicated to increase the consumers awareness. If consumers’ awareness increases, it may lead to more conscious purchase decisions.

A customer walks into a store, to choose apparel and as a conscious consumer wants to know whether what he/she is purchasing has been made “sustainably”. To find an answer to this basic question is tough. Of course, the brand shall always proudly proclaim it has been made by “fair use”- thanks to the huge ethical responsibility of the corporate today, they might have measured, managed and declared it. Alternatively, the brand may choose to be absolutely silent on it. Greenwashing might also be practiced in few instances.

The brands may probably be able to effectively communicate their sustainability story to the customers without dampening the facts during its transmission facilitating better purchase decisions by them. Maybe now is the opportune time.

2 Lecture Note

There have been studies conducted establishing positive correlations between Sustainable Product and Consumer Willingness to buy the product. Previous research indicates that consumers have a positive attitude towards environmental protection. In past consumers have expressed demand for green products to companies [1]. It shall definitely be a great idea if consumers get to know how sustainable an apparel is so as to make more conscious purchase decision.

The term coined by economists “Willingness to Pay” is but a mirage that consumers are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products [2]. The reality however seems to be grave as the consumers may be willing to pay extra but they might not really be doing so in real life while making their purchase decision as they “expect” the product to be made sustainably as a criteria and want non-compliant companies to face penalty and not pay the price for it [3]. In such a competitive market where even a cent’s price difference can lead to wiser buying decisions by customer, not being sustainable might lead to loosing order by manufacturer from brand/retailer.

Maybe what has been withholding most of the Apparel brands from incorporating declaration of sustainability in the form of a “label” is the risk involved. On one hand, the gamble of receiving or not receiving “Return on Investment done for implementing sustainability”. Alternatively, the very complex and glocal supply chain of the Apparel brands make it very tough to confidently boast of it. Another reason maybe one of the most important reasons - price conscious customers and customers with taste of Fast

Fashion defy the whole purpose of it. Maybe what has been holding this from happening is too much of transparency might have a counter effect on the brand reputé in case of any error.

If a customer goes to purchase electrical equipment, the product proudly declares the “Energy Efficiency” of the machine. If he/she choose to purchase a washing machine, they do know the water consumption/efficiency. Knowing the customer’s desire to know the Sustainability aspect of the product they intend to purchase and incorporating it in the product design and marketing strategy of a product is definitely a great idea meeting the expectation of a conscious customer. The star rating of electrical appliances is a measure of energy efficiency of an appliance on a five points scale where the higher the rating the higher is the energy efficiency or the lower is the energy consumption and hence better savings as standardized and measure defined by the Bureau of energy efficiency BEE [4] (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Star rating of electrical appliances as per essential commodities act, 1955, India (Source: <https://www.beeindia.in/bee-star-rating/> Retrieved on 16th March’19)

SAC, Sustainable Apparel Coalition is redefining transparency by PEF label- Product Environmental Footprint label as shown in the product from Nike [5] (Figs. 2, 3).

Sustainable Apparel Coalition leads the Technical Secretariat for the European Commission’s Product Environmental Footprint, PEF [6] project and is one of 27 such pilots designed to evaluate diverse products from leather to pasta to batteries to apparel. The participating apparel brands like Adidas, H&M, Nike etc., included the PEF label in select European stores. The best part is that the approach includes both a label to be used on the product as well as supporting communication for on-and offline purposes. This small step by SAC shall definitely pave way for giant leap of the Apparel industry towards sustainability.



Fig. 2. PEF label in a NIKE product (Source: Nike) [5]



Fig. 3. PEF label depicting the Environmental Impact (Source: SAC) [6] <https://apparelcoalition.org/pef-project/>

One of the contemporary examples to it is the collaboration between Sustainable Apparel Coalition, SAC and Globe Scan. The efforts shall “identify what consumers want to know about the sustainability credentials of products, brands, and manufacturer”. It might be able to guide them in their purchase decisions- more sustainable shopping choices. This study shall facilitate development of new and effective guidelines for helping customers turn on the key to sustainable purchase [7].

Few brands spread awareness amongst consumers so that they participate in recycling and other sustainable efforts of the brand like the reGAINapp [8]. The collaboration of the company with brands help the customers earn discount coupons as well as serve the purpose of recycling. Landfill of clothes is a big problem especially in the developed world. Therefore, this app is an easy way to recycle.

Few labels tell the Sustainability story of the product or brand effectively communicating it to the customers depicting “care for Earth”, “respect Women” “Trade Fair” “line Dry” “Mend when torn” “Reuse When Worn” etc. One of the examples is the hangtag by a NGO Freest which began in Sonagachi, one of Asia’s largest red-light areas with 10,000 sex workers in West Bengal, India. They employed these women to make T-shirts proudly proclaiming the story through hangtag as depicted below [9] (Fig. 4).

Few are more *avante garde* with Smart Hang tags [10]. Thin Film Electronics ASA, a global leader in NFC (near field communication) mobile marketing and smart product solutions, in partnership with Charming Trim & Packaging, Inc., a provider of trim and



Fig. 4. Sustainability label (Source: freesetglobal.com) [9]

packaging solutions to the garment industry. Thin film Speed Tap technology shall be integrated into a product's hangtag, label or packaging and can be read with the tap of an NFC-enabled Smartphone. Once a consumer taps the NFC tag with a compatible Smartphone, the phone connects to Thin Film's CNECT cloud platform to launch a highly relevant mobile consumer experience, including contextually relevant product and brand information, promotions, authentication messaging, and other brand-directed content (Fig. 5).

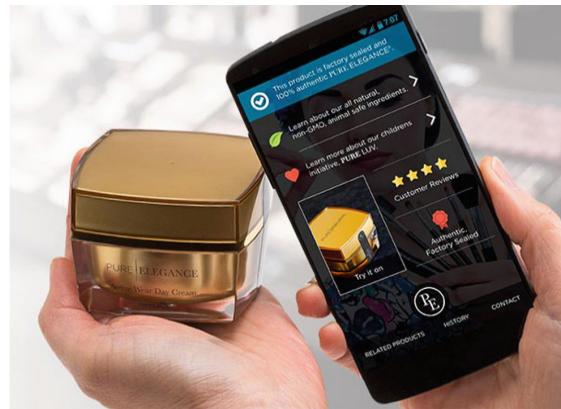


Fig. 5. Thinfilm SpeedTap technology (Source: Apparelmag) [10]

Perhaps it takes “conscious collection” of H&M to pull the conscious customers [11]. The success story of this collection tells it all. 75% of all Nike products contains some or the other recycled products as of May 2018 official website of Nike [12]. It is a phenomenal leap from 1990s labor unrest until the today’s sustainable approach of the

brand. In addition, Nike has become a pioneer in domain of sustainability by diverted nearly 5 billion plastic bottles from landfills since 2012. Marks and Spencer giving second life to its products through Oxfam [13]. In the UK is one of the very welcome ideas in UK. These contemporary case studies clearly indicate that in near future adopting the path of sustainability and communicating it to the consumers shall gain momentum.

Today sustainability drive has become so compelling that today brands are trying to communicate it loud and proud to the consumers. However, a little risk is unavoidable as consumers are generally price conscious.

The term coined by economists “Willingness to pay” is but a mirage that consumers are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products [2]. The reality however seems to be grave as the consumers may be willing to pay extra but they might not really be doing so in real life while making their purchase decision as they “expect” the product to be made sustainably as a criteria (and want non-compliant companies to face penalty) and not pay the price for it [3].

Few hangtags proudly proclaim how the particular product offered by the brand is Sustainable to imprint their efforts in the mind of consumers leading to better brand perception which may lead to prompting their purchase decision. Denims have been under a constant scanner for sustainability. Wrangler markets it as “Tough Denim, Gentle Footprint, Responsible Action”. However, exceptions do not make the rule.

Communication of Sustainability and Ethical issues in Fashion to end user/customer can be done more effectively by having a label of sustainability. Only if the consumers send a strong message by choosing sustainable apparels and showing their power through sustainable purchase decisions, shall the stakeholders want to invest in it and shall be compelled to invest in it. So it should probably be double edged strategy to be practically actuated.

3 Conclusion

Trickling of sustainability to consumer still has long way to go as the distance between the words “Willingness to buy” and “Buying” is so huge and it take only few seconds and a few cents to convert the latter to the prior. The labels “Don’t speak it all”. The label is mute when it comes to indicating the sustainability aspect of the garment. It unable to communicate its sustainability story to the consumers. Consumers deserve all the right and have keenness to know it all. The beautiful story either ends here unheard by all or the dark secrets get buried somewhere. If the labels of apparel talks of the Sustainability score, it shall be a giant step towards fortifying the basic tenets of sustainability. After all “An attire does not make a man. A man makes an attire!” Let the “Labels speak it all” and convey their own story through a simple label to let the consumers know of the score on Sustainability path followed while creating it.

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Fashion Communication: History and Other Issues



Narrative Structures in Fashion Film: Generating Engagement

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Abstract. This study intends to investigate the new branded narrative suggested by fashion films, an online video category featuring its own language characteristics and a new approach in storytelling. These moving images are becoming a key communication tool, defining new fashion imagery in the digital age. In comparison with the commercials of the traditional advertising campaigns, these online short movies privilege communicative policies, which are based on the brand entertainment strategy, an entertainment that is often polished and innovative and promotes the viewer's active and critical engagement. The observation of this profound change leads to an analysis that attempts to understand how fashion films can stimulate the activity that Eco defines as *interpretative collaboration* by the recipient of the message. An interesting scenario emerges, which concerns the new fashion tales, in which the creative experimentation does not seem to have finished yet: in the era of globalized and industrialised fashion, when it was losing its own character of exclusivity, Arts arrive to support it in the research of that cultural elite that is the ideal public of luxury and the relationship with the seventh Art becomes stronger than in the past.

Keywords: Fashion film · Fashion tales · Online video · Fashion images · Fashion advertisement

1 Introduction

The digital revolution is imposing new rules of communication on brands in all markets. In particular, fashion market has developed its own tool, fashion films, an online video category featuring its own language characteristics and narrative structures. Following a logic of *brand entertainment*, fashion films are indeed characterised by expressive contents and forms with a high entertainment value and move away from the conventional commercial dimension of brand communication.

Based on these considerations developed in previous studies [7, 8], the new intention that this paper arises is to understand how narrative structures work to generate engagement, or the co-authoring process of viewer. In particular, this study about fashion films intends to apply some of Eco's consideration of the new branded narrative, understanding how new *brand narrative* pushes viewer to develop an *interpretative collaboration*, seeing as the recipient of the message, who is the potential

brand's consumer, is called to share these experiential universes online in a strategical logic of brand entertainment.

The interest stems from the fact that fashion films belong to the broader category of online videos which, based on the Hootsuite's report on the *Social Video Strategy 2019 Reports* (Hootsuite, n.d.), are destined to become the most widely used and shared form of communication:

Eight billion daily video views on Facebook. Over 1 billion YouTube users. Social video is beginning to dominate almost every platform—and it's only getting bigger. (Hootsuite, n.d.)

The investigation carried out in the present document starts from the vision of the fashion films released by the main brands on this market, which has been a constant and continuous vision over the last eight years, combined with a regular monitoring of the main platforms and social media of the online world.

2 Overview About Fashion and Communication

Nowadays talking about *fashion communication* means dealing with two relevant ongoing trends that are typical of fashion brands: on the one hand, the decrease in conventional advertising investments and, on the other, the significant growth of investments in online communication in a broad sense, including investments in some social media, above all Instagram.

As regards the first trend, Pambianco website ([38], February 21) had reported Nielsen Italy Data about 5.1% decrease in the fashion industry in 2017, equal to 13.6 million EUR reduction of the budget allocated for fashion communication and then confirmed also by the Nielsen data released in August 2018 showing 4.7% decrease in the advertising industry that is instead steadily growing. Indeed, Alberto Dal Sasso, AIS Managing Director of Nielsen, expected to end the 2018 fiscal year with a positive sign, equal to +1.8% compared to the previous year, especially thanks to some product sectors such as leisure, automotive, drinks and spirits.

Still according to a global 2018 Nielsen Survey Digital [34], 55% of luxury brand investments are made in digital, a data above the average as the digital covers 32% of advertising investments in the other industries. Moreover, about 1/3 of this 55% is destined to online video making.

This shows the great attention of luxury, and in particular fashion market, for the digital world, in line with the current trends: in fact, the GlobalWebindex data between the third quarter of 2015 and the second quarter of 2017 reveal that the percentage of Internet users who watched a video on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter or Snapchat (excluding YouTube) has increased from 38% to 56%. These data are based on the Report *I trend dei Social Media nel 2018* [23]; the aforementioned survey analysed a sample of 433.016 internet users aged between 16 and 64, excluding Chinese users.

Furthermore, GlobalWebIndex in its report *Trends. The trends to watch in 2017*—chapter *The victory of video* writes the sentence by Nicola Mendelshon, Facebook VP in EMEA:

In five years' time Facebook will definitely be mobile and probably all be video [19]

Based on a research conducted by Contactlab and Exane BNP Paribas, the branch of the French banking group involved in financial investments, which measures the cross-channelling and digitalization level of 34 international fashion and luxury brands supply, the Italian fashion brands climb in the ranking of the Digital competitive map 2018, as also shown in Fig. 1 ([11], May 29).

The Digital Competitive Map considered **19 criteria** e analysed **178 parameters** on the “**Strategic Reach**” and “**Customer Experience**” axes. Examining the axis of the ordinates, which shows the “Digital Strategic Reach”, **Burberry** maintains its leadership position. **Gucci** almost reaches it thanks to the opening in China and the online supply extension also in non-core product categories such as the houseware (...) (translated by author) ([11], May 29)

Within this scenario, the most commonly used social is Instagram, which is also the best platform to reach a younger target of customers, very important for fashion luxury brands, the Millennials, i.e. those who were born in between the 1980 and 2000 and also known as “Y generation”: the Alttagamma Foundation defines them as the sixth continent of the luxury market:

Aged between 18 and 34, the new protagonists of high-end consumption are global, digitalised, optimistic and open to innovation, more likely to recommendations and products exchange and pay attention to sustainability (translated by author) ([2], December 02)

The Y generation has new myths, keeps up with the news differently, has a new language than the previous generation and totally different purchasing *drivers*. The Millennials, who are certainly more in love with the luxury experience than the physical luxury, are today asking companies to learn their language – they want to identify their own identity in the brands, as well as their own values and needs, which are very different from those of the previous generation. Not only Millennials but also artists are among the main users of Instagram, which is increasingly used by brands for collaborations. Think at Gucci, with its *Utopian Fantasy* SS 2018 campaign made by the young and emerging Spanish illustrator Ignasi Monreal whose images have also become protagonists of the Art Wall of New York, Milan and Hong Kong to then turning into a subject of viral communication on Instagram. Indeed, unlike other social networks, on Instagram it is also possible to launch viral advertising campaigns thanks to the use of special hashtags (#utopianfantasy or #guccigang, or #mycalvin for Calvin Klein). The aim is to non-aggressively involve the user as he will interact with the brand of his own free will. This is an indirect advertising and therefore much more effective than the conventional strategies.

New communication tools have certainly led to new languages and forms of fashion-tales: in particular the new communication channel, generically represented by the web, dictates new codes able to generate new messages and intercept the post-modern individual, who is increasingly more distracted and elusive. Kotler [26] displayed a 2015 research by the *National Center for Biotechnological Information* according to which an individual's concentration capacity has passed from 12 to 8.25 s in about 15 years, thus becoming slightly less than that of a red fish, which is notoriously the animal with the lowest concentration capacity in the world. Therefore, using fashion films is for the fashion industry a way to narrativize the brand world, thus pursuing the goal of creating engagement in its interlocutor thank to new kinds of story.

In conclusion, the fashion brand communication is not recording a negative trend, except for the conventional communication. Rather it is developing new strategical approaches by optimizing new communication tools mainly linked to digital world, fashion brands communicate even more than the past but in a different way.

3 Narrative Structures: Closed Story and Open Story in Fashion Film

Fashion films are online videos made by fashion brands, which are always based on brand contents translated into moving images; they can present a collection or simply create brand narrations revolving around a main content of brand identity. For this reason, fashion films are the result of a synergy between three different languages: fashion (with a strongly codified language over the years), Cinema (the filmic language of the Seventh Art) and internet (the new communication channel, with new rules and dynamics). The three worlds find their original synthesis in these new communication tools, thus generating something unique and innovative.

As mentioned above, this study covers the topic of online videos made by fashion brands. Within this category, however, as well as Fig. 2 shows [38], it is necessary to make a distinction between those videos visible on different parts of the web pages searched by the user (those that were generically called *advertising banners*) and the videos that are demanded and sought-after by the consumers and which can be short or long. The former adopts the communication strategy of conventional advertising, the so-called *interruption marketing*, and their narrative and persuasive form remains strongly anchored to the TV commercials; the second category instead adopts a strategy that follows the principles of the *permission marketing*, theorised by Seth Godin in 1999 [22]: this approach aims to attract a proactive and conscious viewer, addressing a consumer that *allows* the brand to communicate with him and who chooses to share experiential branded worlds, which is today possible also through an online video. The fashion films under this analysis belong to the second category: far from the traditional commercials for their communicative language and structure, they are an example of *brand entertainment*, where the branded contents are created to originally and pleasantly engage the consumer. This kind of brand entertainment shows a high quality of the finished product, in terms of contents and narrative approach, working about the brand's communication themes and values (*values placement*). In fact, it is not the product of manufacturing company to play the protagonist role in the story, but rather the story itself and, through it, the brand's aesthetics and vision. The duration is very varied but in case they are shown on a web page or Social Media like Instagram or Facebook they appear to be shorter (about 5 s) and for the full video version the viewer is addressed to the web pages or Youtube or Vimeo. Today, more and more fashion films are made with a divisible structure, based on the cinematographic language potentials. This enables them to achieve several goals, among which: allowing their presence on social media like Instagram and Facebook; adopting a necessary tactic on the internet channel (the sharing tactic that amplifies and extends the lifespan of any online message); last but not least, creating a teaser for the whole fashion film.

As already noted in a previous publication [8], based on the analyses carried out in recent years, fashion brands use this new communication tool to reach three different branding goals. Indeed, they can choose it to create a real story revolving around the brand's founding values, where the narrative structure is conceived to guide the viewer through the main brand's areas of significance. A second option is to focus the narration on the introduction of the brand's inspiring Muse, without necessarily developing a story articulated in a progression of events, but rather choosing to outline the main traits of a personality that wants to be unique. The third way is to create a full video that evokes suggestion through powerful images, working on the typical brand's mood or atmosphere (that could be dreamy or virtual or portraiture) without any narrative or descriptive intent.

It is however important to make a further specification: only the first two above-mentioned cases, i.e. telling a story and outlining a personality, generate narrative structures, developing a narrative plot. Considering these two fashion film clusters leads to the following evidence: different brand narration solutions can be detected depending on the viewer's different type of involvement. In particular, there are some stories, which unfold showing a logical and consequential progression of events in which the receiver is driven from the beginning to the end of the story, thus leading to a shared conclusion. On the other hand, some stories are much more articulated, where the characters and their actions elude the logic and leave the receiver free to interpret them.

In both cases, the brand narrative results in a totally subjective and active participation of the subject in the process of understanding the story, which is ultimately the communicative scope of the author of this essay, but the ways to achieve this purpose are certainly different.

