

Teresa Sádaba · Nadzeya Kalbaska
Francesca Cominelli · Lorenzo Cantoni
Marta Torregrosa Puig *Editors*

Fashion Communication

Proceedings of the FACTUM 21
Conference, Pamplona, Spain, 2021

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Preface

The conference “FACTUM 21—Fashion Communication: between tradition and future digital developments” is a major academic event, which takes place in the School of Communication of the University of Navarra (Pamplona, Spain), June 28–July 1, 2021.

It is aimed 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 ISEM Fashion Business School (Madrid, Spain) and the School of Communication of the University of Navarra (Pamplona, Spain), in collaboration with USI—Università della Svizzera Italiana (Lugano, Switzerland) and Université Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne (Paris, France).

Through this second edition of the Factum conference, the organizers aim at consolidating Fashion Communication as an academic field and establishing an international and interdisciplinary network of related scholars.

We have received 40 submissions, 25 of which were accepted at the presentation of the event and are collected in these conference proceedings. Each research paper went through a rigorous double-blind review process by the FACTUM 21 Program Committee Members.

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: “Digitalization in Fashion”; “Fashion Communication Strategies”; “Communicating sustainability”; “Social and Cultural Perspectives”; and “Fashion Storytelling”.

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

Presentations and workshops from keynote speakers enrich the program of the FACTUM21 Conference.

We greatly appreciate the valuable time and help of all the FACTUM21 Committee members, who helped to ensure the high quality of all accepted contributions.

We would also like to thank the School of Communication of the University of Navarra for supporting and hosting this event.

We hope you enjoy FACTUM21 together with us in Pamplona.

FACTUM21 Conference Chairs

- Teresa Sádaba
- Marta Torregrosa
- Lorenzo Cantoni
- Nadzeya Kalbaska
- Francesca Cominelli

Factum 21—Fashion Communication Conference

Keynotes

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Joshua Williams | Fashion Institute of Technology, New York |
| Emanuela Mora | Universita Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano |
| Teresa Sádaba | Isem Fashion Business School, Madrid |
| Marta Torregrosa | School of Communication, University of Navarra, Pamplona |
| Fabien Pecot | TBS, Barcelona |
| Lorenzo Cantoni | Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano |
| Nadzeya Kalbaska | Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano |

| | |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Madrid, Spain | Teresa Sádaba |
| Lugano, Switzerland | Nadzeya Kalbaska |
| Paris, France | Francesca Cominelli |
| Lugano, Switzerland | Lorenzo Cantoni |
| Pamplona, Spain | Marta Torregrosa Puig |

Contents

Part I Digitalization in Fashion

| | |
|--|----|
| Omni-channel Retailing in the Fashion Industry: Its Definition and Implementation | 3 |
| Camila Portela, Nadzeya Kalbaska, and Lorenzo Cantoni | |
| Digital Fashion Competences: A Longitudinal Study | 17 |
| Tekila Harley Nobile, Nadzeya Kalbaska, Rafael Almeida de Oliveira, and Lorenzo Cantoni | |
| Touch in Text. The Communication of Tactility in Fashion E-Commerce Garment Descriptions | 29 |
| Michela Ornati | |
| Symbolic “Entrance” Effects of IoT: Portable Cosmetics Commerce behind the Deep-Link of web.3.0—A Case Study of Social Media Platform Store | 41 |
| Hsin-Pey Peng | |
| Understanding the Internal and External Drivers and Barriers for Digital Servitization in the European Textile Manufacturing Industry | 53 |
| Olga Sironi, Jonathan Rösler, Nadzeya Kalbaska, and Thomas Friedli | |
| Mediatization: Understanding the Rise of Fashion Exhibitions | 63 |
| Marta Torregrosa and Cristina Sánchez-Blanco | |

Part II Fashion Communication Strategies

| | |
|---|----|
| Fashion Statements. Fashion Communication as an Expression of Artistic, Political, and Social Manifesto between Physical and Digital | 77 |
| Vittorio Linfante | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Virgil Abloh’s Contemporary Discourse: An Academic Approach to His Communication Strategies | 91 |
| Carmen Baniandrés Gómez, María Rufat, Laura Martín-Escanciano, and María del Pilar Villanueva Cobo del Prado | |
| Advertising Format Evolution in Fashion Brands’ Communication: Contagious Case Study 2010–2020 | 103 |
| Cristina Sánchez-Blanco, Jorge del Río Pérez, Marta Torregrosa, and Elena Luisa Sanjurjo | |
| Millennials and Fashion: Branding and Positioning through Digital Interactions | 117 |
| Joan Francesc Fondevila-Gascón, Pedro Mir Bernal, Patricia SanMiguel, Teresa Sádaba, and Silvia Pérez-Bou | |
| Digital Fashion Exhibition: Salvatore Ferragamo Museum and Google Arts & Culture | 129 |
| Daniela Candeloro | |
| <i>Harper’s Bazaar en Español (1967): The Failed Attempt to Start a Spanish Edition of Harper’s Bazaar in the 1960s</i> | 143 |
| Daniele Gennaioli | |
| Part III Communicating Sustainability | |
| Adolfo Domínguez: The Role of Sustainability on the Social Media Engagement in 2020 | 157 |
| Elisa Regadera, Paula Gárgoles, and Lucía Pérez | |
| Label Conscious: Communicating Verifiable Sustainable Impact by Labelling Garments with Smart Technology | 173 |
| Hilde Heim | |
| Building a Prosocial Communication Model in the Fashion Sector, Based on Sustainability and Artificial Intelligence, Derived from COVID-19 | 187 |
| Lucía Pérez-Pérez, María Gatón Fraile, and Santa Palella Stracuzzi | |
| Dressed in Words: Crafting Slow and Fast Fashion Hashtags | 205 |
| Katharina Sand | |
| 100 Years of Fashion Activism: From the Women’s Suffrage Movement to the US 2020 Elections | 219 |
| Gabriela Ambás and Teresa Sádaba | |
| Rallying Hashtags as a Tool for Societal Change in Fashion | 237 |
| Olga Karamalak and Lorenzo Cantoni | |

Intercultural Crisis Communication on Social Media: A Case from Fashion 251
Alice Noris and Lorenzo Cantoni

Intangible Heritage: The Change of Significance of Hungarian Embroidery over Time 265
Anett Lőrincz

Part IV Fashion Storytelling

Grunig’s Two-Way Model in the Fashion Films of Chanel N° 5: *The Film and the One that I Want* 281
Ana Sánchez de la Nieta

The Revival of Heritage Fashion Houses: Brand Identity in the Digital Era 295
Gemma Muñoz Domínguez and Paloma Díaz Soloaga

Luxury Fashion Storytelling: Branding Performance on Instagram 309
Marga Velar

Fashion Stories in Rome: Place-Making Narratives Within Fashion Branded City Guides 321
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Part I
Digitalization in Fashion

Omni-channel Retailing in the Fashion Industry: Its Definition and Implementation



Camila Portela , Nadzeya Kalbaska , and Lorenzo Cantoni 

Abstract “Omni-channel retailing” frequently catches the eye of fashion industry professionals browsing the web for insights or ideas on how to face the digital transformation deeply affecting their industry, accelerated by the global pandemic. In this paper, the following research gaps are addressed: (1) a clear definition of omni-channel retailing for the fashion industry and (2) a holistic view on the integration of channels or omni-channel initiatives implemented in the fashion industry. After thematically analyzing the results of 14 in-depth interviews conducted to senior/middle-level managers of fashion retailers and solution providers, omni-channel retailing for the fashion industry was defined, as well as an omni-channel experience framework was developed. Furthermore, a list of omni-channel characteristics and initiatives for the fashion industry was created and tested. To the authors’ current knowledge, it is the first time that these theoretical contributions have been made to the omni-channel and digital fashion domains. They will help in setting theoretical bases for the omni-channel literature. Moreover, this paper could serve as a guide to omni-channel retail implementation for fashion industry executives.

Keywords Omni-channel · e-Commerce · Fashion · Digital transformation · Digital fashion

1 Introduction

The fashion domain is facing a digital transformation that has been accelerated by the recent global pandemic. Several factors are leading this momentum in the industry: “the swiftly evolving communication technologies (ICTs) and the tech-savvy generations with growing acquisition power, the millennial generation and generation Z” [1]. Researchers have only recently begun to set the theoretical bases

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of the emerging omni-channel research domain [2–4]. There is a great need to clearly define omni-channel retailing for this industry and develop a framework that illustrates this specific customer experience. There is a relatively stable agreement among researchers that omni-channel refers to the integration of channels and touch points, an integration that results in a seamless and consistent customer experience. However, literature lacks a structural view necessary to understand and identify which functions in an omni-channel system should be integrated and how [5–7].

2 Literature Review

Summarizing the most relevant articles found in three databases (Business Source Complete, ProQuest One Business, and JSTOR) using several keywords like fashion, apparel, e-Commerce, omni-channel, and retail, among others, this literature review groups previous academic knowledge in the following sections: digital fashion, omni-channel experience defining characteristics, and implementing omni-channel retailing.

2.1 *Digital Fashion*

Digital fashion or e-Fashion refers to the intersection of two realities, fashion and communication technologies (ICTs). Research around omni-channel retailing is related to how ICTs impact fashion marketing, distribution, and sales [8]. The development of ICTs for the fashion industry has made the implementation of omni-channel strategies possible [9, 10]. It is a selling strategy that has information as its core asset. ICTs are allowing retailers to integrate the information provided by the different channels and touch points. According to Mosquera et. al [10], multi-channel, cross-channel, and omni-channel retailing are stages in the evolution of retailing [4]. A multi-channel retailer is a retailer that makes use of its channels as independent entities to reach target segments. Cross-channel retailing reflects the retailer's first attempts to integrate channels to enhance cross-functionality and achieve synergy, allowing customers to trigger partial interactions between channels [2, 4, 10], while the omni-channel retailer is considered to have achieved maximum integration of channels, unlocking the possibility to create a selling strategy that takes advantage of the strong points of each channel and creates a superior shopping experience [4].

2.2 *Omni-channel Experience Defining Characteristics*

Two words catch one's eyes when reading omni-channel literature: seamless and consistent. Almost unanimously authors affirm that the omni-channel experience should be both seamless and consistent; but, interestingly, not even one of them defines these terms. The omni-channel experience construct seems to be composed of these two main characteristics. The following graph summarizes the knowledge found in literature and gives readers a holistic look at these concepts that previously had never been defined or put together.