This distinction recalls Umberto Eco's theory in his *Lector in Fabula* (1979). In this book, indeed Eco explores the potential implications of an interpretative semiotics, which wants to highlight the inevitable attitude of cooperation operated by the receiver of a text. Textual cooperation is seen as a phenomenon that occurs between two discursive strategies rather than between two individuals. Everything is therefore "model" before being "empirical". Indeed, the text is a lazy machine, a presuppositional system of gears which implies the *unsaid*. As a consequence, the author must assume a model reader who owns the skills required for reading. When we speak about model reader, we refer to a set of textually established conditions of happiness that must be satisfied in order for a text to be fully actualised in its potential content. The assumed model reader should be able to interpretively act as the empirical author (the actual writer) has generatively acted. Likewise, based on the previously acquired data from other communication acts, the specific empirical reader (the actual reader) generates a hypothetical image of the author (author model) to whom attribute ideas, worlds and feelings. In any story, the reader (as well as the viewer) moves abductively at each stage, making assumptions on the *topic* (or theme) of the speech: the contents of each proposition are gradually summarized in larger content units and from *partial topics* we move to *global topics*. For this reason, Eco [14] conceives the *fabula* as a sort of railway junction network: when reaching some *disjunction of probabilities* (narrative turning points), the reader is invited to venture some possible developments that are then confirmed, betrayed or left unsolved from the text. We must however remember

that any text does not admit to be construed in any way possible, though there is always a parameter to follow for its possible interpretations, and indeed each story turns out to be the strategy that constitutes the universe of its (if not ‘legitimate’) justifiable readings [Eco 14]. Consequently, the decoding a text implies some limits; the author of the text must precisely identify those contents that the public will clearly understand and those that can only be suggested and left to free interpretation. These limits cannot be passed over nor ignored as the risk is that the reading would lead the receiver to other interpretations. Eco defines *closed* a text that drastically reduces such varieties by addressing the reader to only one possible reading and minimising the personal work of decoding. On the contrary, a text is defined *open* when, besides monitoring the reader’s cooperation, it includes additional references and keys to interpretation with possible keys for cross-readings. Regarding the closed texts, Eco asserts:

As advertisers say, they will choose a target (and a “target” cooperates scarcely, he waits for being hit). They will make sure that every term, every saying, every encyclopaedic reference is what they expect their reader can understand. They will aim to stimulate a precise effect (....) (translated by author) ([14], p. 57)

As for the open text,

(The author) Decides (this is where the typology of texts risks to become a continuum of nuances) to what extent he must monitor the cooperation of the reader, and where it should be aroused, where it should be directed and where it should be turned into free interpretative adventure. (translated by author) ([14], p. 58)

Those fashion film that develop a story, they could use closed story or open story: some do so by showing the clear purpose of guiding the viewer towards a line of consistency; others by feeding uncertainties and doubts and stimulating curiosity and the receiver actively participates in the creation of brand contents thus becoming *co-author*; above all fashion brand always avoids to show itself as the originator of success in the consumer’s life. In particular, fashion films prove to be interesting new communication tools of brand entertainment just because they appear far away from old traditional advertising strategies; in fact they open up new ways of interpreting the brand narrative, where the product often plays a marginal role, and the chosen narrative theme is often unsuspected and unconventional.

To better understand what described above, it is worth considering some episodes of a Miu Miu saga, *Women’s Tales*, in order to show how these two narrative structures can both be applied to the same brand and generate different kinds of engagement. MiuMiu was one of the first brand to create a fashion films saga, which talks about its own Muse: a world where the women’s sensitivity, complexity and power is always the driving force and helm of their lives. Each episode is filmed by a female director, coming from different Countries in the world. The episode *Women’s Tales #16, The wedding singer’s daughter*, lasting about 8 min, was released on the brand’s Youtube page ([30], September 2) and was directed by Haifaa Al-Mansour, considered the first female Saudi filmmaker. It tells the story of a Saudi wedding in the ‘80s.

It’s night-time in 1980s Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Glittery and glamorous heels climb out of cars. Women shrouded in traditional black abayas make their way into a wedding hall. There, they reveal what’s underneath: dazzling dresses and wild hair. Their true selves set free, unseen by male gaze. There are strict segregation rules in Saudi weddings. All eyes and ears are on the

wedding singer; until the electricity cuts out suddenly. “This is the worst wedding singer ever,” guests mutter, condescendingly. Will the young daughter manage to save her mother’s dignity? ([30], September 2)

And the answer will be yes: with cleverness and courage, the child will be able to go up to the problem (a socket to be slipped back) and help her mother, despite the other women’s and their daughters’ gossips due to the fact that her mother was a singer. The wedding party will therefore take place in total happiness and everybody will be happy and joyful because the courage and initiative of some women is something that everyone will benefit from. In this case, the path is linear and the reading of the message is clear and univocal, so we can define it as closed story.

Different is the narrative structure of the episode of the *Women’s Tales #17* saga, *Sako Mako*, released by the brand on its own Youtube page ([31], January 26). Lasting about 16 min, it was made by an American director, Hailey Gates, once again to explore the complexities of the female soul.

“Farah,” a bread seller, walks the streets of a Middle Eastern town, while an American military vehicle, surrounded by soldiers, slowly passes by. A moment’s silence. Then, a devastating explosion. Civilians are bloodied, wounded. The horrors of war. “Farah” looks around aghast and wailing. But nothing here is quite what it seems. In fact, “Farah” is a character played by an aspiring actress called Laila. And this isn’t Iraq, but a replica village erected on the Fort Irwin army base in California, used to train American troops before being sent abroad. Laila believes her acting talents are being wasted away in this arid simulation, where female role-players are limited to mute, background roles. She takes things much more seriously. Laila plots her way out. ([31], January 26)

The perception of the *nothing here is quite what it seems* permeates all the film narration, which adroitly moves from the filmic reality to the filmed filmic reality, in a complex and subtle game between the must be and the being, between the cinematographically interpreted role and the narrative role of the narrating character. Essentially, there is no final solution: there is an open possibility to conclude the story. Will the girl find another job to play a closer and more valuable role to her? And, as for the actor-soldier who found this probable chip and watches the girl’s videoclip where she candidates herself as an actress, what reaction will he have? What will the consequences be? What remains unequivocal is that this girl is strongly resolute in pursuing her dreams with great determination and courage. In both fashion films, the chosen theme is not a conventional one for luxury market, rather it shows a singular attention to different culture and societies all around the world, focusing on the feminine universe.

However, although a different co-authoring action is evident in the two different brand narrations, at this stage our assessment cannot be forced to consider a narrative model that is more active than another in producing engagement. This also because brands offer open or close fashion films that refer to the most varied narrative genders, thus legitimising the evidence of the multiple interpretative possibilities that this strategic communicative brand tool may offer: from fantasy (such as in many Gucci’s fashion films by Alessandro Michele) and adventure (such as in *The tale of Thomas Burberry* (2016) by Burberry) to gothic (such as in Alexander McQueen’s S/S 2014) and thriller (such as *L’invito Pericoloso* (2013) by Fendi); from the classic fairy tale (such as in many Christmas fashion films by H&M (2016–2017) to the social and

historical gender (such as in #16 and #17 episodes of *Women's Tales* by Miu Miu that we analysed (2018–2019). This extreme variety and continuous experimentation can be object of subsequent reflections and analyses, also collecting feedbacks in terms of greater audience appeal for one or the other. Unfortunately, this type of data is not available yet.

In this regard, it may be interesting to mention a market survey conducted by two American scholars of the University of Chicago in 2010, Phillips and McQuarrie. They studied the different types of engagement developed by watching the advertising images on fashion magazines and considered a female audience sensitive to the fashion world: indeed, the sample was composed of regular readers of *Vogue USA*, having sufficient financial, cultural and social resources to spend thousands of dollars in garments and who were quite involved in all that is fashion. This survey shows that the images, creating the most engagement, are those that display the intent of bringing the audience into a story.

As a consequence, fashion films, which create a story through the usage of the filmic language for the web, interpret and actualize this desire of experiencing, which is typical of media and fashion users in this Millennium. In light of the above, further research should be needed to investigate and translate these suggestions in figures and data.

4 Saga and Fashion Film. The Last Step to Produce Engagement

An aspect of newness emerges from methodical observation, which is increasingly developing in recent years: it is the phenomenon of fashion film sagas, that is more episodes revolving around some key factors of the brand's visual identity. Unfortunately, there are still no precise data nor information concerning this trend, albeit the extra-ordinary Netflix phenomenon and its successful sagas encourage to believe that this trend is gaining ground and affecting the social behaviours so that these new films based on episodes seem to represent what people want today.

Indeed, the topic of *sagas* has become extremely interesting over the last few years: being included in the Cannes Film Festival in 2017, Netflix, which is the quintessential platform of tv series, films and other entertainment streaming contents, has changed the way of enjoying films and videos in a few years, giving the tv series a new life. Born in 1997 as direct competitor of Blockbuster, in 2007 Netflix introduced a streaming service under subscription: 10 years ago it was already as we know it today and the company was one of the first to understand the streaming potential. In 2012 the members were 25 million and the following year the number had risen to 33 million. In 2013 it offered original Netflix branded products for the first time. The first was "*House of Cards*", a political series with Kevin Spacey. This is how the "*binge watching*" phenomenon was born, that is the habit of watching more episodes of the same series one after the other without breaks. "*Orange is the new black*" came on the heels of it, the most watched series ever on the platform. Since January 2016, Netflix made the streaming service available in over 190 countries.

In his volume *Imagining* (2016), referring to tv series, Antonioni affirms:

(...) In conclusion, on the basis of more general changes related to the way of perceiving the spectacularism in a participatory sense, the corresponding model of seriality becomes complex and requires a greater participation, and consequently a greater affection, to its own audience at various levels and under different perspectives. (translated by author) ([3], p. 27)

Probably in the wake of this trend, many fashion brands are today developing *fashion films websagas*, that are cycles of episodes revolving around a key topic, sometimes interpreted by a product, sometimes by a character who recurs in all the episodes and becomes the bearer of these contents, such as in the *The delivery man* saga by Prada for the Cahier Prada bag (2018), where the bag and the delivery man constantly recur in the three episodes. The episodes can also develop independently from each other, maintaining the basic contents of the brand constant and becoming recognizable for their graphic format and language used, such as in *The frames of life* by Giorgio Armani Eyewear. In both cases, these are sagas structured as episodes of a *series*, and therefore independent episodes with closed narrative structures.

There are also sagas structured with a *serial* logic, that is, episodes looking like fragment of a constantly interrupted plot, whose narrative structure is sometimes that of the open story. An interesting example is the saga made for Jil Sander by the German director Wim Wenders: the saga was launched for the SS 2018 and features five episodes of fifty seconds each. The directorial skills of Wim Wenders articulate the events of five episodes in a complex and unclear plot. The characters are: a man, perhaps a photography assistant, a model, a photographer, a mysterious woman of whom nothing is known, and a diver, who unexpectedly appears in all the episodes. Each episode is abruptly interrupted and leaves the story plot incomplete. Neither the last episode dissolves the doubts, rather it makes them even stronger. For the following season FW 2018/2019, Wim Wenders for Jil Sander creates a single episode, structured in frames that can be individually released on social networks. This episode is starred by a man and a woman and, astoundingly, the same diver of the previous saga. The musical accompaniment is still the same, but here the story is less cryptic than the previous: the woman and the man look like two close yet far, eclectic and complicated identities, in a cold and uncomfortable context. The diver emerges from the depths of a lake, bringing out concerns and doubts of the protagonists. Even this episode seems to be structured with an open story mode as the narrative plot can be perhaps summarized in a story with symbolic significances about the complexity of human relationships, proving the new sensibility and the great attention of fashion tales in social topics.

Furthermore, these sagas, series or serials, clearly aim to produce a certain number of appointments with their interlocutor, thus starting a dialogue that broadens the time of relational time to expand the possibilities of engagement, inspiring people to new cognizance.

Fashion brands contrast the logic of speed with that of serial stories, creating more complex stories than the past brands', feeding that desire that today, in the logic of the impulse purchase, has been outclassed by the *whim*. They continue to pursue the goal, which is necessary for luxury brands [26], to instil the desire of that particular Object in

their audience, transcending from the object itself and loading it with symbols and values through the brand narrations. In conclusion, these brand communication solutions, structured in episodes, pursue new paths with an evident load of experimentation and innovation.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, fashion films appear an innovative and groundbreaking tool in brand strategy because of these new narrative structures, that require an updated consumer role in communication process: indeed viewer must be participative, focused on and conscious, as well as cultivated. Fashion films are sometimes not to everyone, as well as luxury fashion, and brands' products are discreetly involved in the storytelling because brand seems to be first of all a contents producer, thus offering cultural stimuli that are definitely rich and polished and so they generate engagement. Fashion films often show a cultural substance and intention of signification that go beyond the brands' traditional communication strategy, and which is rather closer to Art as well as to the New Millennium strategies of the luxury market [26].

The goal of the luxury fashion market has always been to sell much more than just a product: luxury is dream so that the object takes on a high symbolic value, which allows to enter a universe of exclusivity and privilege, as well as creativity and art.

Covering the relationship between luxury and art, [26] identifies the new fashion need to closely approach art. In particular, he finds this new need of fashion in the new form of luxury, especially fashion luxury that has nowadays become an industrial reproduction whose resulting products are losing rarity; reason why a strong involvement with art could allow fashion to walk away from the industry world but rather address that *cultural elite* that is its authentic public. Fashion films take part in this new fashion brands' strategic goal of generating high levels of brand narrative, especially referring to the Seventh Art, the Cinema. To date, it is not possible to gain quantitative results that certify the effective level of engagement that they are able to generate, but an accurate and systematic observation of fashion films recommends, on the one hand, to record the continuous and evident increase of this phenomenon and, on the other, to consider the fact that this communication approach indulges the new post-modern individual's demands. However, the resulting interest is to integrate these assessments with quantitative results in terms of effectiveness, which could be obtained from further investigations and analyses.

Appendices

Fig. 16 – In DCM 2018 Gucci joining Burberry in the digital leadership. Valentino, Louis Vuitton, Fendi and Cartier also standing out in the top 6. Burberry still leader on the Strategic Reach Axis, closely followed by Gucci and Dolce&Gabbana. Gucci and Louis Vuitton co-leaders on the Digital Customer Experience Axis, closely followed by Burberry, Cartier and Valentino (1/2)

The Digital Competitive Map Luxury May 2018

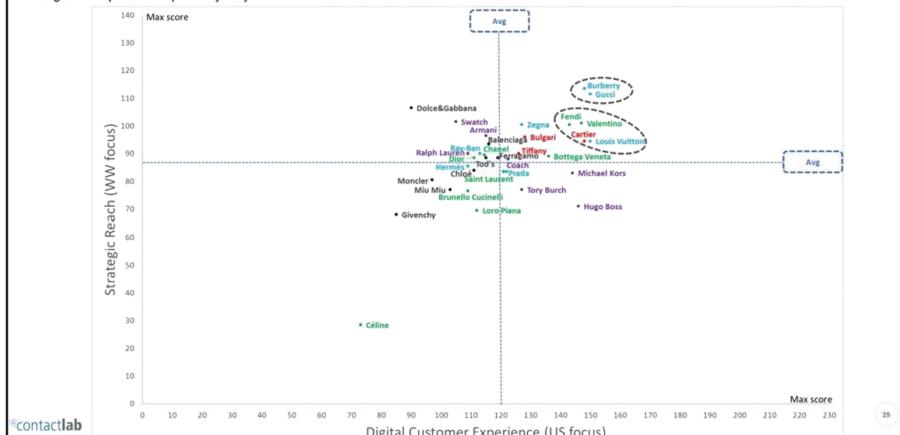


Fig. 1. Digital competitive map 2018 (Source: www.contactlab.com)

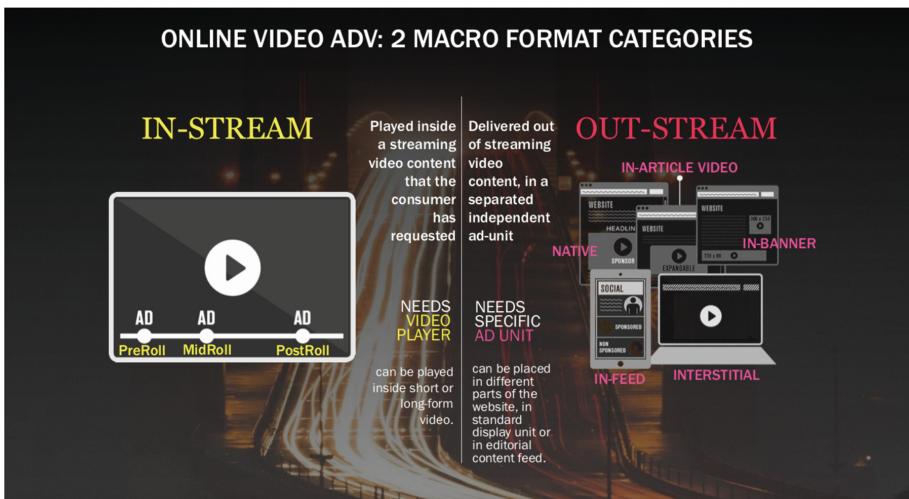


Fig. 2. Online Video Adv: 2 macro format categories (Source: *Audovisual Landscape, PM Research, Y2017*, PublicisMedia)

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Great Expectations: The Dissonant Media Portrayals of Local Independent Fashion Designers

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Abstract. As fashion dissemination is increasingly globalized and democratized, the growing population of local small-scale independent fashion designers is gaining attention for its distinctive creations and strong convictions. However, in the corresponding worlds of fashion design and fashion communication designers and journalists who are working on their personal branding and their unique selling points, are vying for the attention of the consumer, rendering the relationship between the journalist and designer surprisingly at odds. In the context of increasing communication formats, this study investigates the effectiveness of independent fashion designer portrayals in local print media. Through textual research as well as interviews with designers, this paper looks at fashion communication in the local market. It finds that dissemination through homegrown initiatives benefits independent fashion designers more than diffusion on elite international platforms.

Keywords: Independent fashion design · Local fashion · Local fashion media · Fashion journalism

1 Introduction

In the current creative economy, the disrupted worlds of fashion design and fashion journalism give rise to many questions regarding the promotion of the designer and the evolution of fashion journalism. In the multi-faceted landscape of the current fashion communication system interspersed with a melee of professionals, DIYers and amateurs, the research questions how fashion communication is affecting the contemporary independent fashion designer. It asks if the tension that arises from the mixed expectations of fashion professionals is rising or converging?

The attention in this study is on the media portrayals of small, local independent fashion designers (IFDs) rather than large scale fashion brands. This focus arises from observing the increase in small scale independent entrepreneurs in the current creative economy. The shift in the creative labor force since the post-Fordist economy, the impact of globalization and the rise of neo-liberalist agendas, finds that the work structure for designers has shifted from employment in large firms to freelance, self-employment and protean careers [2] with many starting up independent labels. Partly facilitated by information communication technology (ICT), production digitization, or

consumer demand and partly by alternative convictions and approaches to enterprise including sustainable practice, varying small-scale fashion business models are now emerging along with a corresponding increase of niche markets. However, within this new and developing landscape on the fringes of the corporate fashion system, individual designers are struggling to gain adequate attention. Their success is dependent on a combination of personal branding, a unique selling point and launching the right product at the right time [3]. Furthermore, dissemination of their idea is vital to viability and success. Unlike former celebratory accounts of the ‘fabulous and glamorous’ [1, 4], a new journalistic challenge faces the media requiring the deft layering of personalities, ideas, niche products, quirky aesthetics, moral causes and so on. At the same time, it presents interesting new content for the aspiring and critical fashion journalist. Similar to emerging designers, several fashion journalists hold strong convictions on ways to ‘change the world for the better’ [5, 6]. Furthermore, fashion journalists are recognizing the imperative of self-branding, a strategy bloggers and influencers have already perfected. In some cases, the ideals of like-minded journalists and designers have coalesced into new directions for fashion communication. Yet, while the media and journalists are creating personal brands with their individual style of journalism, opinions and/or media format, the question remains, how do these channels affect the local independent fashion designer. This question arises from a presumption that the function of the fashion journalist is to promote the designer. It is easy to assume this standpoint in the light of previous fashion commentary that has been instrumental in the rise of celebrity designers. Celebrity portrayals may seem shallow in today’s world challenged with issues. However, if celebrity culture is no longer the only option, how is fashion journalism now portraying designers, and in particular independent designers?

The contribution of this study is to shed new light on the existing tensions between designer and journalist and reveal the effect of local fashion journalism on the success of local independent designers. The significance of this study lies not only in identifying the changes occurring within the niche world of local fashion communication and its relationship to the changing world of independent fashion design but the greater shift in culture that independent fashion makers and journalists are triggering in the wider community through communicating their philosophies. It is not only the creative output but the business models themselves as well as new convictions that hold interest both for fashion observers and consumers. Fashion journalists play an integral role in partnering with IFDs, even if at a distance in disseminating the IFDs’ fashion activism and contribution to culture within an alternative labor market.

2 Research Design

Fashion communication sits in a framework of communicating arts and culture. I chose to conduct the research in the local government area (LGA) of the state capital Brisbane, Australia. I settled here as an independent designer, running my own label’s local and national operations from the area for over a decade. This means that as a former

independent fashion business owner myself, I share common knowledge with the participating designers. Further, as a former graphic designer in elite international fashion magazines¹, I have gained knowledge and formed professional networks that connect me with stakeholders and provide insights from across the industry. The Brisbane region provides a unique fashion studies position because, unlike major fashion centers, either national or global, it does not have fashion authority [9, 10]. Promoting local products to locals also holds particular challenges [11] and marketing within a non-fashion city even more so. I contend that Brisbane is a non-fashion place because it is neither a fashion industry city, intended as a center of mainstream fashion production, nor a hub for small-scale designers, unlike the rising second-tier cities of Barcelona, Antwerp or Seoul [12]. The context of place increases the challenge of disseminating the qualities of local designers. Five local publications were selected for investigation. These are both free and paid print magazines that exhibit a preference for lifestyle and particularly women's fashion. All of the publications have electronic versions and off-shoot products, but this study focuses only on the printed matter that may arrive in local residents' mail boxes, are accessible in cafes or that may be purchased from a newsstand. I examined the publications' mission statements and their approach to presenting local fashion designers where possible. I also analyze accounts of local designers published by the magazines, evaluating the light in which they are represented.

As I privilege the standpoint of the designer in this study, I investigated 17 designers, their activities and their entrepreneurial approaches as well as their reaction to media portrayals. The designers in this study are all entrepreneurs, operating their own micro business. They live locally, have produced small ranges and have few or no employees. Their marketing budget is limited if existent and they often resort to digital DIY methods of promotion. The designers sell online as well as through designer markets or independent boutiques, locally and nationally and/or internationally. Their business directions may include conscious decisions to remain small-scale, the use of genre specific online sales platforms, unconventional work spaces and participation in the new sharing economy. This paper presents vignettes on three of those designers to gain insights into the way in which they build their reputations and publicize their product regardless of local constraints. The label Alice Nightingale, is nominated as the key case, presenting a small-scale firm that has minimal international fashion communication reach, and finds that local press brings her more success. A further two cases, Gail Sorronda and Suzii K, are also presented to contrast the findings. The characteristics of the enterprises also comprise their alternative methods of communicating, networking and collaborating, the importance of local identity, as well as their relationships with the local press. The businesses have been established for several years, do not generate a large profit but are viable and generate cultural value for the local community.

¹ Vogue, Elle, Madame Figaro.

3 Designer Portrayals

Journalists and designers have long history of interdependence. Towards the end of the twentieth century and aligning with the demise of couture, the celebrity designer emerged [4]. By capitalizing on media attention, designers benefited from close relationships with other celebrities, such as actors, media and political personalities. Editors of elite magazines treated key fashion designers as creative geniuses and, in this way, promoted designers as well as photographers rather as artists [13]. Publication in magazines enhanced and validated the designers' status and emerge as crucial to the sale of clothing. Triumphant accounts of designers became fundamental in the fabrication of the rise and fall of designers [8]. In the last twenty years, the ideology of individualism and distinct aesthetics has been carried into the new millennium even more potently through the pervasive image based culture which further fostered the designer as celebrity [8]. It is therefore no wonder that designers are still expecting the media to 'discover' their talents and facilitate their meteoric rise.

Publications like Vogue often subscribed to by fashion leaders have high fashion credibility [14]. Their milieu is a larger, elitist and international audience [1, 4]. Since a decade, Rocamora [7] has given us insights into alternative forms of fashion media such as blogging and observes the shift in interest by the public from journalists who were once the tastemakers and gatekeepers of fashion information to bloggers who are everyday people with a more than usual interest in fashion (or specifically dress) practice. Furthermore Rocamora perceives a digital turn, where the media format itself dictates aesthetic decisions [7]. Pedroni points out that blogging has changed the way fashion information is presented and how its proponents are given credibility thus prevailing as an 'autonomous microcosm' [15] maintaining its own laws. These scholars concur that fashion communication is in itself a form of design with a host of players eager to stake their creative claims. Surprisingly this can leave the fashion designer on the sidelines. Tensions arise and although journalistic authorities such as Suzy Menkes insist on a legacy of 'growing together' with the designers [16] there seems little regard for mutual admiration and respect as may have been the case several decades ago. Indeed, designers are seen battling for the attention of the consumer in an already competitive terrain. Therefore, the confluence of niche markets, designers, journalists and new media platforms have arguably also shifted the depiction of designers, their processes and product.

Small scale independent designers understand that their creative output alone is not sufficient to draw the volume of clientele required for a viable business. Good publicity (and some would argue any publicity [17]) is keenly pursued and beyond their social media activity designers need connections in the press. However, what would appear a mutually beneficial exchange is surprisingly problematic. Investigating the dream of becoming a 'famous fashion designer' in the mid-1990s, McRobbie [18] recognized a fractured relationship between designer and publisher in her early studies on the independent fashion designer. McRobbie's subjects were graduates emerging from art schools who aspired to emulate the high profile *créateur* and emerging celebrity roles. The dwindling positions available in the industry partially due to the advent of globalization, as well as the drive to 'succeed' and 'have their own name' (label), led to the

rise of the so-called independent designer. Unable to find work in industry, this designer embarked on self-employment, setting up their own small business. Regardless of the good media exposure they may have received for their graduate show presentations or any subsequent press (hence ‘fame’), the designers found it difficult to survive as a small entity. According to McRobbie, the clothes displayed in fashion communication ‘play a symbolic role in the fantasies and aspirations of the reader’ [18] but do not fulfil the function of selling the garment as might be expected from the designer. This is the job of marketing. McRobbie sees fashion communicators as creating taste groups that not only draw attention to designers but help to coalesce communities, markets or readerships, which in turn also benefit advertisers [18].

4 Local Fashion Media

Parallel to the changes seen in the world of niche contemporary fashion entrepreneurship, fashion journalists are also readjusting their positions in a constantly shifting media landscape. The decline of fashion magazines as arbiters of taste, caused mostly by the recent democratization of fashion reporting through social media has arguably increased the tensions between intermediaries and designers. The weight on journalists to promote designers directly seems heavier in this new media landscape. Yet it is incumbent on the media to maintain credibility with the readership. Cleverly, some journalists have turned their critical eye away from the minutiae of style trends (now covered by social media) and are interpreting and reporting on higher order issues for the reader. Publications that announce new convictions and approaches to fashion communication are appearing in tandem with niche independent designer labels in an effort to satisfy latent demand for the critical evaluation of the current status quo and conscious consumption. In the Brisbane LGA, *Frankie* and *Peppermint* magazines have established themselves as proponents of sustainability while embracing the idiosyncrasies of their quirky readership. However, not all local magazines are going down the path of critical fashion journalism. Some remain firmly embedded in the straight forward promotion of designers in an effort to gain those designers as advertising clients or simply attract increased circulation as well as satisfy the local readership with tales of local heroes who bravely eke out an existence in the local setting. *Fashion Weekly*, *Brisbane News* and *Style* magazines aim at cultivating and marketing the local subtropical lifestyle while Melbourne based *The Fashion Journal* aims at an in-the-know millennial approach. Following is a brief description of the direction taken by each of these publications.

Peppermint magazine is produced locally with a small editorial staff. The magazine claims to be the leading sustainable fashion and lifestyle magazine in Australia, providing a platform that shares the stories of people ‘doing good in the world’ [6]. The magazine’s policy on designer portrayals appears to favor messages pertaining to sustainable practice and aligns with values played out in the designers’ workstyle choices. The designer is presented in a realistic way such that their daily life seems attainable for others wishing to pursue a similar creative career. Thus, the journalist communicates the navigation of currently shifting labor practices. Little is discussed of product, rather the notion of gender fluidity and body politics takes a forward stance when reviewing aesthetics. The editors look for features that discuss social change rather than output or vanity.

Self-pronounced vintage clothing enthusiasts and ‘tea-drinkers’ [20], the founders of *Frankie* wanted a magazine that spoke directly to their like-minded eccentric readers [20]. The magazine covers design, art, photography, fashion, travel, music, craft, interiors and real-life stories, interlacing illustrations with photography on matte pages. *Frankie*’s activities go beyond their namesake magazine, with products such as the DIY book *A Little Bit Crafty*, a stationery line, and the coffee table book *Look What We Made*, which showcases local artisans. Less about big-picture activism, *Frankie* magazine’s policy on designer portrayals appears based on intimate story telling. Far from celebrity reports, examples of recent designer portrayals are personal accounts of their offbeat preferences and self-effacing humor. Featured designers are small-scale startups using simple and resourceful methods of getting their businesses off the ground, an approach to business and self-employment which seems attainable. Thus, it provides both justifications and reassurance for its young at heart audience that is navigating a disrupted and uncertain world.

The current proprietor/editor of *Fashion Weekly* declares that it is Brisbane’s leading fashion magazine. Publishing a quarterly digital magazine and daily-updated website, *Fashion Weekly* magazine’s editorial selection is highly trend driven. Examples of recent designer portraits tend towards reporting on the lifestyle of the designer, but unlike in the case of the characteristic *Frankie* designer, the *Fashion Weekly* designer is depicted as a more dynamic, ‘boss-girl’ who is very aware of her appearance in public and her glamorous status as a designer. This designer also realizes the power of networking. *Fashion Weekly* blurs the lines between design and styling. It cultivates not just personal style but discusses success and personal power. Thus, inspired perhaps by celebrity designer accounts, this blogger style of communication emphasizes the values of aspirational women-in-business, and more specifically in fashion and image making enterprises.

Style magazine’s co-owners wanted to create a magazine for locals containing lifestyle, fashion and gastronomy that supported small Brisbane businesses. With its unusual square format and glossy pages, the magazine provides its followers with ‘must-have’ local products, reports on newcomers and upcoming events in the city and on the nearby coastal areas. The magazine presents carefully curated luxe fashion shoots and exposés on lifestyle stories rather than featuring an individual designer. In this way the magazine is providing a strong styling service to its readership rather than discussing local, global or critical issues. However rather than fashion journalism as such it is a marketing vehicle for small businesses as most of the articles are either mixed, styled shoots or advertorial snapshots.

The Fashion Journal is aimed at ‘lovers of style, music, travel and beauty – for those who want to consume content that’s fresh, aspirational, relatable and humorous’ [21]. The publishers place themselves as forward-thinkers, approachable and offer an ‘alternative to expensive and outdated glossies’ [21]. The editors champion local brands but keep up to date with international labels and trends. The monthly print edition is free – distributed to retailers, shopping centers, cafes, hair salons and interestingly universities nationally, which would suggest that their target market is educated millennials. Editorial articles such as ‘Art meets fashion’ are culturally or socially based critiques on the modern lifestyle. Designer features as such are rare. Rather, several pages of designer snapshots appear on the turn pages which are

advertorial spaces with copy written by the designers themselves. The magazine does present fashion spreads of a dozen or more pages. So, although this publication has a strong appeal for the ‘in-the-know’ young millennial, similar to *Style* magazine and as McRobbie had recognized some time ago, its strong aesthetic appeals to a niche community thereby functioning as a good marketing vehicle for a select audience.

The large format *Brisbane News* is a free magazine available in shopping centers, other public areas, and delivered to households in the Brisbane metropolitan area. Local entrepreneurs are featured every week in the magazine with a fashion cover feature about once a month. Stories tend to appeal to a mainstream audience with a celebratory style of ‘talking up’ the designers’ positions. With perspectives such as ‘Brisbane designer brings Peruvian flair to Mercedes-Benz Fashion Festival’ or ‘London calling for Australian teen fashion designer’, the article headlines tend to elicit an ‘Oh wow!’ response [22]. There is often little discussion of consequence in the portrayals about the designers’ business models, convictions or concepts, keeping the fare easy to digest for a very broad audience. Nonetheless it raises the profile of the designer profiled, even if momentarily.

The local publications described above are diverse, and their staff writers tend to follow the company line of appealing to the potential advertising client. This points to the tensions arising between dissonant motivations. The designer believes that they are featured on their own merits because the public may be interested in their story. However, the publication is appealing to and binding readership with attention-grabbing stories of endeavor or niche tastes, thus increasing circulation which attracts advertising. The papers are also looking to schmooze the designer as a potential future advertising client by giving them ‘free editorial’. Meanwhile, the journalist has not necessarily conveyed a critical view of the designers’ business model, aesthetics or ‘real’ struggle. If the journalist were to tell the truth they risk rejection by the designer and other members of the highly networked fashion community and or disciplinary action from the paper as the article did not portray the potential designer-client in a favorable light. Indeed, to circumvent this issue, most designers are asked to write their own copy, thus leaving the journalist out in the cold altogether. Fashion journalists may therefore be seen by others and themselves as complacent staff writers. Some publications such as *Peppermint*, *Frankie* and *The Gentlewoman* beg to differ, offering their journalists the platform to ‘tell it how it is’. The question remains, how do these forms of fashion journalism affect the designer. In the next section I discuss the responses from designers who have been featured in some of the above publications. Although the publications are ‘only local’ it seems they do provide the designer with effective exposure, even though it may not be on their own terms.

5 Local Designers

Alice Veivers, the designer behind the Alice Nightingale label, self produces all of the product she sells in her small inner-city laneway boutique. She has her own e-commerce website and Etsy shop [23] since 2010. Products are also sold at The Finders Keepers Markets [24] held twice yearly in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Adelaide. Alice supplements her marketing with DIY social media posts. Alice herself

features heavily in the posts, showing images of working in her studio, while others are non-professional images of product. Although an anomaly exists between the ideals of local production and the connectivity provided by ICT, Alice believes that designers can make a place for themselves locally, especially in Brisbane precisely because it is a smaller city than Sydney or Melbourne. ‘There is so much competition in Melbourne. Everyone wants to go there because they think it is a fashion city’ [25]. Alice expresses strong local pride and applies the subtropical lifestyle preferences of her clientele to her work.

Luckman [26] observes that sellers need additional support to gain visibility. Alice’s ‘lucky break’ came about in 2011 when she was featured on the aggregating platform Etsy [23]. The article came to the attention of *Frankie* editors and Alice gained more publicity in 2012. Since then she has been steadily maintaining the (sole) income from her clothing line sales. The designer portrayal gave Alice a significant advantage, which underpinned her ongoing social media activity. According to Anderson [19], through digital media and social platforms, we have reached the recommendation age and reputation has become additional marketing collateral for the designer. This has led to a rise of the parallel culture-of-interest or the ‘micro culture era’ [19], which favors less geographic and more shared interests. There is a push for innovative customer engagement and a shift from the generic to the specific. According to Anderson, ‘mass culture will not fall, it will simply get less mass and niche culture will get less obscure’ [19]. The editorial feature in *Frankie* is significant because the publication notably represents an alternative more ‘wholesome’ lifestyle and values community. The magazine benefits from the designer portrayal by exemplifying Alice Veivers’ life style. In this way the magazine also retains its integrity and credibility. Alice benefits from the exposure of her product, albeit in a secondary position.

Several high fashion publications and blogs have presented the elite designer label Gail Sorronda founded by local designer Gail Reid, in editorial articles. Gail’s originality and creativity has attracted journalists keen to present unique and original ‘local’ work. As also experienced by Alice Nightingale, feature articles boost the visibility of the label, but the editorial platforms, and hence the target market, is different. Gail explains,

Black magazine and other New Zealand magazines have been good supporters. I was in Italian Vogue recently and I love being in there because they always present it beautifully. They’re somebody you respect and it kind of helps to validate what you are, professionally and creatively. That’s always nice for the ego but when it comes to sales, the local media reaches a lot of people. It’s not dressed up and as glossy, but people can just relate to it which helps us. You’ve got your aspirational element, but you’ve also got something else. You would think it would be the opposite but what is perceived as successful isn’t necessarily so. I feel like people do like the idea of supporting the local designer or just local business. Its as simple as that [27].

Publications like *Vogue* have high fashion credibility, often subscribed to by fashion leaders [28] unlike *Frankie* and *Peppermint*, which feature Alice’s work, that follow craft or sustainability agendas and therefore remain niche and on the margins [20]. Surprisingly, the print circulation of the two types of magazine, *Vogue* and *Frankie* is close. Although *Vogue* has the weight of mainstream fashion acceptance, and *Frankie* is on the fringes, the respective target audience reach is very similar. The images on Gail’s social media are from highly polished photoshoots of the designer’s

collection or images from magazine editorials of her garments. Appearances of Gail working in her studio are not part of the social media strategy.

Alice and Gail have an international reach in both media and sales. Through the online platforms Alice sells directly to overseas customers, but Gail's 'fashion reach' is greater which arguably nudges her into the mainstream. This is not only due to the high fashion press her label enjoys, but partly because she has been physically present at international events. For example, Gail was at Who's Next fashion fair in Milan (2010), where she received feedback from Anna Wintour, has had her collection presented on the runway with Dolce & Gabana (D&G), and was stocked for a time in the D&G boutique in Milan. Although, according to Gail, the marketing of the label is 'pretty organic' [27], echoing Vogue Australia's editor-in-chief, Edwina McCann's comments [29], Gail explains she rarely uses PR agents.

We did have PR agencies on and off depending, if we did fashion week for instance, we'd bring someone on board, just to help with the manpower of organisational processes, just trying to maximise exposure, but its fully sponsored [27].

Gail's view of her work is that it is artistic rather than craft based and for this reason appeals to a fashion forward audience.

Milenial designer Suzii K, is the youngest and least experienced of the designers interviewed, produces in her parents' home (in suburban Brisbane) and has found a large following through social networking activity. Suzi left her fashion course after six months of study to launch her own label. At nineteen she had received significant press coverage in the local *Brisbane News* magazine including a congratulatory cover story which pointed to her tender age and high ambitions. Within weeks she was invited to present at Brisbane Fashion Week, then at Sydney Fashion Week. By the end of the year she was asked to participate in New York Fashion Week in a showroom presentation. Suzi's rapid trajectory had a two fold beginning. The first and most interesting story for the public was based on her young age. However Suzi took this further and began blogging herself. Not shying away from writing and networking she took full advantage of the fashion week events and set about meeting the most influential people possible. Her self perpetuated popularity amongst fashion A-listers served to increase her social media 'fame' and she continued to be offered influencer advantages. However after about 18 months the original pretext of her interest (her relative youth within the fashion designer world) became irrelevant. Suzi's exposure began to slip and although she continued to follow up on the usual events she had lost the 'edge' endowed by the press. Suzi has continued to develop her strong networks within the industry but has failed to inspire local journalists into presenting more stories. Whereas the local media 'used' Suzi's story to attract attention to the paper (rather than the designer), Suzi saw this very differently. She believed her work to have fashion merit and was surprised when after a few years, as her youth was no longer pertinent, she was not called upon for stories.

The ideal creative partnership can take place when designer and journalist collaborate meaningfully. Several years ago in my position as proprietor for my own label I was approached by a journalist and asked if they could have 'exclusive rights' to my stories. I was quite flattered at the time and did not realize the importance of this request. Today I realize that the at least monthly reports kept the label front of mind for

the many readers of that paper. Marketing and advertising agencies and campaigns understand this but designers less so.

There is little evidence in the interviews conducted for this study that journalists and designers sought mutually beneficial relationships and strategically planned publications together. On the contrary, designers felt adulated, would take advantage of discussing how they were presented in the press but did not understand the reciprocity that could have taken place, which may have led to a long term and mutually beneficial relationship.