Customers are demanding *seamless shopping experiences* because they reflect how customers themselves are engaging with brands. Seamless experiences tend to increase convenience and are a result of making switching across channels more effortless [11]; these transitions should be designed taking into consideration consumers' preferences, needs, and behavior in order to make them intuitive [10]. Customers are expecting *consistent customer experiences* across all touch points [4, 12–14]. Homburg et al. [13] define facets of touch point or channel consistency: design language, interaction behavior, communication messages, and process/navigation logic. Customers should perceive a similar style in everything that a retailer does. Zhang et al. [15] argue that consistency is not necessarily complete uniformity.

2.3 *Implementing Omni-channel Retailing*

Literature reveals that companies across all industries implement omni-channel retailing through initiatives around seven areas of channel integration, defined and exemplified with initiatives in Table 1.

3 Research Questions

This article seeks to answer the following three research questions: (a) How is omni-channel retailing understood and defined in the fashion industry? (b) What are the omni-channel initiatives that fashion brands implement? (c) What are the most recurrent initiatives implemented by firms in the fashion industry?

4 Methodology

Figure 1 was created to summarize and relate the information found in the literature review to understand the omni-channel experience construct. Afterwards, a table listing the omni-channel initiatives (across all industries) found in the literature

Table 1 Omni-channel initiatives across all industries

| Area of channel integration | Definition | Omni-channel initiatives | References |
|---|--|--|-----------------|
| 1. Promotion | “All the ways available to make a product or service known to and available to purchase by customers” [15] | Tablets as in-store sales tools; store locator on website; in-store product information via QR code; self-service technology: self-service checkouts, express-order terminals, multi-media kiosks; integration of social media | [5, 13, 14, 16] |
| 2. Order fulfillment and return processing | The steps involved in receiving, processing, and delivering orders to end customers [17]; and in managing the process of returns, which includes putting the material back into stock, refurbishing items for resale, and returning a new item to the customer if necessary. This is sometimes referred to as reverse logistics [18] | In-store return of online orders; real-time integrated inventory management; click-and-collect; delivery lockers; collect+; free home delivery of in-store orders | [14, 16, 19] |
| 3. Information management | The act of collecting customers’ information, managing the information, and making it available across channels [20] | CRM system that accommodates all channels | [20] |
| 4. Customer service | A company’s interaction with costumers on an as-needed basis to provide technical support, answer questions, and assist them in whichever way they need [6] | Support offered in physical stores for problems related to online purchases; website provides after-sales services; Support for products bought in physical stores, real-time live chat | [20] |
| 5. Product and pricing information management | The management of product information, descriptions, categories, prices, and discounts across channels [20] | Consistency in pricing across channels | [19] |
| 6. Information access | Facilitating customers’ access to information across channels [20] | Online information of in- store product availability; information kiosks at store with online product availability information | [19–21] |
| 7. Performance measurement | How a company quantifiably assesses how well it is achieving its desired objectives across all channels | Online statistics; tracking additional sales from click-and-collect | [19] |

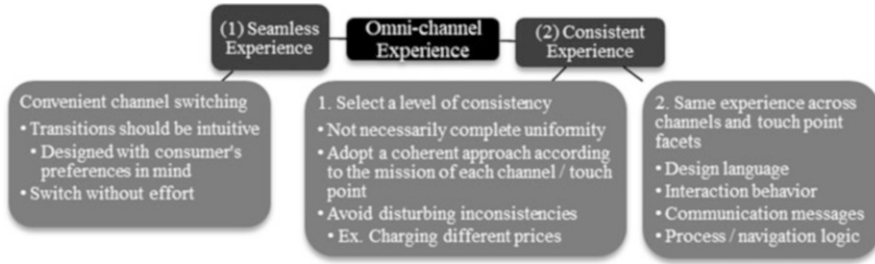


Fig. 1 Omni-channel experience construct based on literature

(Table 1) was used in order to validate it through interviews, aimed at understanding which of these initiatives had been applied to the fashion industry and therefore create a list specific to this industry (Table 2). A total of 14 interviews were conducted. The explorative nature of this research favors the choice of qualitative methods, concretely, semi-structured, in-depth interviews. A mix purposive and convenience sampling was used to select senior/middle-level managers of two types of companies: fashion brands/retailers and solution providers. Participants were guaranteed anonymity; however, Appendix A lists a general profile for each company that participated. In this research, fashion brands/retailers are companies that belong to the fashion or luxury industry; sell their own products (brand) or those of others (retailer); and have both a physical and online shop. Solution providers are companies that sell technological solutions for e-Commerce and have or have had at least one fashion brand/retailer as a client. One guide of 15 open-ended questions was developed for each group. Interviews were held during May and June 2018 in Switzerland and Italy. Third, Braun and Clarke’s [23] 6-step framework for thematic analysis and an approach developed by the authors – explained further below – were used to analyze the transcribed interviews. The results from this analysis were compared to the information obtained in the literature review, resulting in a definition of omni-channel retailing for the fashion industry and in the *Omni-channel Experience Framework* (Fig. 2). Also, Table 1 was used as a list to keep track of the initiatives that were mentioned by the companies. If the initiative was mentioned, a “1” would be placed in the corresponding cell beside the item and below the name of the company. If the initiative was not mentioned, the cell would remain empty. After tabulation, the results would be analyzed by ranking the items according to the number of times they were mentioned in the interviews (Table 3). Fourth, the results were then compared to the initial list obtained from the literature review (Table 1), and the final list tailored to the fashion industry was created (Table 2).

5 Results and Discussion

Results are presented and discussed along the three research questions.

Table 2 Omni-channel initiatives list for the fashion industry

| Area of integration | Definition | Omni-channel initiative | Definition |
|---|--|---|---|
| Promotion | “All the ways available to make a product or service known to and available to purchase by customers” [22] | Smartphones and tablets as in-store sales tools | The use of smart phones or tablets as devices for selling merchandise that is in-store or online, while in the physical shop |
| | | Store locator on website | A feature of the store’s website that showcases the geographical location of all of the firm’s physical stores |
| | | In-store product information via QR code | A QR code in the price tag of the product will lead the customer, when scanned, to a landing page with detailed information about the product (e.g., manufacturing details, other colors and sizes available, etc.) |
| | | Self-service technologies | Touch-screen display kiosks that allow a customer to scan, pay, or place an order or access additional multi-media information without the help of an employee |
| | | Integration of social media | When all social media accounts are in line, with the same marketing strategies |
| | | Online and offline loyalty program | A loyalty program that covers both physical and online sales |
| Order fulfillment and return processing | The steps involved in receiving, processing, and delivering orders to end customers [23]; and in managing the process of returns, which includes putting the material back into stock, refurbishing items for resale, and returning a new item to the customer if necessary. This is sometimes referred to as reverse logistics [18] | In-store return of online orders | A product that is bought online can be returned in the store |
| | | Real-time integrated inventory management | One repository for all inventory, for products from online and physical shops, and that records sales and purchases immediately to have a complete picture of what’s occurring with inventory |
| | | Click-and-collect or BOPIS | Buy online and pick-up or collect in store |

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

| Area of integration | Definition | Omni-channel initiative | Definition |
|------------------------|---|---|--|
| | | Delivery lockers | A delivery option to place products in locker at a convenient location for the customer, usually a car parking or train station |
| | | Collect+ | Free service in which retailers contract local businesses to collect returns from costumers and bring them back to the firm |
| | | Free home delivery of in-store orders | Products bought in physical stores are delivered for free to the customer’s home |
| | | In-store packing of click-and-collect orders | Products that are bought online and destined to be picked-up at the store are also prepared and packed in-store |
| | | Endless aisle | Allowing customer in the store to virtually browse or order products that are out of stock or not sold in-store; then these are either shipped to the store or directly to the customer’s home |
| Information management | The act of collecting customers’ information, managing the information, and making it available across channels [20] | CRM system that accommodates all channels | A CRM system that captures information from both online and offline channels |
| Customer service | A company’s interaction with costumers on an as-needed basis to provide technical support, answer questions, and assist them in whichever way they need [6] | Support offered in physical stores for problems related to online purchases | In-store employees are prepared to offer support to customers that face problems with online purchase transactions |
| | | Website provides after-sales services | Employees in charge of online store are prepared to support customer with problems they face with products bought in either store, physical or online, through a real-time live chat or e-mail |
| Product and pricing | The management of product information, | Consistency in pricing across channels | |

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

| Area of integration | Definition | Omni-channel initiative | Definition |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|
| information management | descriptions, categories, prices, and discounts across channels [20] | | The firm has a pricing strategy that is the same for all channels |
| Information access | Facilitating customers' access to information across channels [20] | Online information of in-store product availability | Customers can verify online if a product is available in-store at different locations |
| | | Information kiosks at store with online product availability information | Customers can go to information kiosks at the physical store to verify if a product is available online |
| Performance measurement | How a company quantifiably assesses how well it is achieving its desired objectives across all channels | Online statistics | The firm uses online statistics to track the performance of sales |
| | | Tracking additional sales from click-and-collect | The firm keeps track of the additional sales that come from products bought online and picked-up at the store |

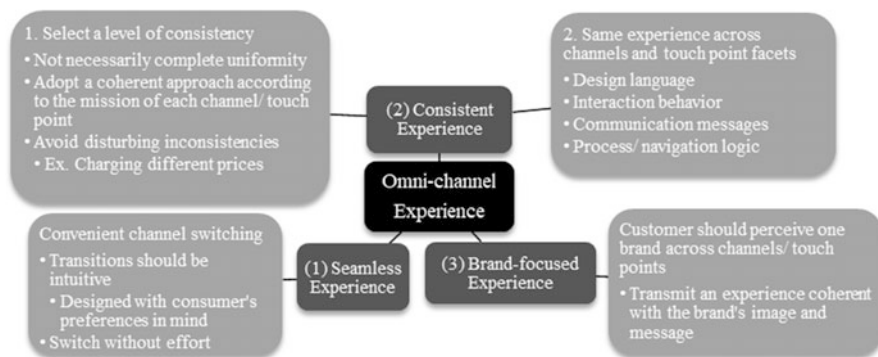


Fig. 2 Omni-channel experience framework

5.1 How Is Omni-channel Retailing Understood and Defined in the Fashion Industry?

Omni-channel Categories Interviews revealed four common categories around omni-channel: (1) *Omni-channel retailing requires cross-channel integration*: a company that wants to “be omni-channel” should integrate all of its active channels, blurring the boundaries between them. (2) *Omni-channel is a customer-centric*

Table 3 Ranking of omni-channel initiatives in the fashion industry each was mentioned in the different interviews

| Ranking | Omni-channel initiatives | N. of times | Area of channel integration mentioned |
|---------|---|-------------|--|
| 1 | CRM system that accommodates all channels | 11 | Information management |
| 2 | Click-and-collect | 9 | Order fulfillment and return processing |
| 3 | Real-time integrated inventory management | 8 | Order fulfillment and return processing |
| 4 | Consistency in pricing across channels | 6 | Product and pricing information management |
| 5 | Integration of social media | 5 | Promotion |
| 5 | In-store return of online orders | 5 | Order fulfillment and return processing |
| 6 | Tablets as in-store sales tools | 3 | Promotion |
| 7 | In-store product information via QR code | 2 | Promotion |
| 7 | Free home delivery of in-store orders | 2 | Order fulfillment and return processing |
| 7 | Online information of in-store product availability | 2 | Information access |
| 8 | Self-service technologies | 1 | Promotion |
| 8 | Support offered in physical stores for problems related to online purchases | 1 | Customer service |
| 8 | Tracking additional sales from click-and-collect | 1 | Performance measurement |

approach: the firm must integrate its channels from the customer’s point of view, resulting in an exchange and communication with customers across channels. (3) *There is diversity in the actual implementation of omni-channel*: it is a concept that represents many individual realities and should be implemented in ways that are efficient for each company. Related to this, a sub-theme was identified: *omni-channel initiatives*, specific actions that are executed in a company to merge the different online and offline channels or touch points. (4) *Omni-channel demands specific customer experience characteristics*: consistency, seamlessness, and brand focus.