6 Discussion

After reviewing the portrayals of independent fashion designers in the local media, I present three findings in this study. First, as already detected by McRobbie [18] some decades ago, designers and journalists' expectations of each other are mismatched, however the misalignment has slightly shifted in the digital age. Second, the local press, although humble and perhaps unsophisticated or derivative, arguably brings the designer more returns than prestigious international publications. Third, fashion journalism (as distinct from social media/blogging) has filtered to the top with some publications taking on higher order topics and disseminating designer stories and issues (rather than products or personalities) amongst communities of shared values. Unfortunately, the designer/journalist relationship while brimming with potential still seems stymied by asymmetric expectations from both sides. Despite the current roadblocks, new stories are nonetheless evolving.

An analysis of the data shows that local publicity is as relevant if not more so than global reach. Thus, the first problem that arises is that the emerging designer falsely expects the journalist to facilitate the making of their 'fame'. Designers do not necessarily understand the difference between editorial and marketing copy and their specific functions. Designers falsely believe fashion communication as a requirement to establishing a reputation and garnering sales. Many emerging designers now realize that either they may not be in the right place or know the right press or that it would take too long to be discovered. They therefore take matters into their own hands reaching for the recently available affordances of the Internet. The designer does not seem to understand that consuming the vision on the page lies far from purchasing the garment.

The second problem amongst designers is their confusion between the different forms and functions of fashion communication. Designer Alber Elbaz asks, 'is it about talent or fame, working or networking, curating or creating, packaging or content'? [30] The power of editorial content lies in its perception as non-biased non-influenced freedom of expression. However, it is no wonder that designers are confused about this as many are approached by magazines to place an advertisement in exchange for an 'editorial' feature of the designer. The message this conveys to the designer is that editorial content can be bought and in doing so can understandably be perceived as advertising, thus functioning purely for the benefit of the designer and not necessarily for the reputation of the journalist as a critical writer.

Nonetheless, niche designer products and the niche fashion press is gradually influencing mainstream fashion communication. I argue that some fashion journalists/media are paving a new way by focusing on the bigger pictures, which affect the public globally (and locally) rather than smaller style trends which have become the remit of the bloggers and Instagrammers. Innovative directions on the fringes of the mainstream fashion industry appear to be making some cultural change. Niche businesses are frequently underpinned with a strong ethical and moral conviction as well as a unique aesthetic. The designers are keen to tell their story because their motivation often goes beyond creating an aesthetically pleasing product. Indeed, the product is generally built with principle and a message to ‘change the world’ in some way. The missions of emerging local publications appear to align with these convictions. These two business models have much in common. They share the same goals and aspirations and talent for creativity. Does this help further the viability of IFDs? I posit that along with the affordances of technology, niche fashion journalism in the post digital turn has arguably improved the viability of small-scale independent designers. Interestingly, according to the designers, the closer to home and more ‘authentic’ the fashion reports or specifically the portrayals of local designers, the more they benefit. Not just personality (as is the case with celebrity designers) but personality, approachability and conviction is important in these portrayals. The designers must appear accessible or relatable rather than aspirational. I suggest this new crop of fashion magazines has reinvented the purpose of fashion journalism and thereby can regain readership or even develop a new more ‘serious’ type of fashion audience which in turn rebuilds the credibility and/or purpose of fashion journalism. Ultimately, it is the community bound by likeminded values and convictions that creates repute and success for both the designer and the journalist.

The position of fashion journalists in this new order is a topic for further discussion. Not only is their ability to critically interpret macro trends for the fashion consuming public of interest, but their ability as arbiters of taste and judgement of good design are areas that also deserve further investigation, as is their candid portrayal of the world of the independent designer. The notion of fashion journalists collaborating with fashion designers as cultural producers may also emerge more strongly in the future and may warrant investigation.

7 Conclusion

In this study, I speak to designers, journalists, their educators and advisors. Although designers may have unrealistic expectations of fashion communication and believe journalists should enable their rise to fame, some are beginning to realize the influence of local platforms of engagement and the value of fashion journalists as critical, creative co-professionals. Indeed, it appears local content written by local insiders is often more effective than glamourous, distant publications. Journalists still hold the weight of objective observer and the power of referral. Therefore, designers would do well to build collaborative and effective relationships with their creative peers, fashion journalists.

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Grotesque Images in Fashion Ads: An Exploration of the Effect of Grotesque Images on Narrative Engagement

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Abstract. This paper explores the effect of grotesque fashion ads (a combination of drama and aesthetic elements) on two dimensions of narrative engagement: narrative presence, a process in which individuals leave their previous knowledge and are adsorbed by the narrative [6] and emotional engagement, which refers to the emotional attachment caused by the narrative [3]. Results of this experiment found that there are no significant differences on narrative presence and emotional engagement based on exposure to a grotesque ad vs. non-grotesque ad. However, participants exposed to the non-grotesque ad reported higher brand attitudes and purchase intentions than those exposed to the grotesque ad. I also, found that only narrative presence significantly affects brand attitudes when both variables are included in the regression model (narrative presence and emotional engagement). Finally, brand attitudes positively influence purchase intentions.

Keywords: Grotesque images · Narrative presence · Emotional engagement

1 Introduction

Stories are captivating and entertaining [4]. Everybody enjoys hearing a delightful story. Sharing experiences and anecdotes in a story format remains the standard manner of communication [9]. One of the most explored mechanisms of narrative engagement in the literature is narrative presence, also called narrative transportation, which is the process where the audience detaches from previous knowledge and immerse into the story. The literature provides evidence that narrative ads can function as a belief change mechanism through transportation [6]. Moreover, narrative ads significantly affect product involvement, and reduce the consumer's tendency to create arguments against the brand [9]. Narrative process has been widely explored in the verbal format, however, little research has been done on the effect of images on narrative process. Some scholars support the notion that images provide a visual representation of the story, where the viewer is not required to imagine the events. Therefore, transportation fails [6, 9]. Other scholars argue that aesthetic elements can significantly affect engagement [12]. In fact, luxurious images displayed in ads enhance brand engagement [8].

In this paper, I address the narrative process from a different approach. I incorporate grotesque images, a combination of dramatic and aesthetic elements in fashion ads, and

its effect on narrative engagement. For instance, a beautiful woman trying to fish a purse with a hook while there is a man floating in the pool apparently dead. This might sound like a scene taken from a horror movie. However, this is the description of an ad used by Jimmy Choo. Grotesque images in fashion advertising have been used by other luxury brands such as Dolce and Gabbana, Versace, Gucci, etc. to engage consumers. Little research has been done to examine the effect of grotesque images on narrative engagement. Phillips and McQuarrie [12] tested the effect of aesthetic properties such as grotesque images in fashion advertising, their results revealed that grotesque ads in fashion ads are an effective mechanism to narrative presence. In their study they neglected to test the effect of emotional engagement on brand evaluations. For their study, they only included “fashion consumers,” a segment they defined as consumers who are interested and can afford high fashion clothing (e.g. a hundred to thousand dollars’ worth). This study attempts to contribute to the body of literature by explaining how grotesque images can positively affect brand attitudes through two dimensions of narrative engagement: narrative presence and emotional engagement. In this paper, I use a more affordable brand, and I interview younger consumers who are more likely to purchase apparel at lower prices than the ones used in the Phillips and McQuarrie [12] sample. Results of this study will help advertisers identify which aesthetic elements in ads are more effective to improve consumers’ engagement and attitudes toward the brand, and how those attitudes can lead to purchase intention.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Narrative Process

Stories have the potential to catch consumers’ attention by involving, entertaining, and captivating them. Stories are also a creative alternative to display a product and demonstrate how it should be used. Narratives are composed of two elements: chronology and causality. Chronology is based on the idea that events occur over time, and narrative processing organizes events in function of a temporal dimension. Time is presented in the narrative as episodes that unfold through a beginning, middle, and end. Causality is the connection between the story elements and the inferred causality [4].

2.2 Narrative Presence

Narrative presence was defined by Green and Brock [6] as a convergent process where highly transported individuals disconnect from previous knowledge, experiences, and schemas to immerse into the story. They distinguish narrative presence from the elaboration likelihood model (ELM), a divergent process in which individuals combine their own opinions, previous knowledge, and experiences to elaborate a message. In contrast to the ELM model, narrative presence requires a single focus (e.g. the story), and transported individuals are more likely to divorce from their own knowledge and experiences to immerse into the story. Scholars have proposed that narrative presence can change beliefs by reducing resistance to persuasion [9] and by evoking emotional engagement [2].

Reduce Resistance to Persuasion. Ads presented in a narrative format reduce consumers' tendencies to create product arguments. Persuasive arguments might be crucial for non-narrative ads. However, when ads are displayed in a narrative format, the story influences consumers' attitudes and product evaluation rather than arguments [9]. Scholars have argued that implicit messages in luxury brand ads enhance consumer engagement, and the narrative has a significant effect on consumers' judgment and decision making [8].

Emotional Engagement. According to Appel and Richter [2], the level of need for affect influences transportation and persuasion caused by the narrative. Moreover, transportation into narratives involving romantic and seductive stories improves engagement with the ad; this is particularly more prominent for luxury brand ads. Fantasies are often related to the wish of fulfillment in terms of luxury products. Narrative presence mediates the relationship between the focus on dreams and fantasies, and the wish of fulfillment. Beyond status aspirations, narrative presence in luxury brand ads includes aesthetic aspirations such as classic, elegant, chic, and fashionable [8] p. 308. Aesthetic elements in fashion ads can increase consumer engagement. For instance, Grotesque images in fashion ads can function as route to engagement [12]. Additionally, highly transported individuals are more likely to develop more positive evaluations of the narrative characters [6, 7]. In fact, transportation and identification with characters have a positive effect on change in knowledge, behavioral intentions, and attitudes [11].

2.3 Narrative Engagement

Narrative engagement includes four interconnected dimensions: narrative understanding, attentional focus, emotional engagement, and narrative presence. Narrative understanding refers to the ease of comprehending the narrative. Consumers tend to be unaware of the comprehensiveness of the narrative unless comprehension fails. Attentional focus, like the previous dimension, occurs when transported individuals are unaware that they are focused, unless they lose the focused attention and they need to redirect their attention into the narrative. Consumers' focus and understanding of the narrative can mediate or moderate the two subsequent dimensions. Emotional engagement refers to the emotional attachment to the narrative, especially the attachments to the characters. Narrative presence refers to being present in the narrative by leaving the actual world and entering the narrative [3]. In this paper, I explore narrative presence and emotional engagement.

2.4 Images and Narrative Engagement

In line with Green and Brock [6], Lien and Chen [9] propose that visual narrative ads have no effect on transportation. Their study results indicate that narrative presence does not mediate the relationship between the visual narrative and product evaluation; this phenomenon only occurs when consumers are exposed to verbal narratives. They argue that images displayed in the ad reduce the need for consumers to imagine the events taking place in the narrative. Consequently, transportation does not occur when

consumers are exposed to visual narratives. They propose that verbal narrative ads are more effective predictors of attitudes through transportation than visual narratives. In contrast, Kim et al. [8], propose that consumers are more likely to engage with luxury brand images displayed in the ad when they are perceived as a mechanism for wish of fulfilment. They used print ads with no text in them to test the effect of narrative ads on consumers' engagement across three cultures (French, Korean, and Australian). Their study found that when implicit images in luxury brands ads allowed consumers to picture themselves in the story, narrative ads displaying European characters lead to narrative presence, which enhances persuasion and brand engagement. Moreover, different aesthetic elements result in different forms of engagement with the ads. For instance, grotesque images in fashion advertising enhances transportation, and transported individuals are more likely to have a better brand experience [12].

2.5 Grotesque Images in Fashion Ads

The use of the word “grotesque” in fashion advertising research was pioneered by Phillips and McQuarrie [12]. They based the meaning of the word grotesque on the romantic poet and dramatist Victor Hugo, who emphasized the power of the unification of the grotesque and the sublime, from this sense grotesque is required to experience the sublime. They identify the sublime as an intense aesthetic experience. For this study, grotesque ads are defined as an alternative art representation in which drama (grotesque element) and aesthetics such as luxuries and fantasies (sublime elements) are combined to engage the viewer. Many prestigious brands in the fashion industry rely on grotesque images to captivate consumers' engagement and curiosity [1], such as Dolce and Gabbana, Versace, Gucci, Jimmy Choo etc. An example of a grotesque image can be found in a Versace ad that displays a model lying on the floor, apparently dead, with a bitten apple in her hand; making a metaphorical connection to Snow White. Green and Brock [6], found that both fictional non-fictional narratives have a positive effect on narrative presence. Additionally, a narrative presence experience is an outcome of the individual's leaving the real world to immerse into the narrative, it has little to do with the emotions caused from the narrative. Therefore, individuals can be transported into narratives that evoke negative emotions such as fear, sadness or anger [7].

This paper attempts to explore how grotesque images can enhance engagement with the ad through narrative presence and emotional engagement. I also propose that engagement influences brand attitudes, and better brand attitudes lead to higher purchase intentions.

3 Hypotheses

Based on the literature described above, I propose the following hypotheses:

- H1a: Participants exposed to the grotesque ad will experience higher narrative presence than those exposed to the non-grotesque ad.

- H1b: Participants exposed to the grotesque ad will experience higher emotional engagement than those exposed to the non-grotesque ad.
- H1c: Participants exposed to the grotesque ad will experience higher brand attitudes than those exposed to the non-grotesque ad.
- H1d: Participants exposed to the grotesque ad will experience higher purchase intention than those exposed to the non-grotesque ad.
- H2a: Narrative presence will positively affect brand attitudes.
- H2b: Emotional engagement will positively affect brand attitudes.
- H3: Brand attitudes will positively affect purchase intentions.

4 Method

4.1 Design

This study uses a between-subjects single factor design which includes two levels of the Independent variable (non-grotesque ad vs. grotesque ad).

4.2 Sample

Participants were recruited through the advertising participants pool at the University of Texas at Austin to participate in the study from November to December 2018, after obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Participants received class credit as an incentive to participate in the study. They were asked to fill out an online survey using Qualtrics software. After discarding incomplete surveys, the remaining sample consisted of 167 participants, which consisted of 71% females and 29% males. The majority was White, representing 57% of the sample, followed by Hispanic-Latino (24%), Asian (17%), and other ethnic groups 2%. Age ranged from under 20 to 30 years and older. Forty-seven percent were under 20, 52% were between 20 and 30, and 1% were older than 30.

4.3 Stimuli

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions (grotesque ad vs. non-grotesque ad). The brand chosen for this study was Sisley because it is a fashionable and elegant brand that is affordable for the sample I targeted for the study. This French fashion brand is well known for its controversial advertising campaigns. In contrast to the Dolce and Gabbana, Jimmy Choo and Versace ads used in the Phillips and McQuarrie [12] study, this brand is affordable for any college student, and their target is the youth population.

For the treatment group, participants were exposed to an ad that displayed a slim beautiful woman wearing a black jumpsuit, partially in a dryer machine. Half of her body in the drying machine and the other half on the floor; eyes closed, apparently dead. For the control group, participants were exposed to a more traditional ad. The ad displayed a slim beautiful model, wearing a similar black jumpsuit, standing against a white background with a smile on her face.

4.4 Variables

Control Variables

Familiarity with the brand. Familiarity with the brand was measured on a five-point Likert scale. Participants were instructed to indicate how familiar they were with the brand ($M = 1.81$, $SD = .66$), (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$).

Independent Variable

Grotesque Ads. Grotesque ads are defined in this paper as ads presented in an artistic fashion, which combine dramatic images with some aesthetic elements (e.g. luxurious and fashionable). To develop a manipulation check scale for grotesque, I used ten adjectives describing a grotesque ad with their respective antonyms to create a nine-point differential semantic scale. Items include: real-surreal, ordinary-bizarre, artless-artful, calming-shocking, literal-metaphorical, undramatic-dramatic, realistic-fanciful, uncreative-creative, regular-freaky, and non-grotesque-grotesque. After computing a T-test, statistical significant differences were found among the two groups: non-grotesque ($M = 3.65$, $SD = .12$) vs. grotesque ($M = 6.41$, $SD = .10$), $p < .05$.

Mediating Variables

Narrative engagement was measured through two different dimensions: narrative presence and emotional engagement. Participants were asked to indicate on a seven-point Likert scale how they agreed or disagreed with each of the statements. A three-item scale was adapted from Busselle and Bilandzic [3] to measure narrative presence ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.23$), items include: I was mentally involved in the ad; I could picture myself in the scene shown in the ad; while thinking about the ad, I could easily picture the events in it taking place. (Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$). A three-item scale was adapted from Busselle and Bilandzic [3] to measure emotional engagement ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.17$). Items include: The story affected me emotionally; while looking at the ad, I felt empathy for the characters; I felt emotionally attached to the characters. (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$).

Dependent Variables

Attitudes. A seven-point semantic differential scale was adapted from Spears and Singh [13] to measure attitudes toward the brand ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.39$). Items include: unpleasant-pleasant, unlikable-likeable, unappealing-appealing, tasteless-tasteful, artless-artful, and bad-good. (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$).

Purchase Intention. A seven-point Likert scale was adapted from Martin and Steward [10] to measure purchase intention ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.33$). Items include: How likely are you to purchase the Sisley product described in the ad?; How likely are you to frequent a store that sells the branded product?; How likely are you to purchase another product than the one described in the ad but is made by Sisley?; How likely are you to recommend Sisley to your friends? (Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$).

5 Results

A T-test was computed to test H1a to H1d. No statistically significant differences with narrative presence were found on participants exposed to the non-grotesque ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.23$) vs. grotesque ad ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.20$), ($t = 1.85$, $df = 165$, $p = .06$). Therefore, H1a was not supported. No statistically significant differences with emotional engagement were found on participants exposed to the non-grotesque ($M = 2.27$, $SD = 1.10$) vs. grotesque ad ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.24$), ($t = -.97$, $df = 165$, $p = .33$). Therefore, H1b was not supported. However, I found statistically significant differences with brand attitudes and purchase intentions based on exposure to the non-grotesque vs. the grotesque ad. Participants exposed to the non-grotesque ad reported higher brand attitudes ($M = 4.84$, $SD = 1.15$) than those exposed to the grotesque ad ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 1.35$), ($t = 6.21$, $df = 165$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H1c was not supported. Regarding H1d, participants exposed to the non-grotesque ad reported higher purchase intentions ($M = 2.98$, $SD = 1.31$) than those exposed to the grotesque ad ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.32$), ($t = 2.37$, $df = 165$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H1d was not supported.

Regarding H2a, multiple linear regression indicated that narrative presence ($\beta = .38$) significantly predicts brand attitudes. Thus, H2a was supported. However, emotional engagement did not have a significant effect on brand attitudes. Therefore, H2b was not supported. The combination of variables to predict brand attitudes from narrative presence and emotional engagement was statistically significant, ($R = .44$, $F = 13.11$, $p < .05$). Only narrative presence significantly predicts brand attitudes when the two variables are included. The R indicates that 44% of the variance in brand attitudes was explained by the model. Note that I controlled for familiarity with the brand within this model.

Regarding H3, simple linear regression was conducted to investigate how well brand attitudes predict purchase intention. Data indicated that brand attitudes ($\beta = .47$) significantly predicts purchase intention, ($R = .58$, $F = 40.77$, $p < .05$). Therefore, H3 was supported. Note that I controlled for familiarity with the brand within this model as well.

6 Discussion

This study contributes to fashion brand advertising by identifying the effect of grotesque ads on narrative presence and emotional engagement. Additionally, I explore the effect of narrative presence and emotional engagement on brand attitudes, and how those attitudes influence consumers' purchase intentions.

Data indicated that there was not a significant difference between the non-grotesque and the grotesque ad on narrative presence and emotional engagement. However, I found statistical differences on brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Unexpectedly, participants exposed to the non-grotesque ad reported higher brand attitudes and purchase intentions than those exposed to the grotesque ad. These findings contradict Phillips and McQuarrie's [12] findings, that provide evidence that aesthetic elements and grotesque images have a positive effect on consumer engagement. Note that their

sample only included women that are highly involved with fashion, such as women that had spent more than average consumers on clothes; about half of their sample had spent more than \$5,000 on apparel within a year. I only included college students in my sample, which leads to the conclusion that traditional and simple ads are more effective on young consumers. Practitioners that attempt to reach young consumers should use more traditional ads rather than the dramatic and fanciful grotesque ads described in this paper. Another rationality I propose is that the role of women in advertising has changed through the years. According to an Ad age article [14], after the mid-20 century the image of women in ads paradigm shifted from a consumer of exclusively domestic goods to a more empowered woman who fights for equal rights in the work force. The ad I used as stimuli portrayed a woman in a vulnerable position, and that is not the way many women see themselves. Gill 2008, [15] argues that women are not portrayed in advertising as submissive figures as often as they used to, women are now depicted as dynamic, independent, and strong beings more regularly in ads. This might be the explanation of why the grotesque ad was not affective in this sample.

In parallel with Green and Brook [6], results indicate that narrative presence had a positive effect on brand attitudes. In contrast, emotional engagement did not have a significant effect on brand attitudes. These findings support and contradict the Murphy et al. [11] study at the same time because they argue that narrative presence and emotional engagement can positively influence behavioral intentions and attitudes. These results remark the importance of narrative presence on brand attitudes, calling practitioners to create ads that allow consumers to immerse into the ad's story. Ads displayed in a narrative format decreases the tendency to generate arguments, and this phenomenon influences product involvement [9]. Additionally, narrative presence increases story consistent-beliefs [6]. Moreover, data revealed that brand attitudes have a positive effect on purchase intentions, meaning that positive attitudes can lead to purchase behavior.

This study contributes to the body of literature by providing evidence that non-grotesque ads are more effective than grotesque ads on attitudes and purchase intentions. These results contradict Phillips and McQuarrie [12] findings. Results of this study lead to the conclusion that non-grotesque ads are more effective among young consumers who are more likely to purchase affordable brands. I argue that grotesque ads were more successful in their study, not only because they recruited a different sample, but also the image of women in advertising has changed over time. Today, women are being less portrayed as victims and more as independent and empowered individuals. Practitioners who attempt to reach young consumers should use non-grotesque ads. Moreover, it is important that the ads allow for immersion into the story, as it has positive impact on consumers' attitudes. And positive attitudes increase the likelihood of purchase intentions.

7 Limitations and Future Research

One of the limitations of this study is that I neglected to ask participants how much they spend on clothes. The amount of money they invest on apparel might have influenced their level of engagement and brand attitudes. Additionally, I attempted to include level

of fashion involvement but more than 70% of the sample reported to be highly involved with fashion. Therefore, I discarded that variable. There are some variables that might mediate or moderate the effect of grotesque images on the dependent variables that were not included in this study such as curiosity, narrative understanding, and narrative focus. Future research should explore those variables. Moreover, I did not obtain the results I was expecting in terms of narrative engagement including both dimensions: narrative presence and emotional engagement. I only measured those variables, and I did not manipulate them as Escalas [5] did in her study. Escalas [5], asked participants to imagine themselves using a salon care shampoo. She argues that transportation is possible if consumers are instructed to imagine themselves using the product. Future research can approach narrative presence by asking participants to elaborate in their head the events taking place in the narrative. Asking participants to use their imagination to create the event in their heads might lead to a different outcome.

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Touching the Cloth: Haptics in Fashion Digital Communication

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Abstract. Touch sensations are important elements of fashion retail that are significantly curtailed in the e-commerce user experience. Online, touch-related apparel information is only alluded to through audio-visual and textual clues. Trends in haptic technologies and applications indicate computer-mediated tactile experiences might fill this sensory void. Research into these developments and their implication for fashion brands is, to our knowledge, still limited. To address this gap, the author intends to conduct research - via appropriate qualitative and quantitative methodologies – into the following topics: how tactile properties are conveyed online; the relevance of tactility for product returns; fashion managers' interest towards haptic technologies; and a potential user group's perception of haptics.

Keywords: Touch · Haptics · Fashion digital communication · E-commerce

1 Introduction

From the novelty of Le Bon Marché department store in 1880s Paris - where ladies could indulge in socially acceptable modes of touching [1] - to Farfetch's mixed-reality beta-version of the "Store of the Future" in contemporary London [2], fashion retailers have always aimed to offer consumers entering their premises a sensory touch experience which includes physical [3] and, more recently, virtual access to products via in-store digital devices [4–6]. Yet online the tactile experience is, at best, limited [7]. Developments in haptic technologies suggest a more sophisticated, mediated tactile experience may become reality, filling the sensory "void" [8] between reality and virtuality in the experience of fashion. This research proposal briefly describes these issues and posits the direction of future investigations.

2 Background

Touch is the first of our senses to develop, providing us with the means to access the external world via haptic exploration [9]. Hence, it has long been a topic of speculation and the object of research, from antiquity to present day haptic technologies, which promise to narrow the gap between the off- and the online experience of fashion.

2.1 The Sense of Touch

Touching is a fundamental human need [10]. Since antiquity, the sense of touch has been the subject of philosophical speculation, intellectual debate and scientific enquiry [11] possibly because of its complexity – it is distributed throughout our body. The sense of touch is in fact sub-served by the somatosensory system, a term deriving from the Greek word *soma*, or body. Together with the vestibular system (which oversees the movement and position of the body in space) and the visual system, the purpose of the somatosensory system is to relay information to the brain concerning “the mechanical state of the body that it inhabits” [12]. Unlike the vestibular and the visual systems, however, the somatosensory system is distributed in - and collects input from - the entire body: skin (mucosal, hairy and glabrous); connective tissues (tendons and ligaments); and muscles [12].

Despite the complexity of somatic input arising from the somatosensory system, the sense of touch is usually described as having two distinct modalities, or states: kinesthetic and tactile. *Kinesthetic* refers to the sensation of forces and torques relayed by connective tissues and muscles. *Tactile* indicates sensations of pressure, shear, and vibration picked up by mechanoreceptors (specialized sensory organs) embedded in the skin. Hence, *somatic information* includes pain sensations, thermal sensations (hot and cold), proprioceptive signals (internal stimuli arising from tissues, ligaments and muscles), and exteroceptive signals (external stimuli affecting the skin) [13].

The palm of the hand and the sole of the foot are particularly sensitive to touch sensation due to the density of mechanoreceptors present in the glabrous skin [14]. Not surprisingly, it is the hand - an organ which unifies both sensory and motor functions [12] - which is generally associated with touch sensation and manipulation. Information attained through touch with one’s hands “is important for the evaluation of products that vary in terms of material properties related to texture, hardness, temperature and weight” such as an item of clothing [15].

2.2 Haptic Technologies

We define haptics as computational systems and applications aiming to *artificially reproduce the sense of touch* [13, 14]. The term *haptics* derives from the Greek word *haptethai* meaning “of or relating to” the sense of touch [1]; it is used within diverse disciplines to imply both the act of sensing and its effects.

A haptics-based system can be described as a system which enables human-computer interaction by exploiting kinesthetics and/or tactile modalities [16]. Creative, technical, economic and market constraints have influenced haptic technology development, contributing to the fragmentation of systems and solutions [17, 18]. Culbertson [14] categorizes haptic systems based on the type of interaction they require (graspable, wearable, touchable, contactless or mid-air) and the type of mechanism used (kinesthetic, skin deformation, and vibration). Haptics can be found all along the reality-virtuality continuum [19] in devices as diverse as, for example, smartphones, wearables or virtual reality displays [17].

Haptic technology has “immense potential within it to bring about a drastic change in [the] communication field” [20] in the near future. Instances of considerable financial

investment in haptic startups and in spinoffs developing haptic applications [21] and the recent launch of industry-driven conferences [22] hint at haptic technology's potential for economic value creation. According to analyst firm Markets and Markets, by 2020 haptics will be a USD 30 billion industry [23].

Haptic marketing will become strategic in consumer industries [24]. Haptics technologies will play into the trend towards a more immersive digital customer experience [25, 26] and contribute to a radical shift in consumer orientation towards tactility [27]. Given this scenario, fashion brands need to consider the role haptics – and other sensory-enabling technologies - will play in their digital communication and e-commerce strategies [28].

2.3 Haptics in Fashion E-Commerce

Fashion e-commerce is expected to reach a turnover of EUR 542 billion in 2019 and reach EUR 757 billion by 2023. Within this category, apparel represents the largest segment [29]. Despite this trend, the e-commerce shopping experience is still characterized by “a dearth of sensory input” [8]. The lack of physical inspection possibilities - not being able to touch, feel, or try out a product before buying it [30] - is perceived as a major barrier [8]. Cognitively congruent audio-visual sensory online strategies can elicit positive consumer response and increase purchase intention [31] [32]. But touch evaluation - to varying degrees based on individual need [15] - is “a critical and symbolic aspect of the apparel purchase decision-making process” [3].

Haptic technologies and devices promise to fill the tactile lacuna, thereby narrowing the gap between the online, virtual experience of fashion and the situated, embodied practice of dress in real life [33, 34]. Consumer acceptance and readiness for haptic technologies will need to be assessed [28], but a recent study conducted on a panel of university students suggests [8] that haptic devices such as interactive gloves may readily find acceptance with specific fashion consumer market segments.

3 Research Objectives

When shopping for clothes online, we cannot feel them. Haptic technologies might change this, impacting fashion digital communication and the online consumer experience [8]. Yet insofar as the fashion system is concerned, research on touch in fashion digital communication, and the potential impact of the forthcoming “haptic revolution” [17] is, to date and to the author’s best knowledge, still limited. The author intends to address this gap by conducting the following research:

- Qualitative research on how fashion brands currently express functional and hedonic tactile properties online;
- Quantitative analysis of a representative data set of product returns, leading to an assessment of the relevance of tactility in the online sales of the fashion firm supplying the data;

- Quali-quantitative research using a haptics application already developed for fashion e-commerce to investigate the perception of haptics within a representative sample of potential adopters (university students);
- Qualitative research on fashion digital managers' perception of haptic technologies.

It is the author's wish that in carrying out this research, she will make a relevant contribution to the community of practice in digital communication, fashion studies and haptics. Furthermore, the research will have implications for the fashion industry.

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Communication Crisis in Fashion: From the Rana Plaza Tragedy to the Bravo Tekstil Factory Crisis

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Abstract. This paper addresses the state of the question regarding crisis communication and corporate social responsibility, going on to describe the fashion industry system. For this, two crisis cases in the fashion industry are analyzed: Rana Plaza and Bravo Tekstil Factory. The Rana Plaza case is the worst accident in the history of fashion manufacturing. The management of the crisis on the part of the individual brands was extremely diverse and led them towards different communications scenarios. However, another crisis emerged at that moment: the industry itself and its manufacturing methods were effectively called into question. In fact, this issue has continued to be controversial and has led to an interesting public debate that had been demonstrated in the crisis in 2017. The crisis cases analyzed, bringing together the facts and the communicative reactions of the brands, as well as the media. This paper seeks to meet three objectives: stress the importance of communication with regard to the management of the crisis; highlight the link between crisis communication and corporate social responsibility; focus attention on the fashion industry, where intangible values acquire considerable importance and, therefore, are especially affected by crises. Our discussion and conclusions highlight the need to understand this kind of crisis by considering other perspectives and questioning some of the traditional ways of approaching the matter of crisis communication.

Keywords: Communication crisis · Fashion industry ·
Fashion manufacturing · Rana Plaza · Bravo Tekstil Factory

1 Introduction

The Rana Plaza case is the worst accident in the history of fashion manufacturing. The management of the crisis on the part of the individual brands was extremely diverse and led them towards different communications scenarios. However, another crisis also emerged at that moment: the industry itself and its manufacturing methods were effectively called into question. In fact, this issue has continued to be controversial and has led to an interesting public debate, as demonstrated by the Bravo Tekstil Factory crisis in 2017.

The events at Rana Plaza and the Bravo Tekstil Factory raise different questions that pose a challenge regarding crisis communication, given that we are dealing with an industry-wide crisis featuring multiple voices and multiple reactions.

This paper seeks to meet two objectives: (a) to stress the importance of communication with regard to the management of crises, especially within a digital context; (b) to focus attention on the fashion industry, where intangible values acquire considerable importance and, therefore, are especially affected by crises.

First, this paper addresses the state of the question regarding crisis communication, going on to describe the fashion industry system, and the new scenario for fashion crises in the digital era. The crisis cases analyzed outline the facts and bring together the communicative reactions of the brands, as well as the media. Our discussion and conclusions highlight the need to understand this kind of crisis by considering other perspectives and questioning some of the traditional ways of approaching the matter of crisis communication.

2 Communication Crisis

Studies relating to crisis management within the business world in the 1960's introduced the concept of crisis to the communication field [1]. Evolving practices within the realm of crisis management in subsequent decades led to numerous studies that have linked crisis and communication, to the point in which communication has become one of the most important aspects of the crisis. In this respect, we find two essential approaches relating to the link between communication and crisis.

On the one hand, we find what we might call the "essential link" approach, which encompasses those authors who argue that crises, by their very nature, already have a communicative element: given that they have a public and harmful dimension with regard to the image of an institution or organization, crises always affect reputational aspects [2] and, therefore, communicative aspects [3, 4].

On the other hand, we find what we might call the "instrumental link" approach, which focuses on the idea that there is a communicative dimension when it comes to solving crises: communication is a tool that helps to present and manage the crisis [5–7].

The "essential link" approach to crises is more all-encompassing with regard to communication and certainly does not disregard the instrumental part, encompassing it within its definition. In this crisis approach, when it is explained that crises always affect facets of public image and institutional reputation, the role of public reaction in the crisis is being highlighted. That is to say, it is the aspect perceived by the public, and amongst them the media, which leads a crisis to be perceived as such. Therefore, the best way of managing a crisis will be to take these perceptions into account, together with their link with reputational aspects. In this sense, we agree with Ruff & Aziz in defining a crisis as "any incident or situation, whether real, rumored or alleged, that can focus negative attention on a company or organization internally, in the media or before key audiences" [3].

Among the traditional types of crises that have been analyzed from an academic perspective, there are various approaches that also enable us to focus closely on the communicative dimension of crises. One of the most important classifications for this study distinguishes between foreseeable crises and unforeseeable crises [3, 8–10]. Foreseeable crises are those that are managed gradually and betray certain symptoms or trigger alerts that facilitate their early management.

Unforeseeable crises, however, emerge suddenly by surprise. Logically, in the case of foreseeable crises, management organizations would appear to be more prepared in terms of their response capacity. In this respect, some authors distinguish between companies and realms that are more susceptible to crises than others [7, 11]. Two classic examples consist of nuclear energy [12] and aviation accidents [13, 14].

These are, therefore, sectors in which reputation can be called more blatantly into question and for whom it is essential to manage responsibility vis-à-vis the public. In this paper we shall explain how the fashion industry, due to the way in which it has evolved in recent decades, may also be considered to be a sensitive realm of activity.

2.1 Communication Crisis in the Digital Era

With the arrival of the Internet, communication crisis management has had to adapt. Internet is not a tool, but a strategy which needs to be planned and executed [15] and organizations have started using these media to manage crisis situations [16].

Digital platforms are changing the traditional ‘one-to-many’ communication model to a ‘many-to-many’ model, in which trust and transparency are the key criteria [17]. Another change in the digital era consists of ‘consumer-to-consumer’ conversations [18], where users are empowered to express their views, and this has created a ‘new equality in communication’.

The effects of this high interactivity may have positive or negative consequences for companies [19], and public relations managers have to take into account the implications of this faster, wider and unmediated communication scenario [20].

The characteristics of effective crisis communication management in the digital era consist of measures that are credible, committed, efficient, responsible and resolving in nature [21]; these are no different from non-digital crisis communication management, but involve other possibilities.

One of the possibilities offered by the Internet is personalization and segmentation according to target audiences, and social networks constitute one of the most effective means for companies to channel digital reputation [22].

Social networks have a dramatic impact on reputation [23] and they allow a closer, even affective interaction between brands and users [24]. Thanks to social networks, brands can become a generator of value that directly impacts the level of trust and loyalty of the consumer [25]. The possibility of segmentation of the target audience offered by social platforms allows the relationship between the consumer and the brand to be consolidated. Therefore, companies design different content strategies for each social network. This is a way of generating engagement with followers [26].

In addition, although the viral nature of digital platforms can be a veritable curse in crisis situations, it can offer the capability of bringing a crisis situation under control; alternatively, the same viral capability can create a crisis situation with just a small amount of information. It is crucial for companies and organizations to understand “the role of processing information and continuing interactivity in times of crisis” [19].

The benefits of digital communication in a crisis with regard to naive one-way online communication through the Internet are as follows: organizations can incorporate expertise in their crisis response; interactions are facilitated with different stakeholders at the same time; organizations can track conversations and understand

their stakeholders' feelings; and organizations are provided with an opportunity to uncover true perceptions [19, 27].

3 Fast Fashion and the Communication Crisis

For fashion companies, crises have become very closely linked with the context of brand globalization and the production conditions for different products. The case of the sports shoe company, Nike, was one of the first to come to the attention of academics [28, 29].

Globalization has enabled brands to sell their products in any corner of the world and also adopt a vertical integration strategy, outsourcing production through global networks [30]. Production is global and requires one of the most complex global production networks and supply chains [31].

Furthermore, with the advent of the fast fashion model, fashion production and retailing have changed their rhythm and a series of low-cost manufacturing tools are now required that are located mainly in developing countries. In these countries, a new opportunity has been created, but one that has also generated a significant problem: how to control manufacturing conditions and bring them into line with brand values.

The fashion industry employs millions of people in poor countries and within the economy; fast fashion, with its low margins and short time-frames, creates a situation that is not easy to balance [32].

Questions revolving around labor conditions and working environments within an industry that generates such huge turnovers raise key ethical issues [33]. This constitutes a context in which human rights and the interests of fashion companies very often directly clash. This problem would seem to be implicit within the very model of production itself.

For this reason, the social dimension of the fashion industry still poses one of the most difficult challenges, due to the complexity of the supply chain and the cultural differences that can be found across different countries throughout the world [34, 35].

In the fashion industry, what is commonly known as "fast fashion" undoubtedly constitutes the most successful production model in recent years. Fast fashion companies have managed to steal a march on other "traditional" companies by shortening the time-periods in which each fashion cycle reaches the point of sale [32]. In general, the fast fashion model combines short production and retailing time-periods (bringing supply and demand closer together) with a high-trend product design (made possible due to consumer and market monitoring) [36].

The fast fashion model originated in Italy [37]. At the time it was devised to facilitate the rapid replacement of clothing items. However, Zara (the Spanish brand) took the model a stage further by going beyond the idea of rapid replacement and focusing on placing new products in its stores according to the fashions of the moment. This is a model that has been successfully applied in more than 80 countries. "The rapid expansion of Inditex throughout the world has forced many other companies such as H&M or Gap to introduce the fast fashion concept into their business models: a high percentage of production close-by that enables them to react rapidly to fashion changes or adapt to certain markets" [38].

As a result of being able to offer new collections in a more habitual manner, retailers can achieve higher net profit margins from sales by replacing exclusive appeal and glamour with fashion appeal and novelty [39]. The constant appearance of new collections necessarily requires cheaper clothes, which is why, for many commentators, fast fashion is synonymous with low-cost fashion. This effectively ends the cycle of summer-winter seasons and also modifies fashion consumer habits.

In this model, the clothing items on offer at stores change frequently, whilst new collections are presented in shorter time-periods than was traditionally the case. Barrios [40] explains it as follows: “The clothing items that are produced are designed, manufactured, distributed and sold almost as rapidly as customers change their tastes. What is more, the same company promotes these rapid changes, endowing its stores with new designs each week, thus creating a climate of opportunity in which customers are made to understand that, if they really like some model, they had better purchase it at the time because it will probably not be available the following week, so the customer buys the clothing item in order not to miss the opportunity to acquire it. This is the climate of scarcity and immediate opportunity that companies have created with their live collections concept” [40].

In this respect, the logistics of design and production processes has been modified, which means that clothing items can be delivered within periods that range between 24 and 48 h.

From the production point of view, cutting these time-periods is only possible due to localization, information models that permit inventories and monitoring, and effective distribution methods. In this sense, outsourced production (certain retailers combine this type of production with their own production) has evolved geographically [30].