Omni-channel Retailing, a Definition for the Fashion Industry Based on the results of this research and on Verhoef’s [24] definition, omni-channel retailing in the fashion industry can be defined in the following way:

Omni-channel retailing in the fashion industry is the management of selected channels or touch points that are efficient for a firm and desired by its customers, and which have been fully integrated through specific initiatives that create a seamless, consistent and brand-focused experience.

5.1.1 Omni-channel Experience Framework

In the literature review, the omni-channel experience concept was deconstructed using two of its main defining characteristics, seamlessness and consistency. Thanks to this research, it has been enriched with insights from the interviews, and an additional defining characteristic has been added: brand-focused experience. This framework (Fig. 2) now clarifies what is meant by an omni-channel experience and can be of help to companies that want to create this type of experience in the future and also researchers that are interested in studying omni-channel retailing. According to the Omni-channel Experience Framework, a (1) *seamless experience* comes from creating convenient channel/touch point switching or creating transitions that are intuitive. A (2) *consistent experience* is made up of two features. First, *select the level of consistency you want your customer to experience*. This means that consistency is not necessarily complete uniformity but instead the adoption of a coherent approach according to the mission of each channel or touch point. Second, *translating the same desired experience across all the channel/touch point facets*. Finally, a (3) *brand-focused experience* is an experience in which customers perceive one brand across channels/touch points; this is achieved by transmitting an experience coherent with the brand's image and message across channels.

5.2 What Are the Omni-channel Initiatives that Fashion Brands Implement?

A list of omni-channel initiatives generated from literature was used to create this final version. Though a well-researched list, it was lacking a couple of initiatives that were discovered during the interviews: *online and offline loyalty program* and *endless aisle*. Also two other small modifications, which came from the interviews, were made to other initiatives in the list. Adding *smartphones* to the initiative completed the first initiative in the list, called *tablets as in-store sales tools*. Now one can read *smartphones and tables as in-store sales tools*. Also, another popular way of calling the *click-and-collect* initiative, which is *BOPIS*, an acronym for Buy Online Pick-up In Store. Thanks to these additions and to the effort of defining each initiative and area of channel integration, the most complete list, to the author's current knowledge, of omni-channel initiatives for the fashion industry has been created.

5.3 *What Are the Most Recurrent Initiatives Implemented by Firms in the Fashion Industry?*

Table 3 showcases the most recurrent initiatives and areas of channel integration in the interviews.

6 Conclusion

The objectives of this article were to (1) understand the concept of omni-channel retailing and omni-channel experience in the fashion industry and (2) provide evidence of the implementation of omni-channel retailing within the fashion industry and understand how companies in this industry are integrating their channels. In-depth interviews were conducted and analyzed using thematic analysis methodology. The following novel theoretical contributions have been made: a definition for omni-channel retailing in the fashion industry, a visual framework that explains the omni-channel experience according to its main defining characteristics and a comprehensive list of omni-channel initiatives for the fashion industry. Each theoretical contribution was derived from a detailed analysis of the literature around omni-channel retailing and analysis of the responses of the senior/middle-level managers of two types of companies: fashion brands/retailers and solution providers.

A limitation found was that two additional characteristics should have been added when selecting the fashion retailers to interview: the company has explicit intention to implement omni-channel retailing, and the size of the firms. Future researchers could take into consideration the size of companies and do two studies, one in which they interview firms “born” omni-channel and one interviewing “legacy” firms, and also use the *Omni-channel Initiatives List for the Fashion Industry* as a guide to empirically measure the implementation of omni-channel retailing within different fashion firms. The contributions of this research serve as guide to fashion executives for omni-channel implementation. They can use the *Omni-channel Experience Framework* to understand and design an omni-channel experience and pick omni-channel initiatives from the *Omni-channel Initiatives List for the Fashion Industry* to implement it.

Participant Profiles

The following list showcases the participant profiles for each of the 14 interviewees in this investigation. SPR stands for “Service Provider,” and FBR stands for “Fashion Brand/Retailer.” (Table 4)

Table 4 Participant profiles

| Profile | Code | Profile | Code |
|---|-------|--|-------|
| 1. American firm that sells an omni-channel platform based on the integration of a cloud-based order management system and mobile point of sales. | SPR-1 | 8. Swiss fashion brand that focuses on making tailor-made bottoms. | FBR-3 |
| 2. Full-service e-commerce provider and digital marketing agency in China. | SPR-2 | 9. Swiss retailer that sells international designer clothing. | FBR-4 |
| 3. e-commerce and RFID management consulting boutique based in Switzerland. | SPR-3 | 10. American multi-brand apparel and footwear company. | FBR-5 |
| 4. Irish e-commerce company that sells a technology platform for brands and retailers. | SPR-4 | 11. Luxury Italian knitwear brand. | FBR-6 |
| 5. German sporting goods brand, leader in the European market. | FBR-1 | 12. Swiss jewelry brand. | FBR-7 |
| 6. Brazilian fast-fashion brand. | FBR-2 | 13. American multi-brand apparel and footwear company. | FBR-8 |
| 7. Swiss mass-market fashion brand. | FBR-3 | 14. Swiss luxury lingerie brand. | FBR-9 |

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Digital Fashion Competences: A Longitudinal Study



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Abstract The fashion field is undergoing a period of digital transformation, further accelerated by the Covid19 pandemic. The evolution of digital fashion foresees a change in the required skills and competences, which should be mastered by employees of the sector. Moreover, the dynamicity of digital fashion also implies the need to constantly update academic curricula, which should be able to form the employees who will be entering the digital fashion job market.

The research objectives of this study are twofold. Firstly, research the skills and competences needed in the current digital fashion market in order to identify whether there are any salient differences from a similar study conducted in 2017 by Kalbaska and Cantoni (Business models and ICT technologies for the fashion supply Chain. IT4Fashion 2017. Lecture notes in electrical engineering. Cham: Springer, 2019). Secondly, conduct such analysis during the Covid19 pandemic, a unique period for the job market, which has experienced major cuts also in human resources, while at the same time a dramatic increase of digital activities has been seen (e.g., eCommerce). To reach such goals, a study has been conducted on LinkedIn, a professional social network, from May 19, 2020, to June 2, 2020, to identify the number and the type of job listings, and the most required skills in the digital fashion domain in the EU and Switzerland.

Keywords Digital fashion · Digital transformation · Skills and competences · Fashion curricula

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1 Introduction

The fashion industry is being impacted by technology advances. Digitalization is transforming the whole industry, from the way in which products are being produced to the communication between retailers and consumers and individuals' shopping habits [1]. Hence, digitalization implies the need to conduct further research on the entire ecosystem of the fashion field [2–4].

Fashion should be about innovations and trends, yet fashion brands have not been at the forefront of digital innovations, with the exception of few disruptive fashion brands [4]. However, the Covid19 pandemic has strongly affected the fashion industry and accelerated the digital transformation that companies have been reluctant to embrace. Due to social distancing, digital channels have gained high importance, and fashion companies have had to drastically rethink their business, embrace new channels, and respond to consumers' changing habits by identifying alternative solutions to the existing ways of operating [5].

To survive this crisis, companies will need to adapt quickly. The digital capabilities will continue to impact individuals' daily lives; hence companies are required to strengthen their digital potential as when this crisis will be over, the fashion industry will have to continue facing a time of changes. To face such complex time, fashion companies must be ready to strategically redefine their business model across the whole value chain. To do so, companies must have a workforce with the appropriate skills and competences to embrace the digital transformation [6].

Additionally, recent studies are acknowledging the lack of integration between students' learning in higher education and the job market. To fill this gap and to form the employees of the future, academic curricula that take into consideration the evolving industry requirements are necessary [7, 8]. Graduates are entering an extremely difficult and unpredictable job market. Moreover, due to the reduction of internships and new/entry level jobs, the competition to find a job opportunity is high. Therefore, equipping them with the relevant skills is crucial.

This study aims to gain a comprehensive overview of the skills and competences needed in the current digital fashion environment and identify how the digital fashion job market is changing through a longitudinal study. To do so, it continues the study by Kalbaska and Cantoni [9], who researched the digital fashion domain in 2017. Details regarding the way in which the study was conducted are discussed in the methodology section. The longitudinal approach is expected to provide insightful conclusions on whether there are any changes from the year 2017 to the year 2020 in which this study has been carried out. Moreover, this study is executed during a unique period, when the whole world is facing a pandemic, adding one more reason of interest to it.

2 Literature Review

Digitalization is having a big impact on the fashion industry. This process is altering and advancing fashion business models and formats, the channels utilized to communicate with consumers, and the customer journey touchpoints [10]. Indeed, fashion is shown to be a rich field, and its interplay with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and digital media happens on different levels. Digitalization is impacting not only the design and production processes adopted by fashion firms but also the way in which retailers communicate with consumers and market their products. These changes are having an impact on the whole society, including education.

The growing importance of digital fashion is also supported by scholars' interest in the digital fashion domain and an increased number of publications on digital fashion from the 1950s till 2019 [1].