1. In 1980 it was thought that high-quality and tailor-made products were only made in the United States and Europe. Beyond these two regions, only medium- and low-quality products were made.
2. In the late 1980's, a change was brought about that led towards a strategy based on greater variety and trends, whilst higher quality and more fashionable clothing items were also demanded. The balance began to tilt towards partially industrialized low-salary suppliers.
3. In 1990, fashionable and high-quality products began to be made in China, Morocco and Turkey, due to the acquisition of machines equipped to create quality products based on more flexible manufacturing processes. The falsification of luxury items also began.
4. Retailers are increasingly beginning to realize that high-quality products can be made in countries such as India and Turkey, due to the availability of a large number of highly-qualified tailors who have recently been squeezed out of the market by large companies.

Even brands such as Zara, which used to manufacture all of its products in Europe, ensuring better quality control, now outsource at least 13% of their manufacturing to China and Turkey. The delivery period to Europe for products manufactured in China can be as much as three weeks, but deliveries only take five days from Turkey [30].

Many companies have now adopted vertical integration strategies, outsourcing manufacturing to partners connected via global production networks [30, 31].

Fast fashion companies have different manufacturers located throughout the world and, in this respect, one key problem concerns the way in which labor and working conditions can be monitored at factories. The supply chain becomes the point at which fashion companies must implement measures that guarantee fulfillment of environmental and human rights policies [31, 41].

The importance of improving supply chains and controls coexists with the dream that fashion brands sell to consumers. By their very nature, fashion brands seek to sell intangibles to the public: the ideas of achieving status, beauty, image, etc., are always present in every purchase of a fashion product [42]. For this reason, consumer perceptions are decisive for the fashion industry and they are also strongly affected by reputational crises.

3.1 Fast Fashion and Communication Crisis in the Digital Era

With the Internet it has been demonstrated that users wish to participate in terms of content creation and construction [25, 43]. Social networks are changing the rules of the game and offer brands the ability to “create a culture of democratic consumption that takes into account consumer opinion while involving it in the creative process” [26].

Social networks have become a powerful weapon, one that has a great impact on brand reputation [23]. The interaction of consumers through social networks has favored a closer, even affective, interaction with brands [24]. Through the monitoring of social media, brands can build learning and alerting/self-control mechanisms and also redefine the products that are meaningful for customers and influence their current and expected relationships with brands [43].

Unfortunately, whilst the impact of social media on the reputation of corporations has increased, academics have paid little attention to them [43]. Today, the front-line of crisis communication has shifted its focus from the use of web pages, on-line press rooms and “dark sites” (Web 1.0) in crisis management to the role of social media (Web 2.0) in crisis management and crisis communication [44, 45].

The four strategies that organizations follow with regard to social media are: absence, presence, attendance and omnipresence [46]. While the first three span from complete absence on social media to awareness and non-participative listening, the last strategy, omnipresence, comprises dialogical interaction and is the one recommended for successful online reputation management [47].

Traditional crises presented other parameters and, with the advent of the social media, have been altered through increased pace, scope and impact [48], which means they can quickly become viral. Anger is the most viral emotion on the Internet [49], one that is less likely to subside because it works with a “long tail” effect [47].

4 Study Cases: The Tragedy at Rana Plaza and the Bravo Tekstil Factory Crisis

Having considered what the fast fashion model is and outlined the relationship between crisis and communication, we shall now analyse two crises in the fashion industry. The first case is the biggest tragedy in the fashion industry, in which more than 1,000 people died. The second case, although smaller and without victims, also constituted a social crisis. Both crises affected the reputation of several fashion brands.

4.1 Objectives and Method

The management of the crisis on the part of the individual brands was extremely diverse and led them towards different communications scenarios. However, another crisis emerged at the time: the industry itself and its manufacturing methods were effectively called into question. In fact, this issue has continued to be controversial and has led to an interesting public debate.

Through the cases analyzed here, this paper seeks to meet two objectives: (a) to stress the importance of communication with regard to the management of a crisis, especially within a digital context (b) to focus attention on the fashion industry, where intangible values acquire considerable importance and, therefore, are especially affected by crises.

The events at Rana Plaza (Bangladesh) and the Bravo Tekstil Factory (Turkey) raise different questions that pose a challenge regarding crisis communication, given that we are dealing with an industry-wide crisis featuring multiple voices and multiple reactions.

The responses of the brands involved were very different and, therefore, led to different reactions and consequences. Below we outline some of the most important. We also describe the media coverage that was provided for these crises and the main positions that were adopted within some of the media.

The methodology of the paper is based on an analysis of the new items that were generated about the case studies in question. In this respect, all of the news items on Google News were analyzed by searching for keywords. The period analyzed for the Rana Plaza case was from 24th April 2013 to 24th April 2018; for the case of Bravo Tekstil it was from 1st June 2016 until 31st September 2018. In addition, the press releases published by the fashion brands involved as well as those of textile associations, NGO's and other institutions involved were analyzed.

The search keywords relating to Bangladesh were: Bangladesh; Rana Plaza; Dhaka collapsed; factory buildings; and fashion manufacturing. The search keywords relating to Bravo Tekstil were: Turkey; Bravo Tekstil; Factory crisis; Bravo workers; Justice for Bravo workers.

4.2 Chronology of Events

Rana Plaza Crisis. In the first case, Bangladesh is the world's second biggest exporter within the world of fashion, behind China. It generates an overall turnover of \$18 US

billion?? in fashion exports and employs some 3.6 million workers within the industry¹.

On 24th April 2013 at 9 o'clock in the morning local time, the Rana Plaza building in Dhaka collapsed. This factory produced clothing for 29 different brands, the majority of them world-renowned. The final casualty figures came to 1,129 dead (the majority women and children) and 2,515 injured. This is considered to be the worst accident in the history of fashion manufacturing².

The companies that carried out manufacturing activities in the collapsed building were Ether Tex Limited, New Wave Bottoms Limited, Phantom Apparels Limited, Phantom Tac Limited and New Wave Style Limited. These companies were contracted to manufacture products for a number of globally-renowned fashion brands. Three days after the event, on 27th April, the first demonstrations took place in front of the flagship store of one of the brands involved: Primark, in Oxford Street, London.

On 28th April, Sohel Rana, a politician and the owner of the building, was arrested. It appears that the building had been constructed without the necessary permits and that the day before the tragedy, when the workers had denounced the fact that a huge crack had appeared in the building, they had been ignored and urged to remain at their work stations.

In May, authorities in Bangladesh and companies from the fashion industry signed a New Safety Accord for Factory Buildings in Bangladesh. This agreement contemplated the need to extend the controls that are carried out at production centres to the building conditions³. In the same month, some 18 factories throughout the country were closed due to their dubious construction.

¹ According to the magazine, Modaes (28/04/14): Out of the 600,000 factories that make up the textile industry in Bangladesh, only 2,000 work for international groups, including the leading players from the industry in Spain: Inditex, Mango and the Cortefiel Group. In the same way as for H&M, Bangladesh is an important supply source for Inditex: it is the largest productive hub according to number of indirect employees, as indicated in the Year 2012 Annual Report. In 2012, Inditex purchased products from a total of 108 suppliers from Bangladesh, compared to ninety the previous year. These suppliers were linked, in turn, to 177 manufacturers, compared to 154 in 2011. A total of 228,520 persons made up the workforces at Inditex factories in Bangladesh at the end of 2012, some 2000 more than in 2011. This figure is well above the 170,709 employees who worked indirectly for Inditex in China, making this country the second most important supplier for the Galician company. In the case of Mango, out of the total purchases made by the group (including raw materials) in 2012, some 41.66% corresponded to China. Bangladesh is currently the sixth most important productive hub for the Catalan group, behind China, Turkey, South Korea, Spain and Morocco. In 2012, Bangladesh accounted for some 5.81% of the company's overall purchases.

² A few months earlier, in November 2012, another accident took place in the textile industry in Bangladesh: a fire at the Tazreen Fashion factory in the district of Ashulia. More than one hundred workers lost their lives.

³ The Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh was signed by the following brands: H&M, Inditex, C&A, PVH, Tchibo, Tesco, Marks & Spencer, Primark, El Corte Inglés, jbc, Mango, Carrefour, KiK, Helly Hansen, G-Star, Aldi, New Look, Mothercare, Loblaw, Sainsbury's, Benetton, N Brown Group, Stockmann, WE Europe, Esprit, Rewe, Next, Lidl, Hess Natur, Switzer and A&F. Walmart, however, refused to sign the accord and, instead, in partnership with Gap, founded the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, which is a voluntary organization.

The NGO that was most active in the process, Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), began a drive in which it called on the brands to provide compensation for the victims. It promoted a meeting and established the figure of 30 million euros for the creation of a compensation fund. Within this context, the Business Social Compliance Initiative (attached to the Foreign Trade Association), which inspects buildings in Bangladesh, declared that it had approved Rana Plaza, although it had never inspected the structure of the building. In the month of November, the press reported that the first meetings had taken place in order to propose compensation for the victims.

Three years after the tragedy, a Bangladesh court ordered 18 people to stand trial for the collapse of the garment factory. The hearings began on 23rd August 2016.

Bravo Tekstil Factory Crisis. In June 2016 the Bravo Tekstil Factory, which supplied garments to Zara and other brands, shut down owing wages and severance payments to 140 workers. In July 2016, the owner disappeared and took all the money.

Since August 2016, the union representative, DiSK Tekstil, with the support of Clean Clothes Campaign and IndustriAll Global Union, has been negotiating on behalf of the workers with the brands Zara, Mango and Next.

In September 2017, 140 former Bravo workers created a petition on Change.org because they were tired of waiting for their money. This petition has a video in which two employees explain the problem with the salaries. The three fashion brands affected appear in the title of the petition: "Tell Zara, Next, and Mango: Pay Your Workers the Wages They Earned!". This petition was addressed to the fashion brands' CEO's and today has more than 300,000 signatures.

At the beginning of November 2017, Zara customers in Istanbul discovered notes in clothing saying workers had not been paid at the factory in Turkey. These notes were only found in Istanbul stores, which would suggest that workers actually went into stores and sewed the tags onto clothes in the stores. The tag reads in Turkish: "I made this item you are going to buy, but I didn't get paid for it." It urges shoppers to back their campaign and pressure Zara into paying them.

Workers say the manufacturer owes them three months of wages, as well as severance allowance. The Bravo Tekstil Factory worked for several brands such as Mango and Next, but the workers said they targeted Zara in particular because 75 per cent of the work they did was for that brand.

Since the social media campaign began, thousands of people have been posting support for the workers on networks using the hashtag #BravolscileriIcinAdalet, which means "Justice for Bravo workers".

The initial reaction was silence. Zara did not immediately respond to questions from The Associated Press in the news of 3rd November.

But one day later, when the campaign had grown, the spokesman for Inditex replied to *The Guardian* and stated: "Inditex has met all of its contractual obligations to Bravo Tekstil and is currently working on a proposal with the local IndustriALL affiliate, Mango and Next to establish a hardship fund for the workers affected by the fraudulent disappearance of the Bravo Factory's owner. This hardship fund would cover unpaid wages, notice indemnity, unused vacation and severance payments of workers that were employed at the time of the sudden shutdown of their factory in July 2016. We are committed to finding a swift solution for all of those impacted."

The next action was a press release in which Zara's parent company, Inditex, stated that it would launch a fund to help compensate the unpaid workers. According to reports, the workers are seeking 2,739,281 Turkish Lira (\$705,000).

However, a full year and four months after the factory closed, the hardship fund had still not been created. The Inditex spokesperson confirmed that no money at all had been transferred from Inditex to the workers who made the garments that brands such as Zara sold in their stores.

Finally, in April 2018, 140 Turkish garment workers accepted partial payments towards the 2,739,281.30 Turkish Lira (now 545,346 EUR) owed to them. However, after a year the brands declared that they would only pay just over a quarter of the amount claimed by the workers. The rationale for this amount was that the initial quantity paid into the fund by the brands was originally calculated on the basis that only certain blue-collar workers would be provided with payments.

The Bravo workers took a principled stand that all workers should be provided with the wages and severance owed, refusing to accept any money until all 140 employees, including supervisors, were covered. Although Zara, Mango and Next agreed to the principle that the fund should be used to provide payments to all employees, they refused to increase the total amount.

4.3 The Brands' Responses

The companies presented diverse responses, ranging from distancing to acknowledgement. The responses were completely different, but followed the pattern of traditional crisis response that appears in classic manuals on crisis communication.

Denial. In the Rana Plaza case, this is what happened in the case of the Italian firm, Benetton, which declared "none of the companies involved is a supplier of the Benetton Group or of any of its brands".

This was a mistake, given that it gave the impression that the company did not have all the correct information at its disposal. It is true that it is complicated to follow all of the supply sub-contracts that companies such as Benetton have in countries such as Bangladesh. The problem arose when a photo was published of a clothing item amongst the ruins of the collapsed building bearing the brand's famous green label. In this respect, this denial response would appear to have been inadvisable at a time when the industry was clearly failing to exercise full control over the entire chain of value.

The brand, The Children's Place, also issued a statement that none of its clothes were in production at the facility at the time, even though a factory inside Rana Plaza had most recently sent it a shipment at the beginning of April.

In the Bravo Factory case, Zara transferred the responsibility to the owner of the factory, who disappeared with the money. This was not a clear denial, but the brand was not considering its own responsibility.

Silence. Another classic reaction to the crisis was that of silence. It is difficult to see a response such as this when the focus of the crisis falls on a single company or institution. Nevertheless, in situations such as the tragedy at Rana Plaza, where numerous voices and sources of information emerged for the media, such responses can occur.

In this case, a number of companies opted for silence as a response. Galen Weston (CEO of Loblaw, Joe Fresh) condemned the “deafening silence” of other retailers and assumed, in their case, that they had not considered building controls when monitoring labor conditions at the contracted factories.

Regarding the Turkish crisis, the fashion brands Mango and Next opted for silence as a response. Maybe they decided to do this because public opinion essentially focused on Zara after the notes appeared in the stores. Zara did not immediately respond to questions from The Associated Press in the news of 3rd November.

Protection and Threats. Amongst the possible responses to the crisis, some sought to protect themselves from possible suits and issued threats in order to ward off those who might be tempted to seek redress.

Firms such as the Italian company, YesZee, admitted to the Clean Clothes Campaign that they had sub-contracted part of their production to an agent who operated at Rana Plaza, but they threatened legal action against anyone who might link their brand directly in public communiqués with any of the factories at the building.

In the Bravo Factory crisis, the union representative, DiSK Tekstil, with the support of Clean Clothes Campaign and IndustriAll Global Union, has been negotiating with the Zara, Mango and Next brands on behalf of the workers.

Acknowledgement of Guilt. As is recommended in traditional crisis and communication management, acknowledging guilt and telling the truth without attempting to hide anything constitutes the first step when it comes to resolving the matter satisfactorily.

This was the case of Primark, which declared that “we are completely aware of our responsibility”. The Irish low-cost fashion company also announced compensation payments for the victims and their families. It even sought to set up a program that would be sustained over time in order to support those children who had lost their parents in the tragedy. In this respect, Primark led the responses of this kind that emerged.

Furthermore, in terms of accepting some of the blame, some brands announced the creation of funds for the victims, such as the giant Spanish department store, El Corte Inglés.

In the Bravo Factory case, the guilt was clear: the owner of the factory. But the problem wasn't solved because the workers had yet to be paid. So the brands assumed their responsibility to pay.

Action: Leaving. Sometimes the response is not so much a declaration or an explanation regarding the event, but a categorical reaction. The most radical response to the tragedy came from companies such as Disney, which decided to leave the country and cease all manufacturing activity in Bangladesh. After all the individual reactions had been played out, a collective judgment immediately emerged, guided in particular by the media.

The Rana Plaza case demonstrated the insufficient nature of the codes of conduct pursued by companies and their relationship with their suppliers, as well as the minor role granted to human rights within CSR policies. It is nevertheless true that, as a result of these events, Inditex and H&M have reached trade union agreements that permit a

greater degree of control. Primark, for its part, has committed funds to improving its supply chain. Mango has been denounced for its meagre contribution to the compensation fund for the victims.

Whatever the case may be, for all the companies involved, and for all of the companies that make up the fashion industry in general, this tragedy marked a turning-point in the way CSR was viewed. In the case of consumers, especially due to the considerable media attention, the Rana Plaza events also changed things, given that their views became somewhat more critical, although there was no discernible impact on their direct consumption of the brands. Nevertheless, an improvement regarding practices amongst fashion companies can be expected, together with a greater degree of reflection regarding their corporate social responsibility.

In the Zara crisis, the action consisted of the spokesman of Inditex explaining the situation and stating that Inditex had met all of its contractual obligations to Bravo Tekstil; the spokesman also stated that Inditex was currently working on a proposal with the local IndustriALL affiliate, Mango and Next to establish a hardship fund for the workers affected by the fraudulent disappearance of the Bravo Factory's owner. This hardship fund would cover unpaid wages, notice indemnity, unused vacation and severance payments of workers that were employed at the time of the sudden shutdown of their factory in July 2016. The Inditex spokesman said that they were committed to finding a swift solution for all of those affected.

4.4 Media Reaction

The leading media channels throughout the world granted considerable coverage to this crisis. In fact, before Rana Plaza happened, similar tragedies had already taken place in Bangladesh, but the magnitude of the events led to massive media coverage in which the names of the companies affected were effectively published.

In fact, this was an event that fulfilled many of the requirements for newsworthy stories, according to traditional journalistic criteria: a human tragedy, a conflict of interests (huge companies versus workers employed in appalling conditions) and global impact (given that companies from many countries were involved).

Regarding the Rana Plaza tragedy, more than 15,000 news items were built up on Google News. Rana Plaza news items appeared on front pages and in editorial columns worldwide in publications such as *The New York Times* and *The Guardian*. This coverage led to the second crisis we referred to earlier, in which the fashion system as we know it today was effectively called into question.

Starting on the day of the accident, major newspapers connected the event with the responsibilities of international retail companies sourcing from developing countries. On 24th April (8:19 pm ET) 2013, *The Wall Street Journal* pointed out in an online article that “[T]hat incident focused international attention on Western companies' increasing use of factories here to produce low-cost clothes and so-called fast fashion, making Bangladesh the second-largest clothing exporter after China”. This and other articles listed the likely names of companies that were alleged to be Rana clients and known to buy from Bangladesh more broadly.

Over and above their reporting of the events, the media's coverage gave rise to two approaches. On the one hand, the media raised the question of political corruption in Bangladesh linked to this tragedy. For many commentators, the fact that the owner of Rana Plaza managed to construct the building without the necessary permits demonstrated the political problems that exist within the country. They analysed the events and sought to place the blame on the system, showing how the system itself affected the companies.

On the other, the media focused the debate on the profits of the "sweatshop economy" (the name given to the outsourcing activities of companies that use workshops featuring poor working conditions in developing countries) versus the rights of workers. These commentators argued that the decision of certain companies to abandon the country would make it impossible for Bangladesh to improve its economy, thus preventing it from pulling itself out of poverty. In some respects, the "lesser evil" was considered to be preferable. Contrary to this idea, ethical questions would emerge as the priority, alongside a defence of the working conditions of the workers in these economies.

The Guardian was, without any doubt, the newspaper most interested in the issue and created a special report "The Shirt on Your Back", which became one of the most comprehensive reports on the fashion manufacturing system. Numerous documentaries also emerged, such as "The True Cost", which reported on the way the system operates.

The Turkish crisis generated fewer than 1,600 news items on Google. Bravo Tekstil did not appear on the front pages, but it also received good media coverage, such as the BBC. The media covered the news, above all through two important press agencies: Associated Press and Reuters. *The Guardian* published three articles about the Bravo Factory crisis. And the magazine *Fast Company* featured an article about the crisis one year later.

In the Bravo Tekstil crisis, there was a difference with regard to Rana Plaza in terms of the viral movement online. The Turkish workers were interested in the power of social media and the Change.org platform; therefore, they did not go to the traditional mass media, such as the newspapers or television channels. They started with the Change.org petition with a video on YouTube and on Twitter with the hashtag #BravoIscileriIcinAdalet.

The causes of the media agenda in the two cases were different. While in the Rana Plaza, the tragedy was covered because of the impact of the colossal accident, in the Bravo Tekstil case the media covered the news after the proactive social actions of the workers via Change.org and the notes in the clothes with the hashtag #BravoIscileriIcinAdalet.

As a result, we can observe the development of viral social movements on networks with Change.org. In the Rana Plaza case, there were six petitions for signatures, but these had a heterogeneous impact: four of them did not exceed 100 signatures, another had 153 and the biggest petition had 15,008 signatures. In the Bravo Tekstil Factory case, the employees affected presented a single petition featuring 309, 263 signatures. The title of this petition was: "Tell Zara, Next, and Mango: Pay Your Workers the Wages They Earned!"

5 Considerations

The importance of crisis in the fashion industry and the role of communication has been demonstrated. Although fashion is not considered a critical sector in crisis communication literature, as happens with other industries, it is especially affected by crises because of the direct relationship with consumers and other intangible variables.

Although our physical distance and the apparently minimal impact of the Rana Plaza and Bravo Tekstil events would seem to suggest that little importance is granted to these crises, this kind of issue in the fashion industry is beginning to hit home, becoming increasingly familiar and global.

From the perspective of brand reputation in both cases, such crises and issues may not have an immediate cost in terms of consumer perception and purchasing decision. However, it is also important to consider the more long-term view in which other stakeholders may also be affected.

In Bangladesh two significant crises took place. On the one hand, there was the crisis relating to the human tragedy at Rana Plaza. Here it is important to analyse the responses of each of the brands involved. Their responses were individual and very diverse, depending on corporate culture and institutional dynamics, as some authors have pointed out [50, 51].

On the other hand, a collective crisis emerged as a result of this event that led to a wider questioning of the fast fashion model itself, the model that Rana Plaza supplied. In fact, the entire magnitude of the crisis was based on this second fallout from the tragic events. Because of this, in recent years, questions relating to sustainability and ethical behaviour within the realm of fashion have begun to be studied from a critical perspective [52, 53].

In the Bravo Tekstil case, taking into account the new digital environment, we can say that the mistakes committed in terms of management of the social media (failing to consider their benefits, as we explained in the literature review) led the crisis to snowball, creating a scenario in which the traditional media started to echo what was happening. Again, this crisis focused on the working conditions and reinforced the criticisms levelled at the fast fashion model that started with the Rana Plaza tragedy.

Indeed, the fast fashion model itself has some controversial issues attached to it that once again reinforce the idea that fashion is a critical sector within the realm of crisis communication. As M.T. Anderson declared on 29th April 2013 in *The New York Times*: “Take a look at the tag on your shirt. The problem is as close as your skin”.

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Artificial Intelligence as a Tool in the Online Fashion Retail Industry to Communicate Fashion Trends

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Abstract. The fashion industry has seen a major change in dynamics since 2010. There has been a decrease in mass production, an increase in the number of fashion seasons and a desire for low cost and high flexibility in quality, design and speedy delivery to the market [2]. As Amed et al. [1] mentions in his article, “more and more mainstream customers are moving into a decisive phase of digital adoption”. Consumers know exactly what they want to buy when they walk into a store and expect highest standards of customer experience and scrutinize convenience, price, quality, and newness. Without being aware of it, you have likely heard of Artificial Intelligence, be it Tesla driving for you or a chatbot, AI is becoming more and more integrated into our daily lives [11]. This paper proposes Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a tool for the online fashion retailers. It reviews the current state of Artificial Intelligence in the online fashion retail industry and presents a systematic review of using neural networks and big data in state-of-the-art artificial intelligence (AI) applications in niches such as communication, prediction and visual recognition.

Keywords: Fashion technology · Artificial Intelligence (AI) · Analytics · Communication

1 Problem Statement

Using traditional forecasting methods in the current state of fashion industry where the demand for a product is highly volatile has its limits and drawbacks. In response to this problem, our paper proposes to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a tool for the online fashion retail industry. Using AI not only streamlines the company’s costs and provides communication services tailored to every individual, it even monitors social media and other data sources, learning from similar past behavior and uses its result to forecast the fashion trends [9].

2 Introduction

According to Liu et al. [9], fashion retail industry is a highly uncertain industry with trends changing with the snap of a finger. Product life cycles are shorter and factors such as weather, politics, marketing strategy etc. affect the demand. It is crucial to have an effective supply chain which ensures that we always have multiple stock units in-store to meet the demand.

There is a huge potential for businesses to attain higher profits. Intelligent AI algorithms can be used to automate the long and convoluted tasks that take heaps of time and don't require human intervention [9]. This can significantly affect the efficiency and time required to achieve the desired outputs.

The American Marketing Association defines consumer behaviour as “The dynamic interaction of effects, cognitive issues, behaviour and the environment through which people make exchanges in their lives” [4]. Consumers are exposed to an abundance of stimuli, majority of which are the result of marketing communication activities initiated by organizations which drastically affect the need for the product [5].

3 Visual Recognition and Its Need in Fashion

3.1 Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) for Visual Recognition

Artificial Intelligence in conjunction with Deep Learning (especially Convolutional Neural Network (CNN)) is used in the classification of apparel image. The algorithm analyses the product, assigns tags to it and can even recommend similar apparel to the customer.

Accurate apparel classification has been difficult due to lack of labelled image datasets of required dimensions, presence of abnormalities (stretches/creases in the datasets) and external factors such as light, cluttered backgrounds and obstructions.

In the recent experiment conducted by Seo et al. [15], the researchers proposed to “pre-train the GoogLeNet architecture on ImageNet dataset and fine tune the dataset based on design attributes” in order to achieve higher accuracy and faster processing times. The last fully connected layer of GoogLeNet is removed and pre-trained using the ImageNet dataset (consisting of 1.2 million images and 1000 categories) and fine-tuned using our own image dataset. The resultant image is classified into 24 fine-grained classes and stored according to the labels as shown in Fig. 1.

DataWeave’s AI-powered, Fashion Tagger is a great example. As Garg [6] mentions in his article, the image is fed into the neural network systems and converted into 0's and 1's. If the product matches any search online, the text-based information for the product is extracted and used to leverage non-visual cues for the product like the type of fabric etc. A list of final product attributes is then generated based on the assigned weightages and priorities (Fig. 2).

Category	Super Class	Class
top	neck	square
		choker
		shirt collar
	front	caging
		wrap
		keyhole
	back	caging
		open
		knot
sleeve	sleeve	flutter
		balloon
		flared
	shoulder	off
		one
dress	body	cold
		bodycon
trousers	leg	flared
		skinny
		wide
skirt	thigh	slim
		pencil
		skater
		pleated
		A-line

Fig. 1. Classified Apparel Dataset. [Digital image]. (2018, May 28). Retrieved March 20, 2019, from <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/8367713> [16]

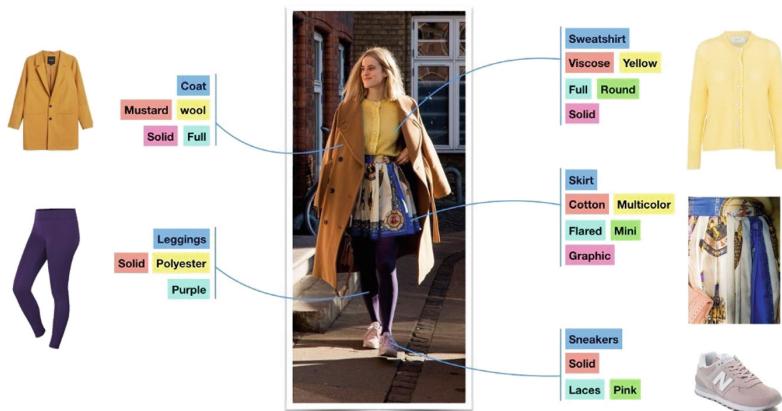


Fig. 2. An example of DataWeave's AI-powered technology processing the image of a fashion blogger. [Digital image]. (2018, April 26). Retrieved January 17, 2019, from <https://news.developer.nvidia.com/how-ai-is-helping-consumer-brands-detect-and-eliminate-counterfeit-products/>

3.2 Targeting Consumer Buying Behavior and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

As Raphael [12] mentions in his article, AI can be a great tool to attract customers. According to Kellet [8], using the data stored from the customers previous purchases, AI chatbots, aka smart assistants can be used to mimic customer service agents in order to help the customers find the product best suited to their needs.

Fashion retailer Levi's is a pioneer in the use of chatbots and helps the customer pick the perfect pair of jeans [17]. Burberry used AI chatbots during the London Fashion Week in 2016 to provide behind the scenes looks for the Fashion week to the fans and subsequently allowed you to make purchases online to shop the look [10].

3.3 Big Data: Communication Tool for Decision Making

There is a large amount of data available to the retailer as well as the consumer. It is still a difficult task for both academia and industry to effectively and accurately forecast the demand for a product.

Big data analytics, through structured and unstructured data analysis of the data collected from a variety of sources such as comments, social media, previous purchases etc. can "help discover the consumers buying behavior, identify the correlation among the transactional data, evaluate the browsing pattern from e-commerce etc." [13].

This data can also be used to make important predictions and decisions to provide a positive customer experience [8]. Companies like Nordstrom and Netflix also use a similar process to provide recommendations [17].

3.4 Using Neural Networks for Communication

Neural networks (NN's) have been gaining momentum in the recent years due to their ability to give solutions to complex problems as a result of non-linear processing, parallel distributed architecture and self-organisation [7]. As Ren et al. [13] and Liu et al. [9] mention in their research papers, the process starts by analysing the product features followed by choosing a forecasting approach. "Fashion retailers usually adopt the traditional statistical methods, such as Bayesian approach, auto-regression and artificial intelligent (AI) methods including artificial neural networks (ANN) and related evolutionary methods, extreme learning machine (ELM) etc. for fashion demand forecasting."

ANNs in contrast, have been proven to provide accurate forecasts. Despite producing high forecasting accuracy, ANN's and ENN (Evolutionary Neural Networks: Advanced ANN methods) are very time consuming due to the utilization of the gradient-based learning algorithms. ELM together with EELM (Extended Extreme Learning Machine Methods) are used for forecasting fashion sales. Although EELM is more stable than ELM, just like the ANN and ENN it requires a considerable amount of time to complete a forecast prediction.

Xineoh, is a good example of this. As Rogers [14] mentions in his article, the company claims to have developed cutting edge technology for predicting consumer behaviour using AI. The company uses an extremely efficient Deep Belief Network which is a combination of machine learning and AI. This belief network can be used to train huge amounts of data in minutes.

4 Proposed Methodology

Secondary Data. Several research papers, textbooks and research journals were reviewed in order to understand and identify the needs of implementing Artificial Intelligence in various aspects of online fashion retail industry as a communication tool.

Proposed Recommendation. Looking at the extensive research done on Artificial Intelligence and the growth of the traditional and online fast-fashion sector since 2015 encourages us to propose its implications to the online fashion retail industry. The results from the previous researches and applications in the current years support the evidence that Artificial Intelligence can be used as a communication tool in the Online Fashion retail Industry in 2020. Additionally, since we use neural network for our implementations, we can model data with high volatility and non-constant variance which can prove useful in financial time-series forecasting, inventory management etc. (Fig. 3).

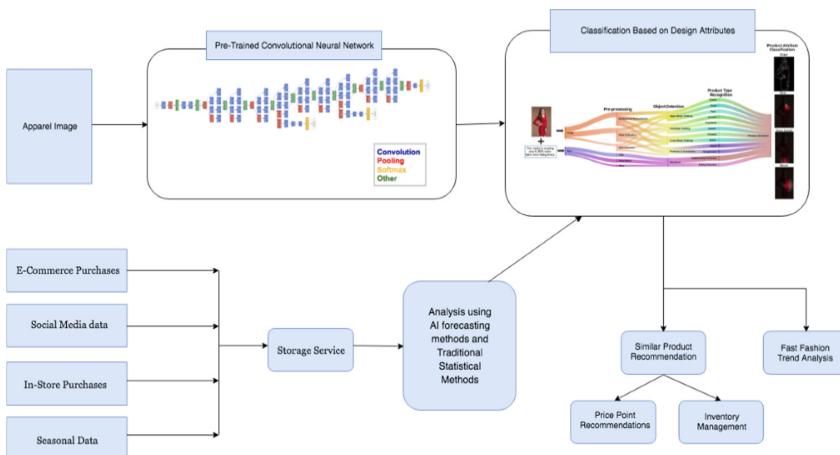


Fig. 3. Pictorial representation of the conceptual framework

5 Scope for Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Future

Further research can be done to develop hybrid models which can combine the advantages of both the statistical methods and AI methods as underlined in the recent research done by Wong and Guo [18]. The model will be able to forecast the linear as well as non-linear data. Also, incorporating technologies like IOT, big data, machine learning etc. in unison with Artificial Intelligence will offer faster, more accurate and efficient personalised systems not just limiting to forecasting but also understanding user behaviour and market trends.

6 Conclusion

The paper presented the scope of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Online Fashion Retail Industry and how it can be used to seamlessly process large amounts of data to present meaningful information, which can be further used by the retailers to make forecasts, trend predictions or provide better customer service to the consumers. The online fashion retail industry has shifted from a brand centric to a consumer centric industry [3] and based on the data provided by McKinsey & Company, the acceptance rate of AI and other technologically advance models in the online fashion retail industry has shown positive results.

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Changes in Fashion Communication

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Abstract. The text follows the task set by this conference to observe, “how communication practices impact today upon fashion industry and on societal fashion-related practices and values”.

A product is “anything that can be offered to the market with the objective of satisfying a consumer’s need” and everything s/he receives in an exchange with a retailer. This includes not only physical goods, but also a growing amount of immaterial products, such as experiences, causes, spiritual values and many others (described in this text). The effective offer of the fashion industry shows nevertheless a very low use of these highly requested immaterial goods. This contribution analyses, for some immaterial goods, the areas, which are today generating them, especially the products grown from Street Styles, from cultural policies such as City Making and from ethical efforts, such as Eco Fashion. The conclusion shows that change happens, when a re-combination of old traditions and new behaviors, generate new products and communication. The value lies today in the immateriality of the products, powered by the emotional interaction of people. The rise of immaterial products and of a new fashion communication is therefore more than the invention of a new commercial item or advertising campaign. It is an evolution of mentality, which documents the existence of ideas, values, ethical concepts, creativity and human dialogue behind the new products.

Keywords: Communication/Fashion communication · Immateral products · Street Style · City Making/Fashion City Making · Ethical fashion

1 Introduction: Term and Subject Definition

The title of the event ‘Fashion Communication: between tradition and future digital developments - FACTUM19’ suggests that the renewal of fashion communication derives from new digital developments which are opposed to tradition [1]. There is no doubt that the market, consumption and society are changing and that this change is taking place during transition to a so-called network society which is able to produce new behaviors, real-time events [2] and the reinvention of sales. It is true that on the Web traditional hierarchies are today transformed into a network of horizontally connected people who decide their consumption [3]. It is also true that losing their centrality and decision-making power, institutions and industries are forced to move from a “make and sell” to a “sense and response” strategy that satisfies more individual [3], and (recently) also more inclusive [4], needs and desires.

Today the market undoubtedly faces a situation characterized by the birth of an information society, which relies on the marketing strategies offered by the network. This market is nevertheless forced to meet the requests of a new, informed and more demanding consumer. The new buyer is empowered. The value of products is today established by his/her demand. Although consumption can be, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced by trends (a trend is “a general development or change in a situation or in the way people are behaving”) [5], by word of mouth information and by product or service evaluations among buyers, on websites such as Tripadvisor, in reality it is the consumer’s new intangible, or better immaterial, demand that determines his/her choices. ‘Immaterial’ is here the appropriate term, because, as Theodore Levitt suggested, intangibles can have material qualities and tangibles immaterial ones [6]. This immaterial demand arises from desires and dynamics which are completely unrelated with the market or the network. Therefore, it is highly probable that the new technologies, the digital communication and the increased use of the Internet, are only new means which reveal and serve in a better way and therefore amplify a new type of demand.

Undoubtedly, a rise of e-sales, driven by Amazon and mobile phones, has been registered. It is nevertheless dubious if this growth depends on an innovation of the products and of their offer or on a renewal of fashion communication brought about by the digital platforms. Some of the leaders of the digital apparel sector, like Zalando, have registered a growth, but it is not as spectacular as announced. During an interview on 28 February 2018, a Zalando marketing executive proclaimed an estimated income growth, for the year, of over 28%. Not only did this prospected growth not materialize, but it even scored below the high expectations expressed for the Christmas sales, later in that same year. In September 2018, the prospected online sales rise had been estimated for Christmas at around 14% [7]. Zalando attributed its negative outcome at the end of 2018 to a “prolonged and unusually warm summer period, with a reduction in demand and a delay in the transition to the autumn/winter season” [8], which seems to be a weak excuse for its failure.

Moreover, it is certainly a repeated commonplace that traditional luxury stores and malls are in crisis and struggling to survive. Many articles speak today even of the closure of traditional shops [9] and malls. In the United States more than two dozen malls have been shut in the past four years [10], while another sixty are on the brink of death, as can be seen on the website Deadmalls, which lists “dead” shopping centers [11]. Many journalists speak today, in apocalyptic tones, of a high street and mall crisis [12] and so far in 2019, in the United States, as many as 5300 shops of famous brands, such as The Gap, Victoria’s Secret and many others, have closed [13]. It is however unlikely that all these failures depend exclusively on the rise and growth of Internet sales.

The success registered by the new digital sales, in contrast to the traditional luxury stores and malls, undoubtedly says something about the modern consumers’ habits, conveniences and time availabilities. It nevertheless says less about the new qualities of the sold products or the innovation of their communication strategies. The sale of an advanced product can take place, traditionally, in an old building, while old-fashioned sales practices can be used in newly built skyscrapers or on the presumably so innovative web facilities. A contemporary sales and communication concept connects

products, services and emotions in order to sell lifestyles, ideas and desires. The resistance to change and innovate products, sales and communication strategies is clearly visible in the luxury brand e-shops on the Internet. These websites, such as the BVLGARI website [14] respond to a “traditional” fashion demand made of old and superfluous products. Most luxury brand e-shops, abuse a “new” medium (the Web) to sell and communicate traditional items, in exactly the same way, as they would be offered in a branded store. This cannot be considered a new way of selling.

Innovation must therefore have a different origin.

In fact, Philip Kotler, marketing professor and consultant [15], believes that the next phase of the market, towards which we are rapidly heading, is one in which products will increasingly include desires, feelings, added and immaterial values. The consumer will define trade with his/her demand for immaterial goods, thus becoming the absolute protagonist of the market. At this stage, marketing and sales will have to respond to all the requests, aspirations and hopes of the consumer, who, by encouraging change, will make the market a mirror of the evolution of society [16].

Today, even the trendy products proposed by the fashion industry are undergoing the boost towards this future phase of the market. In fact, they are assuming a new shape, and they change from being material goods to being increasingly immaterial goods with strong added values [17]. Consumption is made increasingly of varieties and differences, of shared feelings and belongings to new elective tribes, which encourage a re-invention of products and communication strategies.

Let us therefore start fulfilling the task set by this conference to observe “how communication practices impact today upon fashion industry and on societal fashion-related practices and values” [18]. “Communication” is “the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium”, but also “the successful conveying or sharing of ideas and feelings”, a definition that contemplates the high immaterial content of this exchange. As communication is also “the field of study concerned with the transmission of information” [19], fashion communication must be “the field in fashion concerned with the transmission of information” [20]. Changes arise always when many creative ideas, which are simultaneously present in different fields of society, mix in alternative combinations, composing new knowledge, products and practices [21].

2 Products and Immaterial Products

Products with innovative qualities arise from a renewal of already existing material or immaterial items through a highly creative idea, which, re-combining old and new elements, in an unexpected and innovative way, generates a progress [22]. A product is, according to Kotler, “anything that can be offered to the market with the objective of satisfying a consumer’s need” and everything s/he receives in an exchange with a retailer [23]. This includes not only physical goods, but also a growing amount of immaterial products, such as experiences, causes or spiritual values.