This study aims to contribute to the ongoing research in the context of fashion transformation by discussing the impact of digitalization on the job skills and competences required by the industry. Additionally, it addresses the importance of identifying the relevance of skills and competences also for the development of academic curricula.

2.1 *Digitalization: Job Skills and Competences*

The digital transformation of a business involves a deep transformation of its activities, processes, and competences [11]. Adapting to the digital changes and integrating a new technology within a business involve both possibilities and challenges. To face such complexity, retailers need on one hand advanced IT infrastructures to conduct their activities and to provide the services to consumers, and on the other hand they must have employees with the appropriate skills and competences to implement these innovations within the business [12, 13].

Skills are a specialized knowledge that enable the creation of products/services and the manipulation of processes and people [11]. Due to digital advances, the routine jobs are increasingly being performed by robots. Employees should focus on developing those skills necessary for nonroutine jobs. The literature has identified some generic skills, which are crucial for completing various tasks in the digital context, including information, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills [14]. Similar skills are also identified to be relevant in the fashion field in the study by Kalbaska and Cantoni [9]. Indeed, the communication skills are among the top skills also for fashion employees [9]. Communication digital skills are defined by van Laar et al. [14: 94] as the ability "to transmit information online and reflect upon the best way to present this information to a particular audience" and they can be of various types. Fashion firms utilize different types of digital media to interact with consumers. Hence, the communication skills of content sharing and creation are important. ICTs provide employees

with innovative solutions to do so creatively, which is essential in such a competitive market [1–16]. Furthermore, the categories identified by van Laar et al. [14] of problem-solving skills and critical-thinking skills, which involve the ability of analyzing a problem and making informed decisions based on evidences, are also crucial within the digital fashion domain, reflected in the data-related skills such as web analytics and analytical skills identified by Kalbaska and Cantoni [9].

The rapid evolution of technologies implies that the skills and competences across the whole supply chain should be constantly updated [12]. To date, however, research has paid limited attention to the skills needed by employees in the digital fashion environment [2]; hence, this research aims to address this gap.

2.2 *Digitalization: Fashion Curricula*

Research on the skills and competences in digital fashion is expected to be relevant also for the development of academic curricula that take into consideration the integration of fashion with ICTs [1–9, 13]. University programs sometimes are criticized for being irrelevant for the market needs and not being able to prepare students for the relevant job markets. Traditional teaching methods, which focus on developing students' academic skills, are definitely important; yet they do not always fully prepare students for the job market [16].

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the integration of technologies within learning has become object of study. Graduates need to be equipped with relevant digital skills to enter the job market. Hence, an active use of technologies within the educational journey, such as mobile applications, augmented reality, and social media channels, can be crucial to prepare students to the complexities of the job market [17]. For example, within the fashion field, the study by Son et al. [18] has developed an interactive learning curriculum for the apparel design and merchandising subject using social media channels. Some of the positive aspects derived from the integration of such channels in the curriculum are higher understanding of the topics, enhanced critical thinking, application of knowledge, and technology skills.

The Covid19 pandemic, which forced many classes to be conducted partially or fully online due to social distancing regulations, stressed the importance of students' curricula that are able to satisfy the evolving market needs. Curricula should be re-evaluated to be relevant for students' post-graduation [19]. Research on digital fashion curricula is still limited to our knowledge, while it is one of the key research topics and key emerging trends identified and presented in the Fashion Communication research Manifesto, developed during FACTUM 19 Conference [2]. Moreover, as mentioned above, the fashion industry is rapidly changing. Hence, this study aims to address the lack of research in digital fashion curricula by providing an analysis of the job roles and skills currently required in digital fashion and that should be integrated in the fashion curricula.

The following section provides details regarding the methodology adopted in order to collect the data.

3 Methodology

For the purpose of this study, a longitudinal research was chosen. In this type of research, data is collected from one or more variables of the same object of study for two or more periods. Thus, it is possible to compare the results of the different periods, identifying the main changes occurred and the possible causes [20].

Job postings related to the digital fashion market were collected on LinkedIn. The social network serves as a worldwide job market with its 675 million members [21], and no other social network for professionals has had the same impact [22]. Job vacancies posted on LinkedIn receive more potential candidates than on networks like Facebook or Twitter together [23], making it a worldwide known platform for increasing employability [22]. The nature of LinkedIn makes it possible for recruiters to identify potential talents and attract them to job openings. As a social network, the access to a large number of professionals in real-time makes LinkedIn widely used by companies and Human Resources professionals to increase the quality of their selection processes [23, 24].

For data collection, an automated web scraping tool called WebHarvy was used. The web scraping tool collects unstructured data available on websites, transforming it into a structured and manageable database [25, 26]. Websites can be described as content pages in digital format, composed of data such as texts, videos, and photos [27]. Websites usually have similar templates to each other, disseminating information similarly in the architecture of each page. Thus, the web scraping tool collects the selected information from a specific page and replicates the process to the other pages, creating an organized database [28].

The web scraping tool was used from 19.05.2020 to 02.06.2020. The steps for conducting data collection and standardizing the analysis followed the methodology described by Kalbaska and Cantoni [9]. For each job posting, the following data were collected: job title, company name, location, publication date of the advertisement, job description, and the industry the job belongs to. Posts from 29 countries (European Union and Switzerland) in English were selected. Besides, the search was limited to the following industries: Apparel and Fashion, Internet, Luxury Goods and Jewellery, Marketing and Advertising, Retail, Textile, and Design.

The following keywords were used for the search of the postings: 3D, Augmented Reality, CRM, Digital Communication, Digital Content, Digital Fashion, Digital Marketing, Digital Media, Digital Transformation, eCommerce, eLearning, Fashion IT, Forecasting, Influencer Marketing, Localization, Personalization, SEO/SEM, Social Media, Trade Marketing, Usability, User Experience, Visual Merchandising, and Web Analytics. From these filters, data from 10,116 job postings was collected.

In the data-cleaning phase, job postings that did not contain the word “fashion” in the job title or in the job description were removed. Moreover, duplicate job postings were eliminated. Subsequently, job postings with the word “fashion” only in the job description were manually analyzed for relevancy.

Following the data-cleaning phase, the final database consisted of 1397 job postings. Quantitative content analysis of job titles and job descriptions was performed using WordSmith Tool 6.

4 Results and Discussion

The presentation and discussion of results is structured as follows: firstly, it discusses the job positions which emerged in digital fashion, and then it analyzes the job titles and descriptions to identify the relevant competences and skills. In order to identify whether there are any evolutions in the digital fashion job market and the impact of Covid19 on the market, the data is compared with the set of data of 2017 by Kalbaska and Cantoni [9].

4.1 Job Positions in Digital Fashion

The number of job positions identified in this study is 1397 (Table 1), compared to 1427 in 2017. Despite the apparent small decrease in the number of listings in 2020, it should be considered that the collection of the data set was conducted between the end of May and beginning of June (19.05.2020 to 02.06.2020). A period when the whole world was being affected by the Covid19 pandemic and most countries were experiencing the first lockdown and its drastic consequences on the global economy. Arguably, considering the market situation, the number of job listings identified in 2020 is high, and it symbolizes the growing importance of digital fashion within the job market, suggesting that fashion companies were intensifying their online activities also encouraged by the social distancing requirements imposed by the pandemic.

The hubs of digital fashion across the years remain the United Kingdom and Germany. However, the number of countries in which job listings are identified increased between the two studies, with job listing identified in 17 countries in 2017 and in 26 countries in 2020, showing that the relevance of digital fashion is spreading across countries.

4.2 Job Titles and Skills in Job Descriptions

The most frequent combinations of keywords found in digital fashion job titles (Table 2) were “marketing specialist” and “ecommerce specialist.” The first two positions in 2017 were occupied respectively by “digital marketing” and “social media,” whereas in 2020 “social media” slipped in sixth position and eCommerce roles grew of importance. Consumers’ shift to online shopping for fashion products

Table 1 Number of digital fashion jobs available on LinkedIn from May to June 2020

| Countries | Frequencies |
|----------------|-------------|
| Austria | 11 |
| Belgium | 34 |
| Bulgaria | 1 |
| Croatia | 1 |
| Czech Republic | 2 |
| Denmark | 12 |
| Estonia | 1 |
| Finland | 10 |
| France | 44 |
| Germany | 203 |
| Greece | 5 |
| Hungary | 6 |
| Ireland | 17 |
| Italy | 86 |
| Lithuania | 6 |
| Luxembourg | 3 |
| Netherlands | 85 |
| Poland | 17 |
| Portugal | 67 |
| Romania | 5 |
| Slovakia | 2 |
| Slovenia | 1 |
| Spain | 44 |
| Sweden | 23 |
| Switzerland | 82 |
| United Kingdom | 629 |
| Total | 1397 |

is expected to continue growing, accelerated by the Covid19 pandemic which anticipates consumers’ increase spending on online channels [29]. Arguably, when referring to eCommerce, other skills might also be implied, as other channels such as social media or voice search are also being adopted for eCommerce purposes beyond traditional websites [30, 31].

The other sets of data analyzed provide an overview of the combinations of the most frequent keywords in the digital fashion job descriptions (Table 3). Overall, the keywords identified across the two studies appear to be very similar, with some exceptions.

The most mentioned keyword combination is that of “luxury fashion.” This could be as the luxury sector is unique for some aspects [32]; hence it requires particular attention. On the other hand, in the study by Kalbaska and Cantoni [9], the most mentioned skill is that of “social media.” Arguably, this result does not indicate a reduction in the importance of social media skills but an increase in the number of other skills required in digital fashion. Moreover, another possible explanation is that

Table 2 Top 20 fashion job titles

| Keywords combinations | # |
|-----------------------|----|
| Marketing specialist | 48 |
| Ecommerce specialist | 47 |
| Visual associate | 44 |
| Content writer | 43 |
| Product manager | 41 |
| Social media | 40 |
| Influencer marketing | 38 |
| Customer service | 30 |
| Store manager | 28 |
| Account manager | 25 |
| Business developer | 20 |
| Graphic designer | 20 |
| Service assistance | 14 |
| Visual merchandising | 13 |
| Operations associate | 13 |
| Campaign manager | 13 |
| Sales management | 8 |
| Fashion assistant | 7 |
| Media executive | 7 |
| Digital analyst | 5 |

Table 3 Top 20 digital fashion skills and competences in job descriptions

| Keywords combinations | # |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| Luxury fashion | 737 |
| Customer service/care | 692 |
| Communication skills | 520 |
| Written communication | 494 |
| Digital marketing | 406 |
| Team player | 397 |
| Verbal communication | 377 |
| Customer experience | 338 |
| Analytical skills/Google analytics | 236 |
| Time management | 225 |
| Visual merchandising | 218 |
| Problem-solving | 216 |
| Project management | 177 |
| Work independently | 156 |
| Fashion industry | 149 |
| Management skills | 142 |
| International team | 125 |
| Flexible working | 119 |
| Paid social | 102 |
| Fashion trends | 99 |

for fashion firms, social media skills are now considered an essential prerequisite and therefore less relevant to highlight in job listings.

Extremely interesting is the importance of “customer service/care” skills in both sets of data. According to the literature, the role of technology in providing services is evolving as it enables to provide better services by facilitating the interaction between employees and customers [33]. Moreover, consumers interact with multiple channels and devices in their shopping activities; hence in the omnichannel retailing experience, which “is geared towards serving customers when and how they want” [15: 471], customer service skills are fundamental.

Soft skills are extremely important in fashion. Communication skills remain among the top skills needed in fashion. Digital channels have enhanced communication abilities and the possibilities to connect, yet in a market characterized by information overload, attracting consumers’ attention is a major challenge, to be addressed with adequate knowledge and skills. Communication skills, both oral and written, enable effective communication among employees and with customers. Fashion firms are constantly searching for ways to connect to individuals’ emotions and feelings through their communication activities. A growing trend is that of providing personalized messages to individuals through different channels in order to attract consumers’ attention and build a relationship with each individual [3]. Hence, excellent communication skills that are able to reach individuals’ emotions are of crucial importance [33]. In the 2017 data set, other skills that are connected to communication skills, such as the ability of creating marketing campaigns, email marketing, and digital content creation emerged to be important. Interestingly, such skills were not identified among the top skills in the 2020 data set. However, traditional communication tools such as email marketing are still widely adopted by fashion retailers [34]. Arguably, as previously mentioned, even though the skills expected by digital fashion experts evolve with new technologies, it should not be concluded that traditional skills lose their relevancy. Other soft skills, such as being a team player, being part of an international team, and also being able to work independently, solve problems, and manage time, are required.

In addition to soft skills, employees in fashion should also have analytical and data skills. Arguably, it is because the traditional skills of the fashion industry are being impacted by data skills. Analytical skills appear in both studies, implying that the ability of understanding, analyzing, and interpreting data is an essential skill. As consumer online shopping habits are expected to continue growing beyond the pandemic, brands will have access to a large amount of data. Moreover, data is impacting other skills, such as the ability of identifying fashion trends. In fact, data can have many purposes within the fashion industry, as it enables to understand consumer behavior, make predictions, and forecast trends [35]. Hence, firms need employees able to both analyze and interpret the data in a way that can be utilized for strategic decisions in such a dynamic environment.

Finally, skills specific to different emerging technologies, such as augmented reality and 3D printing, do not emerge from the studies, although in the most recent research they were inserted as keywords on LinkedIn. 3D design is an interesting method to experiment with, and there is already the equipment at disposal to

implement it, yet it is still at its infancy in the fashion industry [5]. However, “customer experience skills” appear to be relevant in digital fashion, and retailers are relying on technological advancements such as 3D, VR, and AR to develop and offer user experiences. Hence, skills relevant for new technological advances are expected to become more important in the coming years.

5 Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research

The digital fashion domain is evolving, gaining importance across countries. This study addresses the suggestion by Kalbaska and Cantoni [9] of a longitudinal study to capture the evolution of the field in terms of the skills and competences required by employees. The number of job listings has substantially remained stable from 2017 to 2020, showing that it was not highly affected by the Covid19 pandemic. Furthermore, it emerges that employees wishing to work in the field should have a wide range of skills, from soft communication skills to operational skills. The results of the studies also imply the need to develop updated fashion curricula that consider the integration of fashion with ICTs to prepare students to the competitive and dynamic fashion job market.

It will be interesting to continue researching how the fashion job market will evolve, including the demand of digital fashion positions and the related skills. After the Covid19 pandemic, the digital fashion market is expected to continue its growth; hence further research will enable to capture its evolution in the years to come. Moreover, further research could analyze existing curricula and consider how they could be implemented to address the needs of the evolving field.

Limitations of the study should be addressed in future research. Firstly, the data was collected on a single platform LinkedIn; hence future research could consider also other platforms. Moreover, only the positions in English language were analyzed. This could provide bias results in the number of job listings in other countries. Hence, future research could take into consideration job listings in other languages and other countries.

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Touch in Text. The Communication of Tactility in Fashion E-Commerce Garment Descriptions



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Abstract Touch is central to the embodied experience of material garments. Passive touch sensations convey how dress feels on the skin, and active touch enables the perception and appreciation of its material properties, as the term “fabric hand” aptly implies. In fact, the subjectively perceived tactile attributes of materials have been described and categorized into ad hoc lexicons by means of sensory evaluation research procedures involving both expert and non-expert panellists. These vocabularies provide a semantic framework for the description of garment materials from a consumer perspective. Thus, they can also serve as an interpretative lens for how tactility is communicated to online viewers. However, a pragmatic, qualitative investigation into a representative sample of popular fashion e-commerce websites indicates that references to touch within garment page descriptions are sparse. Given e-commerce’s relevance for fashion brands, improving communication of touch in text presents opportunities.

Keywords Touch · Haptics · Digital fashion communication · Fashion e-commerce

1 Introduction

1.1 *Touch in the Online Experience of Dress*

The sense of touch is central to the embodied practice of garments [1], because dress engages this particular sense in all its complexity [2]. When our hands reach out to actively touch and grasp a garment, we collect information about its material and thermal properties via highly specialized receptor systems embedded in the skin. While getting dressed, we activate and engage other parts of the body, triggering

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kinesthetic touch sensations such as pull and pressure. When the clothes we put on graze the skin, passive touch sensations relayed to the brain contribute to the multisensory perception and evaluation [3, 4] of our bodily experience of dress. Thus, touch sensation [5] is inseparable from our interaction with garments—material items intended to physically cover, protect, and adorn [6] our bodies.

In the digital fashion realm, specifically in the two-dimensional context of fashion e-commerce websites, dress cannot be physically touched, but it can be seen, and its haptic properties perceived visually. Online, garments are presented onscreen through moving and still images, text, and possibly sound. Seeing pictures—perhaps even a video—of an item of clothing worn by a model triggers sensory substitution processes, activating mental simulations or re-enactments of the perceptual experience of dress; reading a description of the item may produce similar effects [7, 8]. Thus, a congruent interplay of textual and visual haptic cues [9, 10] can lead to a perceptually meaningful, if not physically concrete, representation of the embodied experience of dress in fashion e-commerce.

Furthermore, research in consumer behavior and sensory marketing has demonstrated that orchestrating congruent audio-visual multisensory stimuli in physical retail settings, as well as in advertising and promotion communications, impacts consumer perception, cognition, and behavioral outcomes [11–16]. Similar research has been carried out in online settings [17–19], suggesting that effectively conveying tactile sensations in text can play a significant role in fashion e-commerce.

1.2 Research Objective

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions governments worldwide have imposed on retail operations, fashion e-commerce has grown considerably and, consequently, so has digital fashion communication relevance for fashion brands [20–22]. With stores shuttered, the experience of dress needs to shift online and be communicated within the sensory constraints of available technological affordances [23]; still and moving images, sound, and text can be mobilized to this effect. However, much attention has been paid to digital effects such as augmented and virtual reality [24] but not, to date and to the author's best knowledge, to the online communication of the embodied, tactile experience of dress, or, more specifically, to the role of sensory text. The purpose of this study is to address this gap. In so doing, the researcher does not wish to dismiss the importance of images in digital fashion nor the significance of multisensory processes in visual and textual perception and, ultimately, consumer behavior [15, 25]. Rather, the objective of this study is to analyze, within a representative sample of popular fashion e-commerce websites, if and how the written word (independently of moving and still images) makes reference to the intrinsic, tactile properties of garments—thereby contributing, by virtue of the processes briefly described above, to the viewer's perceptual and cognitive understanding of the materiality of dress.

2 Background

2.1 *Approaches to Sensory Evaluation of Materials and Garments*

Wearing garments activates the tactile perception of garment material feel under the hand and on the skin, and the on-body kinesthetic sensations of being clothed. This research focuses primarily on material feel, although as we shall discuss, attributes from on-body effects emerge as well. The subjective perception of material feel is influenced by a variety of physiological, psychological, social, and cultural factors; therefore, consistently measuring material attributes or describing them in technical and layman's terms poses unique challenges [26]. In order to solve these issues, researchers and industry actors have developed different approaches involving mechanical measurements, human judgment, or a combination of both. This study leverages evidence gleaned from the literature on sensory evaluation, as described below.

Sensory Evaluation Research in Textiles and Apparel Sensory evaluation is a procedure which aims to establish a product's sensory profile, that is, a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the sensory properties of an item, based on human judgment. The International Standards Organization (ISO) has established specific guidelines for this method [27]. Sensory evaluation includes the development of descriptive sensory lexicons for which the ISO 5492:2008 "Sensory analysis—Vocabulary" guidelines can serve as a starting point [28]. Lexicons enable standardization, serve as a common language to researchers and business, and are used as a basis for the design of consumer research [29].

In the textile and apparel domains, sensory evaluation dates to the 1920s, when the first large-scale study of subjective material perception was conducted by H. Binns [30]. An investigation—by no means exhaustive—of the literature indicates that in the last two decades alone, research in textile sensory evaluation has employed various methodologies [31–34], covering numerous textile materials [35–39] or specific material attributes, such as surface texture [40–42] and apparel products [43, 44] in several countries [45–47].

Textile and apparel sensory evaluation procedures may involve one or more of the senses. Tests focused on haptic perception are conducted by asking panellists to manipulate a fabric hidden behind a screen. Evaluation categories (e.g., fabric properties related to hand or surface texture) and descriptive vocabularies may be selected in advance or developed in the course of the procedure. Depending on the objective of the analysis, panellists may be experienced judges (such as quality control experts) or untrained users. By involving non-experts, researchers can study potential consumers' perception of a given material and the terms chosen to describe its properties, thereby developing layman sensory vocabularies.