Products are re-invented by rethinking the basic idea behind them. The ongoing development of the electrical plug, might, for example, no longer require for an item’s cable to be brought to its site on the wall. A newer idea of a plug might instead entail

moving the plug towards the item that needs be connected to electricity, by rolling out a long cable hidden in the wall. Change creeps unnoticed [24] into old thoughts, actions, values and modifies society. The transition to contemporary society brings new ideas, new ways to socialize and the re-invention of many products and behaviors.

Products and communication strategies with innovative qualities arise from a renewal of already existing material or immaterial items, through a highly creative idea, which, re-combining old and new elements, in an unexpected and innovative way, generates a progress [25].

Incorporating the results of scientific research, products may express new beautiful forms made of technically advanced or sustainable materials [26], such as Ross Lovegroves's Swarovski Solar Car, a vehicle powered by solar panels, enhanced by Swarovski crystals, which perfectly combines the scientific research of two different fields in order to produce a futuristic locomotion [27]. Technological advance is nevertheless not true innovation, although it is a means used to express a new way of thinking.

Innovative products are capable to give ideas a new shape and show a "flexible and disseminated body" [28], which, by leaving the item's physical limits, allows a connection between the material and the immaterial world. Goods of this kind, such as the enchanting chandelier by Hilden & Diaz which projects shadows of a forest into your room, are not only bought for their material characteristics, but rather for their ability to respond to the buyer's immaterial desires and create a link to their personal imaginary world.

The many studies on consumerism seldom investigate the origin of the innovative qualities of products, although these are reliable indicators of change and the state of our contemporary condition. What people use, buy, wear and eat reproduces what they desire, know, believe and imagine. This process is also reversed and new immaterial products may become a force that fosters change [29] through the consumer's collaboration in the product's outcome and the rise of a creative society accustomed to new technological media through the evolution of science and ethics and through the cultural forces leading towards globalization [30].

Society's new knowledge and projects [from Latin proicere, throwing, driving forward or ahead] [31] for the future, by concretizing in products' qualities, are able to change lifestyles, the production of meanings and of collective imagination [32]. Green architecture, such as Tokyo's "Vent Vert Apartments", which are designed by Edward Suzuki Associates and feature a facade of luxuriantly growing greenery, raising the level of the consumer's quality demand, will in time modify all lifestyles [33].

Today, among all goods, there is a "no-thing" which is invisible because it is not a material item but an immaterial concept. It represents the most advanced and sought-after product on the market [34].

The great success of the sensational Burberry Prorsum Autumn/Winter 2011 fashion show is due to a contemporaneous advertising campaign which, by linking the brand to the proverbial rainy weather of London, through a dedicated weather app, intelligent bus stops and the presence of digital snow on the catwalk, transformed it into one of the most tweeted fashion events of all times.

A success repeated in April 2012, in Peking when, to herald the opening of the first Burberry flagship store in Taiwan, the brand created a multi-sensory experience of the

world of Burberry through a 360° film viewing experience, with live music and digital “weather” [35]. Burberry’s notoriety does here not arise from the luxury or the exclusiveness of its material products, nor from the new digital technologies used to communicate the products, but rather from the consumption of a different communication strategy, an immaterial product, which is used to communicate the brand’s product to the public in accordance with its new demands.

This new type of communication signals an innovation in which the change is fostered by three new forces.

- (1) the cultural forces leading towards globalization (with all its paradoxes, such as the growing gap of wealth and knowledge).
- (2) the collaborative force of the consumer in his/her own consumption (the consumer must now collaborate in his/her consumption).
- (3) the creative forces of the consumers participating in the creation of the immaterial product [30].

In turn the market is forced to re-think the substance of its products [36] and to concentrate on an immaterial consumption. Subsequent paragraphs, however, are indented.

3 Types of Immaterial Products

Immaterial products are exclusive services products, which are distinguished by the buyer’s participation in the goods’ outcome and by an acquisition, which precedes their production.

Events products offer the experiential aspects of fashion, sports and entertainment shows. People become products, such as athletes or stars used for sales endorsement or politicians marketed to gain votes [37].

The conference entitled “Religions as Brands – The Marketization of Religion and Spirituality” [38] showed that religions can also be products intended to satisfy a demand for spiritual values. The immensely popular beatification of Karol Wojtyla, which was broadcasted worldwide, was a product, which attracted not only Catholics but also an overwhelming mass of people from all confessions, even declared atheists. It revealed that their participation was not at all tied to religious devotion. The high emotional involvement of the participants suggests, instead, the presence of a strong demand for the sacred, a very immaterial product, in the contemporary world.

In a very similar way the recent, international ecological movement “Fridays for Future”, inspired by the Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, nominated for the Nobel Prize [39], gave rise, on 15 March 2019, to a coordinated global strike which turned out to be the biggest climate action event ever. The protest involved about 1 million people, in 2000 cities [40], in more than 125 countries [41]. The protesters, which could not be dismissed as some ‘kids skipping school’ [42], included students, their families and teachers, but also ecologists, climate activists, politicians and eminent scientists. Support came from many climate, energy and environmental research institutions, such as the Max-Planck-Institut [43], from an Open Letter of 350 Dutch scientists [44], and from the foundation of Scientists for Future created by 12,000 German scientists [45].

Favorable official statements were made by the UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres [46] and by the Club of Rome (a Think Tank founded at the Accademia dei Licei in Rome), composed of heads of state, politicians, international organization officials, diplomats, scientists, economists, and business leaders from all over the world [47].

The great participation, the emotional involvement of the participants and the immediate supportive response of so many authorities, suggest that Friday for Future, more than a protest to avoid further global warming and climate change, is an immaterial product intended to satisfy a strong demand for different (i.e. ecological) spiritual values.

Experiences, a product that evolved from “luxury experiences”, promote added values that become available through a participation of the consumer and a “different” consumption [48]. The alternative diet of the Freegans or the Dumpster Divers, who eat only food retrieved from supermarket garbage and recycle items found in the trash of luxurious neighborhoods, is for example a product promoting the downshifting of consumption and a freedom from brands [49].

Likewise, in the popular cause products, a social cause, such as nuclear-free or ecologically “clean” living, is the value sold. Smart companies can today position their brand by marketing cause products or by donating part of their revenue to charitable causes. The term “corporate social responsibility” expresses the company’s commitment to ethical behavior, which takes into account the economic, social and environmental consequences of the company’s activity.

Naomi Klein, a Canadian social activist, became known for her famous best-seller, No Logo [50], which sold over 1 million copies in 28 languages. In her book she attacks the branded consumer culture and the abuses of big businesses, like Nike, McDonald’s and Microsoft. Her accusations, especially about Nike’s exploitation of the poorest workers and child labor, forced industries to introduce more sustainable productions. No Logo thus became a product supporting the cause against corporate globalization.

The value of all these new products is neither tangible, material nor enduring, but the buyer’s collaboration in the product’s outcome, his/her high personal involvement and his/her strong relationship with the producers, in other words, the product’s relational qualities, are indicators of its novelty.

The effective offer of the fashion industry (exactly like many other producers) nevertheless shows a very low use of these highly requested immaterial goods [51]. A failure of the system to recognize and understand these new goods means, however, also an inability to communicate them or to narrate the contemporary evolution of society.

Let us analyze, for some immaterial goods, the areas, which are today generating them, especially the products grown from Street Styles, from cultural policies such as City Making and from Ethical efforts such as Eco Fashion.

4 Street Style

In “Street Style”, according to Polhemus, people ‘style surf’ the entire ocean of fashion, choose from an endless array of garments from designers, ethnic cultures, street kids and vintage shops, the items that they like and mix them into personal combinations

[52]. This personal choice allows the invention of a new intangible product: an individual dressing style and lifestyle [53]. “Style surfing” [54] substitutes a “traditional” fashion [55] prescribed by a charismatic designer or by marketing strategies [56]. The entire history of style of the whole world is today mixed to personal innovative looks. Many of these Street Style novelties form in subcultures, where street kids, such as hipsters, punks or ravers, share clothing styles. To alleviate its constant need for novelties, the fashion industry imitates their street styles [57]. The “perfecto” motorcycle jacket, born from a Second World War aviator jacket and worn by Marlon Brando in the movie The Wild One, as a symbol of a rebellious lifestyle [58], was for example copied again and again by fashion and shown on the catwalks of Montana, J. P. Gaultier, Gianni Versace, Burberry and many others. Unfortunately, the subcultural identity, which is the immaterial part of the product, gets lost when it becomes “the latest fashion”.

During a visit, with a group of English fashion students at the creative offices of Valentino Couture, on looking at the mood boards, I was shocked to discover that the Spring/Summer 2011 collections were completely inspired by the movie Avatar. Having lost its innovative power [59], the fashion system not only fails to communicate the immateriality of products, but also by copying them, disperses the precious immaterial quality of the new immaterial goods.

The increase of shape imitation, without its content, the fusion of contrasting distinctive characteristics, and the reproduction of the distinctive elements of urban tribes [60] produces countless hybrid style combinations. Multiplying and fusing, they lose their intrinsic meaning and become available to all. People on the streets display a stylistic promiscuity, dressing like punks one day, like hippies the next [61]. In this “supermarket of styles” [62], society moves towards a new global street wear [63] in which everything is possible. Multiplicity and creative liberty become leading features of this new immaterial fashion product [64] and transform it into a universal cultural phenomenon [65].

5 City Making

Cultural products, grown from cultural policies such as City Making, can be powerful means of innovation. Actions aimed at innovating the city, which is composed not only of the tangible urban geography but also of the movements and habits of the inhabitants, by their connective substance and their immaterial flux, are called City Making [66]. City Making does not simply invent new material marketing strategies to sell the city. City Making is an immaterial cultural product, created by cultural politics as a powerful mean of innovation, which encourages the citizens to be creative as a mass and re-launch the city [67]. To affirm an identity, the city needs a ‘tale’, or a narrative communication of itself. Paris, which calls itself “the city of fashion”, presents identity and behavioral models, which differ strongly from a city, like Rome, that describes

itself as “the city of the church”. The narration or communication of these different identities implies, however, a high rate of creativity on the part of the citizens who structure their lifestyle according to these different tales. The creativity and the innovative quality of the city are related, because a city that never changes, that is not created or continually renewed, dies. It is therefore the creativity of citizens that keeps it alive.

Copenhagen was turned into a pedestrian city by thousands of cyclists who acted simultaneously against traffic [68]. Civic creativity is the imaginative capacity to solve the problems, granting all citizens an advantage [69] and thereby produce a new feeling, an immaterial product, that modifies the city. How these feelings have been communicated and were able to become a collective way of thinking about the city has yet to be thoroughly investigated. I was not able to find a description of the creation and communication of this very interesting immaterial product.

However, not only creativity makes the city evolve, the links among economy, society and city configure a system that generates evolution, if it is communicated [70]. Models for cities’ development no longer focus only on the financial value [71], but concentrate on the wealth gained from immaterial products, such as the establishment of a Fashion Capital, which is branded and managed as a good [72].

The long-running television series, concluded in 2006, “Sex and the City” is for example a competitive promotional and communicative vehicle, which associates branded fashion products, such as Manolo Blahnik shoes, with the City of New York [73]. Subsequently the Sex and the City series also became a vehicle to connect any type of product with any city.

The Roman cupcake shop “Cake and the City”, opened in December 2010 but unfortunately now closed, linked the Eternal City not only to a foreign pastry but also to a new lifestyle. The television show had therefore been used to communicate not only a new image of the city and a new lifestyle, but also new ways of the inhabitants to relate to each other and to live the city. The creative link between the city and a material good (the cupcake) communicated an immaterial product.

The establishing of strong Fashion City brands [74], the hosting of Fashion Weeks in a city, are also immaterial goods which use fashion to generate tourism and cultural events [75], which in turn favor the growth of the city’s immaterial value, popularity and fame.

An active and communicated Fashion Culture is able to turn its Street Style into distinguishing features of the city. The presence of the Japanese avant-garde, since the 1980s, changed for example the immaterial value of Paris forever. This “fashionalization” is a sort of identity construction of the city, in which its “fashioned” clothing culturally promotes it to the world [76]. The mix of fashion, business and coolness guarantees a glamorous image on the global stage [75]. The immaterial value of the city, which links fashion and cultural identity, becomes an essential part of the urban culture, which is also an immaterial product.

6 Ethical Fashion

Ethical Fashion is another generator of immaterial products. Grown from urban culture, these goods bring about changes that favor the community [77] and respond to new collective needs, such as the halting of environmental pollution. Elements from different fields are today combined to invent these new immaterial products: the mix of commerce and ethics produces fair trade; that of ecology and fashion produces Eco fashion; and that of fashion and the needs of the very poor generates social businesses operating to put an end to poverty [78].

Ethical fashion fosters the rise of many innovative goods, which incorporate immaterial ethical added values into clothing, such as a minimized pollution, correct labors' conditions, re-cycling and sustainability [79].

One of the first eco fashion products, which also marked the beginning of the process that turned sustainability into an immaterial fashion product, was the iconic T-shirt by Katharine Hammnet "58% do not want Pershing." The Pershing is a medium-range ballistic missile invented by the US Army, and Katharine Hammnet's shirt alluded to the fact that, in the 1980s, 58% of the UK population was opposed to acquiring this weapon. Thanks to this T-shirt Hammnet was not only chosen as designer of the year 1983, but was also invited to meet the conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, whose government favored these weapons. In this way, the product's immaterial quality was turned into an effective communicational product [80].

Eco fashion invents many innovative ways to produce. Inventive designers up-cycle industries' off-cuts. An example of this practice is Christopher Raeburn, who (especially in his first collections) made beautiful garments from raincoat scraps or the brand From Somewhere (today unfortunately extinct) which re-sewed vintage dresses into unique pieces [81].

Eco fashion invents many innovative ways to communicate immaterial values. A growing number of celebrities, such as Stella McCartney or Colin and Livia Firth, associate with it [82]. Many cities host Ethical Fashion shows, and Eco companies come up with different ideas, such as innovative business models, recycling and refashioning ideas or effective social businesses.

The great opportunities in this sector are also at the basis of the new Social Business companies proposed by Muhammad Yunus and his Grameen group. This new kind of business conceived by Muhammad Yunus, Nobel Peace Prize in 2006 for his "microcredit" bank, responds to the demands of the very poor, either by manufacturing high quality but inexpensive products or by making the workers partners in the production [83]. In the Yunus' Grameen-Uniqlo textiles company, created in 2010, two thousand local women will become their own business owners, by selling the clothes they produce to their neighbors [84]. This will give them the opportunity to defeat poverty. A world without poverty is the first of 17 Sustainable Development Goals set by The United Nations, to be fulfilled by 2030 [85]. The added values and the advantages for the community reveal these productions to be typical immaterial products.

7 Conclusion

This text has defined immaterial products and has shown their ability to respond to buyers' new demand, which is much richer than imagined. Tired of just using, showing, buying, wearing or eating, consumers now request items that embody what they desire, know, believe and imagine. New technologies, digital communications and the increased use of the Internet, unable by themselves to satisfy this request, are the useful means to materially answer the growing demand for these goods, which embody immaterial desires and are linked to imaginary worlds. In this process, immaterial goods foster changes [86] through the rise of a collaborative creative and globalized society [30] accustomed to the use of digital media. Immateral products are the most advanced and sought-after goods on the market today. Designers and producers show, however, a difficulty in understanding that, to sell products today, it is neither their materiality (such as shape, color, luxury, exclusiveness), nor the available means used to get to know and acquire them (such as online e-shops, digital communication campaigns) that have to be adjusted. The market must acknowledge a globalized, collaborative and creative consumer and re-think the very substance/substantiality (or rather in-substance/in-substantiality) of its products [87].

The distinctive sign of the present era is, as is known, constant change: of the market, of sciences and technologies, of products, of consumption, marketing and communication. In a series of publications, Kotler illustrates the transition of the focus of successful marketing communication from 1. the product, to 2. the customer, to 3. the human spirit, to 4. the digital. In his book Marketing 4.0: Moving from Traditional to Digital [88], he lists the many changes taking place in the passage to a digital economy. Market segmentation and targeting are substituted by spontaneous communities of choice [89]. Traditionally fixed parameters (such as products and prices), diffuse and become dynamic (like the changing prices of flights and hotel rooms) [90]. Brand positioning and differentiation are now less important than keeping faith to a commitment and maintaining the brand's features constant [91]. This is necessary because, as has been shown elsewhere, a clear differentiation among sectors is fading and a tendency towards convergence and integration is visible in all fields [92]. The marketing mix moves from its four P's (product, price, promotion, and place) to a mix made of four C's (co-creation, currency, community, conversation) [93]. Product promotion is no longer only a movement from the producer to the client, but its main influence is exerted in the interactions among the consumers and in the feedback action from the client to the producer [94]. In other words, the transition to digital technologies changes the marketing focus and the material way to respond to the new demand. The strong immaterial (choices, commitments, brand characters) and social (community, integration, interaction) qualities of this transition reveal nevertheless a profound change of attitudes, desires and ideas which has yet to be met. In effect, Kotler believes that "digital marketing is not meant to replace traditional marketing. Instead the two will co-exist with interchanging roles [...]" [95]. Kotler sees the two forms as two tools able to fulfil different tasks. "The essence of Marketing 4.0 is to recognize the shifting roles of traditional and digital marketing in building customer engagement and advocacy" [96]. He also believes that "marketing 4.0 is a marketing

approach that combines online and offline interactions between companies and customer, [and] complements machine-to-machine connectivity with human-to-human touch to strengthen customer engagement” [96].

In all fields change occurs today with similar dynamics [97] and simultaneously more than consequentially. An increased use of digital technologies alone could probably not produce all these similar modifications. The extensive change arises rather from a series of coincidences. The change of the market, of consumption and of society concurs with the transition to the network society. At the same time there is also a coincidence of many strong catalysts, such as the erosion of all differences between the dominant, mainstream culture and the new urban tribes [98]; the cultural flow produced by migrations and by the creation of transnational ties which re-cast local cultures and produce multiple globalizations [99]; people’s chosen lifestyles and behaviors; their new immaterial needs and desires. All these elements are the true fuel of this change.

Change happens when a re-combination of old traditions and new behaviors gives life to new products and communication. Product innovations arise from a renewal of already existing items, through creative ideas, which recombine old and new elements in unexpected ways, generating progress [100]. Innovation is not born suddenly, but arises from many often un-recognized precursors. It creeps unnoticed into old thoughts, values, behaviors and modifies them. This is why it becomes visible only by changing perspective [101] and why, rarely recognized, it is often mistaken for what is already known. Columbus discovered America, but for a long time, unable to recognize his discovery, he kept calling it the Indies [102].

While a traditional version of the fashion narrative, backed by the fashion system, goes on recounting how economy and an unlimited mass consumption rule society, new products, new consumption behaviors and a new communication gain ground, in which the changes of society and the empowered consumers define the market and its products.

Recognizing these changes should enable the market to preview peoples’ demands. It should allow the system to preview their needs and redesign goods and strategies, “so that the product or service fits...and sells itself [...]. Postmodern marketing [should] make selling unnecessary” [103]. Today’s sales and communication strategies show, however, the inability of the market to offer a valid response to the consumers’ new immaterial needs [104].

This inability can however stop neither innovation, nor the re-invention of products, of consumption and of fashion consumption. The rise of new products is not the end of the market. It is the sign of a strong demand for a new consumption. While the idea of society as an inexhaustible material mass market shows all its inconsistency, the consumers’ new requests and behaviors grow increasingly effective in today’s interconnected world [105]. Each of the innovative product categories (Street Styles, City Making, Ethical Fashion) analyzed in this text concentrates on the immateriality of the new goods, which transforms consumption into social, cultural and ethical activity. The focus shifts from being material to being immaterial, from being an object to being a concept. A new consumer fashion communication arises. Its new traits are multiplicity, diversity, inclusivity [106] and creative liberty [107]. The value lies today in the immateriality of the products [108], powered by the emotional interaction of people. It is their mutual contacts, their communication and collaboration, which transforms old

goods into highly desirable new products. The rise of immaterial products and of a new fashion communication is therefore more than the invention of a new commercial item or advertising campaign. It is an evolution of mentality, which documents the existence of ideas, values, ethical concepts, creativity and human dialogue behind the new products.

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