Lexical Categories In the textile and apparel sensory evaluation literature reviewed for this study, tactile attributes fall within three lexical categories, as summarized in

Table 1 Textile sensory evaluation: lexical categories

| Material attributes | Hand attributes | Surface attributes |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| Pliability (responsiveness or springiness) | Flexibility (suppleness)/stiffness (rigidity) | Flatness (vs. relief) |
| Thickness | Thinness/thickness | Density (vs. sparseness) |
| Flexibility (elasticity) | Softness/hardness | Rigidity (vs. softness) |
| Drape | Temperature (warmth vs. coldness) | Temperature (warmth vs. coldness) |
| – | Fineness (smooth)/coarseness (roughness) | Friction (sticky vs. slippery) |
| – | Moistness/dryness | Liquidity (moist vs. dry) |
| – | Lightness/heaviness | Flexibility (elasticity) |
| – | – | Pilousness (plushiness) |

Table 1. Material attributes are referred to in terms of a textile’s pliability (e.g., how fabric springs back to shape when unfolded), thickness, flexibility, and drape (how fabric falls). Hand attributes fall within descriptive extremes (e.g., from flexible to rigid, or from cold to warm). Finally, textile surface attributes are characterized in diverse terms ranging from flatness to pilousness. The lexical categorization of material attributes provides a semantic framework with which to proceed with the analysis of online textual product descriptions, as follows.

3 Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research adopts a pragmatic approach [48] to the analysis of online content [49], focusing on textual product descriptions. The sensory evaluation lexicon (Table 1) serves as an interpretative lens for how the subjectively perceived tactile qualities of products are communicated to consumers online. This line of enquiry was pursued as follows: first, by identifying a representative sample of popular fashion e-commerce websites; second, by analyzing a number of individual women’s garment webpages and product descriptions within the sample; and third, by identifying textual references within these descriptions which could be ascribed to the sensory evaluation framework. Tactile references which did not fall within the framework were noted as they emerged. The methodological approach is presented in detail below.

3.2 Research Methodology

The research was conducted from May to October 2019 and then from September 2020 to January 2021. The fashion e-commerce websites included in the sample

Table 2 Distribution of 75 items per apparel category, including, for *outerwear*, coats, jackets, and blazers; for *bottoms*, skirts, pants, and shorts; and for *tops*, shirts, t-shirts, sweatshirts, and sweaters

| Swimwear | Sportswear (technical) | Outerwear | Lingerie (nightwear) | Dresses | Bottoms | Tops |
|----------|---------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|---------|---------|------|
| 2 | 5 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 15 | 26 |

were identified by comparing and cross-referencing both worldwide and country-by-country ranking information as provided by third-party online statistical services Alexa (www.alexa.com) and SimilarWeb (www.similarweb.com). The overarching criteria for the website selection were the parent firm's incorporation in a Western country and researcher fluency in one of the country's officially recognized languages.

The final sample comprised six globally ranked websites plus seven websites top-ranked in the country of incorporation. The first includes Nike, HM, Asos, Mango, Zalando, and Shein, which was included as an exception—it being incorporated in Hong Kong—because of its ranking relevance both worldwide and within countries. The country sample included Yoox (Italy), La Redoute (France), Zara (Spain), Globus (Switzerland), Next (UK), Gap (USA), and Marks (Canada). The six globally ranked websites were accessed using the international or Swiss site version set to the English language (.com or .ch extensions). The country sites were accessed with the country-specific extension (e.g., .it, .fr, .es, .ch) and in a local language (with the exception of the German-language Zalando site, where English was preferred). The analysis focused on products in the women's clothing category.

From the links provided in the landing page menu of each fashion e-commerce website included in the sample, the researcher accessed the women's clothing category section—or product sub-sections thereof—and selected items as they appeared when scrolling down the page. Product page structure, functionalities, and content were annotated for each page until feature saturation was reached; this led to a different number of product pages and corresponding garments being studied within each website. In total, the analysis includes 75 items distributed across 7 apparel categories, as illustrated in Table 2.

Each product webpage was captured with several screenshots; available text was culled manually. Subsequently, the product descriptions were scrutinized for terms which could be mapped to the material, hand and surface attributes provided by the sensory evaluation lexical categories (Table 1), and results quantified. As mentioned, emerging touch-related textual evidence was also annotated, and instances categorized across items until saturation was reached.

4 Research Findings

4.1 Sensory Evaluation Vocabularies in Sample Text

The complete list of terms referring to garment tactility culled from the sample—vocabularies referring to material, hand, and surface attributes—is presented in Table 3.

Although all website pages featured basic product information such as garment type, material composition (including, in some cases, weave and knit type), as well as style, few included sensory descriptions; references to tactility were scarce and, in some cases, absent. Table 4 lists the fashion e-commerce websites within which such terms were found, the language of analysis, how many items were analyzed per brand, and the number of unique terms observed per lexical category. Since the frequency with which the same terms were used was not of interest in the context of this study, terms often times repeated within a single product page, or within the same brand, were counted only once.

Asos, Mango, Yoox, Zalando, and Zara are not featured in Table 4 because the product pages analyzed in these websites did not include textual references to sensory evaluation lexical categories.

Table 3 Sensory evaluation sample vocabularies. In italics: French terms (if an equivalent term was not found in English, the author’s translation is given between parenthesis)

| Categories | Sensory evaluation sample vocabularies |
|---------------------|--|
| Material attributes | Flexible, stretch/stretching, bi-stretch, <i>mi-lourd</i> (mid-heavy), heavyweight, <i>fluide</i> (fluid), drapey, tumbling, stays true (to shape), <i>grosse</i> (rough) or <i>fine</i> (<i>maille</i>)/fine (knit) |
| Hand attributes | Soft/ <i>toucher</i> <i>doux</i> , light/ <i>léger</i> , crisp, airy, heavy, warm/ <i>chaud</i> , <i>toucher ferme</i> (firm hand) |
| Surface attributes | Padded, fleeced, with vents, <i>crêponné</i> (crinkled), <i>structuré</i> (structured), ribbed/ <i>côtelée</i> , smooth/ <i>lisse</i> , flat, stitched, plush, <i>moelleux</i> (fluffy), <i>plumetis</i> (satin-stitch relief) |

Table 4 Number of unique terms found per sensory category and in total per brand

| Website | Lang. | # items | Material attributes | Hand attributes | Surface structure attributes | Total unique terms |
|------------|-------|---------|---------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| Gap | En | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Globus | Fr | 7 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 6 |
| HM | En | 8 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| La Redoute | Fr | 8 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 7 |
| Marks | En | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 6 |
| Next | En | 6 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 |
| Nike | En | 8 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 6 |
| Shein | En | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Table 5 On-body effect type descriptions (in italics: French and Italian language terms)

| On-body effect type | Sample vocabularies |
|---------------------|--|
| Material comfort | (Wicking) breathable, warm, (feels) dry, (feels) cool, cooling, regulating (temperature), soft |
| Garment comfort | Comfortable, cozy, <i>agréable à porter</i> |
| Kinesthetic feel | Snug, tight, body-hugging, streamlined, tailored, loose/ <i>ampio</i> , non-restrictive, relaxed, easy, covering, supporting, shaping, accentuating (hips and thighs), close fitting/ <i>attillato, ajusté</i> , [feels] locked in |
| Bodily outcomes | (body) skimming/trimming/slimming, enhancing/accentuating/revealing (body part) |

Emerging Sensory Categories In addition to the terms detailed in Table 3, other sensory content categories emerged from the sample analysis. Of these descriptive vocabularies, three specifically refer to on-body perceptual effects: material comfort, garment comfort, and kinesthetic feel. Another category makes indirect reference to touch sensation by referring to the bodily outcomes of dress. These four emerging vocabularies and the terms ascribed to them are detailed in Table 5.

In contrast with the paucity of touch-related terms, garment descriptions, where available, contained ample reference to construction, detailing, style, and “look.”

4.2 Additional Observations and Study Limitations

As highlighted in Table 4, La Redoute, Globus, Marks, and Nike product pages contained several instances of material tactile attributes. Both Globus and La Redoute featured detailed products descriptions, but while the former’s narrative style was matter of fact, the latter felt conversational, almost intimate. Nike and Marks, which sell technical garments as well as ready-to-wear (sportswear in the first case; outdoor or extreme weather wear in the second), also exhibited a factual style which emphasized material and product comfort. However, Nike product narratives stood apart from those of the other brands. By suggesting that a material “stretches while you move,” “hugs your body,” “[makes you] feel locked in,” “when you go hard,” “as you move through your flow,” “while you bend and stretch,” “during your run,” or “while you train or compete”—actions the viewer “silently” names by reading—Nike’s textual descriptions effectively trigger mental simulations [50], thereby mobilizing motor responses [7] and, thus, kinesthetic dress embodiment sensations.

Customer Comments Websites which include a review functionality (8 out of 13) offer viewers additional information uploaded by previous customers. In the comments reviewed for the analysis (up to 10 per product page, where available, for a total of approximately 230 reviews) mentions of the tactile, material features of

garments abounded, enriching touch perception: “*tissu très agréable*” (very pleasant material), “*tissu souple très confortable*” (very comfortable fluid-soft material), “*laine brute, pique beaucoup*” (rough wool, itches a lot), “super soft and nice material,” “soft against the body,” “very comfortable,” etc. These statements enrich touch communication within a product page. In fact, research suggests touch-related customer reviews influence consumer perceptions and evaluation of garments [51].

Study Limitations The analysis focuses on 13 fashion e-commerce websites. In the future, the sample size could be increased or diversified, for example, by focusing on non-Western fashion e-commerce websites in different languages. Alternatively, the study could be conducted vertically by product category (e.g., fashion e-commerce sportswear or lingerie websites only). Additional research is warranted as fashion e-commerce grows worldwide in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and solutions are introduced for improved online customer experiences.

5 Research Discussion and Conclusions

5.1 Discussion

Consumers’ visual and tactile interaction with products triggers multisensory processes which lead to cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses [13]. While these processes are highly personal and cannot be affected *per se*, fashion firms can modify visual and tactile cues within a retail environment’s atmospherics, thereby influencing consumers’ sensory perception and evaluation of products [10]. This also holds true for digital retail. In fact, in e-commerce settings, consumers are more inclined to consider material products, such as garments, when the items’ features are written about in terms of touch properties rather than visual properties [17] such as style or design, a finding which points to the importance of carefully curating tactile material descriptions. However, in the fashion garment pages analyzed for this study, textual reference to material, hand, or surface properties were limited to a small number of recurring terms, seemingly confirming that “vocabularies for the haptic sense is a particularly barren area” [52 p. 321]. Research [53] has shown that in English, linguistic encoding of the touch domain is lower in ranking than any other perceptual domain with the exception of olfaction. But a crucial skill for industry experts—including textile and fashion designers—is the ability to apprehend and communicate the properties of materials [54, 55] through verbalization of the subjective nuances of tactile perception [56]. Were that knowledge and its attendant vocabularies be made to percolate through the value chain to online product descriptions, the outcome could be a distinct sensory enrichment of consumers’ digital fashion experience. Additionally, fashion brands could leverage embodied narrative approaches such as Nike’s or introduce review functionalities aimed at eliciting customers’ responses to their tactile interaction with physical garments.

5.2 Practical Implications, Originality, and Value

The findings of this study have underscored a dearth of sensory terms referring to touch in e-commerce webpage texts describing women's garments. This suggests companies should review their online textual communication strategies, leveraging industry experts' sensory material knowledge to enhance consumers' digital fashion experience. Thus, the study makes an original and valuable contribution to the study of communication practices in the digital fashion domain.

6 Conclusions

The objective of this research was to analyze touch in text, or the communication of tactility in a sample set of fashion e-commerce women's product pages. The results point to a dearth of textual sensory touch stimuli online, with some interesting exceptions, particularly in the technical clothing domain. Together with visuals, text can help convey the multisensory, embodied experience of dress, even where dress can neither be touched nor worn. With consumers increasingly privileging e-commerce buying because of the COVID-19 pandemic, tactile communication in product webpage descriptions is an opportunity digital fashion firms should not let slip by.

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Symbolic “Entrance” Effects of IoT: Portable Cosmetics Commerce behind the Deep-Link of web.3.0—A Case Study of Social Media Platform Store



Hsin-Pey Peng

Abstract With the growing preponderance of social media in marketing, the IT advancement of Web 3.0 tends to reinforce the function of digital platforms upon social media. In following with prosperity of a rapidly thriving E-commerce with massive-scale B2C and B2B electronic platforms in China, the Chinese entrepreneurs are now seeking greater opportunities to combine B2C and B2B to develop a new integrative business model ushering in a brand-new consuming ecology. Through the case study of the mini-program built-in the Chinese social media application, WeChat, this research presents a conceptual framework to examine how the IT infrastructure has specific capabilities in terms of its reinforcement on the deep-link function of social media platforms. The purpose of the research is to examine how technology brings forth an impact on a commercial model. Drawing on the results of qualitative data generated from the analysis of technical documentation, business reports, as well as observations and interviews, the research first presents the logic and innovative business operation that Chinese entrepreneurs use on the basis of social data and personalization to create a new commercial model in practice. It is found that the up-to-the-minute application, “applets,” invented to embed in WeChat, can be privileged in deriving the huge number of existing users from the most powerful Chinese social media. Finally, it analyzes the specific role of applets service in establishing start-up online and offline commerce. It is concluded by inquiring whether this emerging techno-commercial platform could be a successful new retail plus networking e-commerce model in the future.

Keywords Internet of Thing (IoT) · Social e-commerce · 4.0 new retail operation · New media’s symbolic power · New consumption model

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1 Introduction

The sharing economy is China's national development framework that has been consistently promoted and devoted to advancement by both the government and private sectors in recent years. The focus on new media development supported by the Chinese government is demonstrated by China's Premier Li Keqiang. He put forward the idea of Internet Plus (Internet+) and proclaimed it the national strategy [1]. In particular, new media has played a crucial factor in mediating "sharing methods." On this basis, China's e-commerce became derived value by the trend of the ongoing invention of new media. In China, e-commerce has been rapidly thriving into massive B2C and B2B electronic platforms for at least a decade, like Taobao and Jingdong. The most noticeable and world-renowned is so-called the Chinese e-commerce giant, Alibaba. In spite of a certain downward trend of China's e-commerce revenue in the period of Singles Day Festival in the recent two years so that most people hold negative attitudes toward the prospect of e-commerce [2], another kind of new retail e-commerce that depends on social media is emerging in time. Drawing this concept, the Chinese entrepreneurs are seeking greater opportunities to combine B2C and B2B to develop a new integrative business model ushering in a new commercial age. This kind of new media circular symbiosis seems to better reflect the core of the sharing economy.

Aforesaid, the concept of the new retail commercial model is established upon the infrastructure of social media. The largest Chinese social media, WeChat, has been developed with the highlight of IT advancement into multiple platforms. WeChat appeared in the 2010s; since then, it had been a primary online platform for connecting friends like Facebook in the Chinese community. In the recent decade, it has developed into a specific network that possesses integrative media circulation function in Chinese people's daily life. According to the latest data report, users of WeChat have reached up to the number of 1.098 billion, and its Daily Active User is 902 million (DAU) [3]. Significantly, the total number of friends in the WeChat user's communication list is accelerating to 110% in 2018 relative to 2015. It signifies that a huge social network of acquaintances is gradually interwoven into a shape. With the recent advancement, WeChat is able to be utilized to manage nearly every level of a resident's daily need, including food, clothing, residence, and transportation. According to Baidu, now WeChat performs as a multi-functional application combining the purposes of messaging, social media, and mobile payment with more than 90 percent of national-wide smartphone usage. In particular, entertainment and personal social relations have become the most important use purposes for making WeChat's popularity.

Just at the time of WeChat's booming, the WeChat IT developer invented mini-programs embedded in WeChat, called applets. Despite it is a very newborn application launched by Tencent in early 2017, as of March 2018, the number of WeChat applet users has exceeded 400 million [4]. The main feature of applets is that they can be used on the WeChat platform without extra download and installation. Its function acts similar to conventional applications, opened to be used mainly by

enterprises, governments, media, other organizations, or any other sectors. Particularly, Chinese entrepreneurs start to be the primary developers to design their own purchase mechanism as virtual stores. The preference for developing WeChat applets for Chinese entrepreneurs is for the huge number of already-owned WeChat users. The purpose of this research is to assess the impact of digitalized social media on commercial models in society through exploring even more delicate features of Web 3.0 that suffice to stimulate a new era of IoT. It is important to note that WeChat, as the largest Chinese social media with advanced IT infrastructure, has new media’s symbolic power to centralize most sources of the social and technology and to integrate most potential customers for its industry partners. New retail drawing on digitalized social media now seemingly owns the authority of extending its new media strategies to intervene in the Chinese e-commerce market.

In effect, the impact of new media and its growing IT development on society has been discussed by academics on a cross-disciplinary basis. Academics maintain that technology-artifact-centric contributions to social impact now stand in an outstanding position in nearly every aspect of society. This point of view is especially evident in China. China has largely invested in and endeavored to IT infrastructures and the Internet, attempting to initiate a technological-netted society. It is peculiarly obvious in the widespread use of various applications for mobile payment, and the rare use of paper money in the country. William Lehr, David Clark, Steve Bauer, Arthur Berger, and Philipp Richter propose that with the development of digitalization in new media, the Internet engenders a layered structure, public network platforms, and application platforms. Moreover, based on the appearance of the role of “users,” the Internet seemingly performs as the third-party platform, allowing extensive innovation with openness and effectiveness. Accompanied by innovation-driven attributes, William Lehr et al. [5] pinpoint that the Internet is meanwhile empowered with the abstract functions brought by digitalization in new media. He upholds that social “meanings” can be distilled from the abstraction of the new media. Using this concept to look at the mini-programs built- in WeChat, it is open to diverse developers to design so as to fit in different functions. The mini-programs apparently give out space, networking, and possibilities for innovation.

In addition, the applet development parallels the conventional deep-link within the Internet mechanism. Daft and Lengel [6] were the first to propose the concept of Media Richness Theory, arguing that the correctness and richness of information communication are determined by the advancement of media functions. In terms of the functions of the digital new media, portability, deep-link, and 5G technologies enable digital new media to aggregate hyper-text and then build an information society. Applets, like the deep-link in WeChat, have the privilege of holding the WeChat users’ habits, preference, and need. On this basis, a business owner can actively offer selected choices for the customers to pick up, which is to filter excess information and provide a better-consuming experience by saving time for potential customers. This accents the richness of applets.

The advent of applets just happened recently, and just a few academic articles discuss its features of interactivity, entertainment, and extensive service [7–9]. Scholars also indicate that distinct from Western Internet companies (e.g.,

Google and Facebook), WeChat was initially fashioned as “platformization and then to the infrastructuralization of its platform model” [10]. This insight well explains the unlimited advancement of WeChat as the typical digitalized social media. Therefore, applets are essentially the extended platforms within the main platform that is hence able to reach out to ordinary people in every aspect of daily life with more ease. Based on it, the emergence of applets has caused a hit of the media news release and public debate, discussing the popularity in various aspects. Interestingly, the powerful function through the small application has been recently demonstrated in entertainment, such as the box office performance of *The Avengers 4* and a large number of WeChat Mini Program users for the mobile game mini-programs [11].

This article explores the commercial trend of new retail operated upon digitalized social media which is now capable of providing e-commerce with an interface allowing consumers to “step into” the store. In the wake of new media development, the business store does not refer to either a virtual or physical store but both. Especially, customers are expected to firstly visit the virtual store and then the physical. This article aims to reveal the symbolic function of the digital platform that has been improved in the wake of the IT advancement of Web 3.0. In particular, the notion of deep-link appropriated to connect to portability has been expanded in its digital function.

Deriving the huge number of existing users from the most powerful Chinese social media, applets have been developed into a new style of the virtual store, providing the customers with a symbolic entrance to the new retail plus networking e-commerce. Nevertheless, the study concludes that the value of the entrance is not embodied with NetFlow as merely collecting IP network traffic. It indeed acts as an interface that attracts the customers to step into the virtual store and imperceptibly accustom themselves to the new consumption behavior.

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 *A Case Study with Observation and in-Depth Expert Interviews*

This study adopts a case study employing technical documentation analysis, business reports, as well as observations and interviews. Expert Interviews is the key methodology for qualitative data generation. The sample for the case study is a Chinese technology company that the techno-features have been utilized to develop diverse models of business and marketing hi-tech ideas and materials. The research has found that the company operates online-and-offline experiencing cosmetic selling through the medium of WeChat applets.

Beautiful Imagination is created as brand-new cosmetics made in China using WeChat applets as its commencement for new retail business. The cosmetic products have been grouping into a variety of categories and displayed based on the customer-

oriented-designed interface. The target customers are the emerging office-working class among younger generations who tend to pursue fashioned outlook and price-friendly products. This commercial model is based on a digitalized logic and manipulating social media platform. More clearly, it is a trial for new retail established upon portable social media. The crucial instrument is seemingly WeChat, the largest social media application in China. However, the deep-link behind Web 3.0 becomes the key. *Beautiful Imagination* is operated by Guangzhou Dizan Info Technology Co., Ltd., an essentially technology software company that is using its Internet technology to develop new social e-commerce innovation models as an experimental example. This example can further provide a reference value for the enterprise side, allowing it to not only open up the consumer market but also to carry into practice for linking the industry chain within e-commerce. The innovation models also represent the Chinese enterprise’s ambition to reshape the marketplace into a complex of B2C, B2B, and C2C by using high technology and new media.

2.2 Interview Design

The interview conducted in this research is in-depth interviews using face-to-face and semi-structured interviewing methods. The interview was conducted for two formal occasions and one informal talk. The CEO of Guangzhou Dizan Info Technology Co., Ltd., Johnson Zhang, is the key interviewee. For the research purpose, the three propositions are proposed to outline three dimensions that are involved in the association for this study so as to be used to develop questionnaires for the semi-structured interview. Propositions are constructed to logically display the core questionnaires of this research. The foregoing discussion indicates three dimensions involved in the association for this study, such as applets, WeChat, and new retail (Fig. 1).

Based on the dimensions, the propositions are developed into the following: (1) Applets provide an essential portable device for both sides of consumers and business runners, and this feature is particularly beneficial to the side of business runners. (2) The function of new media is taken to create a new consumption

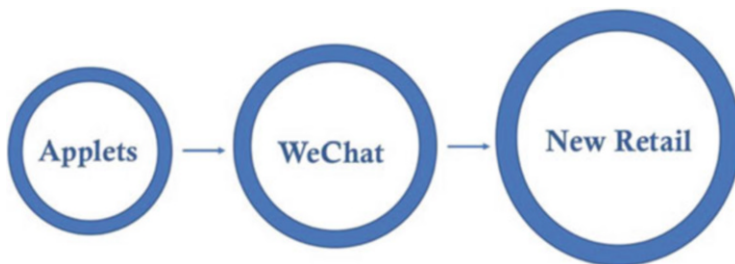


Fig. 1 Three dimensions of the study (conceptualized pattern by the author)

experience. (3) In the wake of shifting commercial models, the regulation of customer management maintains conventional importance but steps into a new solution. Questionnaires for the semi-structured interview includes the following: (1) Applets seem a subordinate program accompanied by WeChat. How does it play a key role in enhancing new retail highlights? (2) Applets function as other digital applications. Would it become an alternative option for customers to apply in their consumption? (3) A new retail model for the Chinese marketplace now appears a trend that cannot be halted. Will conventional customer management turn into an uncontrolled challenge to handle?

The interview revolves around the discussion of the proposed questions, dismissing questions that offered only “yes-no-maybe” answers. According to Rapley, the in-depth interview engrosses “a style of interviewing that encourages interviewees to produce ‘thick description’... by questions and other verbal... methods, to produce elaborated and detailed answers” [12]. In addition, Atkinson and Silverman (cited in Rapley, [12]) indicate that the face-to-face interview is “presented as enabling a ‘special insight’ into subjectivity, voice and lived experience.” The in-depth interview, using a face-to-face method, was very useful to this study because it provided practical insights into how the Chinese enterprise establishes “smart stores” as a credible brand for the new retail e-commercial model. The questions proposed in the interview are semi-structured in style. According to Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, and Alexander (1995), the design of the semi-structured questions requires researchers to use the relatively broader topic in which they are able to guide the interview. Additionally, the semi-structured mode of asking follows the unstructured, unfixed interview process [13]. Moreover, the semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to ask questions more flexibly. For instance, when the interviewee explains any ideas during the conversation, the interviewer can be reflexive and ask deeper questions at any time.

This research studies a wide range of issues from the development of digitalized social media in China to the specific elements of a new business model; particularly, this study aims to provide a conceptual framework for future research. Therefore, the semi-structured interview allowed the questions the researchers proposed to be flexible and adjusted according to the interviewee’s response. The interview conducted for this research also adopted the approach of the expert interviewer as part of the study. According to Bogner, Littig, and Menz, the expert interview is used to providing a shortcut for entering the enormous context with uncertain development to acquire useful results quickly [14]. In other words, this specific type of interview allows a researcher to collect data efficiently from the professionals in the industry. Bogner et al. suggest that conducting expert interviews can serve to shorten time-consuming data gathering processes, particularly if the experts are seen as “crystallization point” for practical insider knowledge and are interviewed as surrogates for a wider circle of players.

As a leading IT developing industry in China, Johnson Zhang provided the most relevant and crucial information that brought specific insights into the direction of this research. His insights saved the researcher much time in selecting useful materials for this study. Summarizing, the combination of various research methods

was conducive to producing findings related to the research questions of this study. The systematic procedures and logical sequence of the research process aimed to examine the new media’s symbolic value at both the macro- and micro-levels in e-commerce ecology.

3 Results

3.1 *The Case Study Shows Two-Aspect Significant Perspectives*

One is that new retailers attempt to develop an innovative business model deriving from the main features of digitalized social media. The other is the new retailers particularly heighten “consumption experience,” which can be established by using multiple effects of IT infrastructure advancement. WeChat applets act as a significant interface. A concise and precise description of the investigated results is drawn with the help of conceptual patterns (Figs. 2 and 3).

Based on the features of digitalized social media, the new commercial mode is able to develop new retail by (1) customized digital platform, which functions in scoping personal preference; (2) deep-link IT development flexibility that can be modeling industrial chain; (3) instant-feedback portability that is to grasp customer dynamics for immediate service; and (4) upgraded social media, which provides multiplying functions to an unlimited smart extent. The interviewee Johnson Zhang indicates that “WeChat has very strong infrastructure by which we can leap upon the base of the existing market” (October 2019; July 2020, translated by the author).

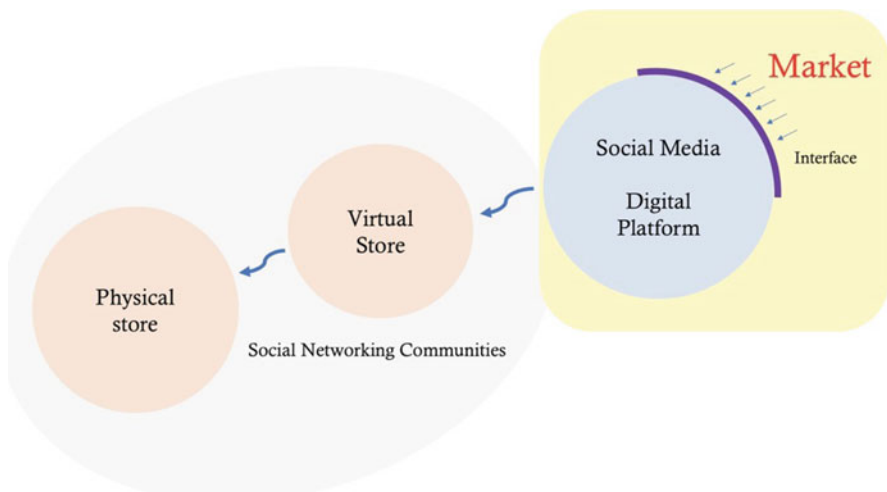
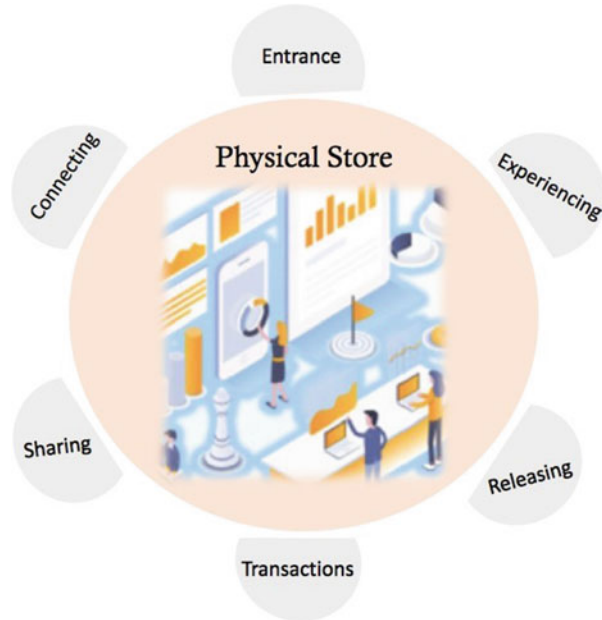


Fig. 2 Extended functions of WeChat applets (conceptualized pattern by the author)

Fig. 3 Online-and-offline store (conceptualized pattern by the author and *Beautiful Imagination*)



Zhang further maintains that digitalized social media has great potential of changing customers' consumption behavior due to gradual dependence on media technology.

As to WeChat's IT infrastructure advancement, the research has found that its multiple effects can be used in new retail, including (1) acting as entrance that refers to WeChat applets performing as the symbolic entrance for customers; (2) connecting function that is to promptly connect customers behind the deep-link of the digital platform; (3) sharing features that the business side utilizes to build customer relationship with trust and fondness; (4) agile transaction that stimulates purchase in quantity based on networking; (5) releasing that refers to customers' endorsement for the consumption experience; and (6) specific experiencing with which customers are able to obtain online and offline product-testing. Zhang reinforces that "the function of WeChat's IT infrastructure advancement has to be explored by retailers who are able to develop more of technological programs to enhance the whole capability of the platform" (October 2019; July 2020, translated by the author).

3.2 Interpretation

Based on Fig. 2, the existing marketplace tends to flow into the new media domain, and now the Chinese enterprise intends to draw it onto the WeChat platform, which has a healthy foundation in terms of "already-there" users and digital payment system. Applets become the vital interface, undoubtedly acting as the symbolic

entrance for the market transferring. Moreover, described as one of the world’s most powerful applications by *Forbes* [15], WeChat is known as China’s social media for everything and a super application because of its wide range of functions and platforms. WeChat attaching a large number of friends’ circles associates the population into “big lumps” for the Chinese entrepreneurs to re-shape the business landscape. Furthermore, the capability of WeChat is to construct an overall daily consumption network on the basis of the social circle at the horizontal and vertical levels. This actually moves toward the substantive implementation of the Internet+ promoted by the Chinese government.

Figure 3 explains the ambition of the Chinese enterprise to create an innovative business model, transferring the efforts in exploring customers into developing more consumption experiences for customers. Since applets are the exemplar, invented as mini-programs embedded in WeChat, they are expected to supply the existed low-cost, Internet-platform marketplace to Chinese entrepreneurs with a huge number of already-owned users. Drawing on the applets, the Chinese entrepreneurs, thereby, are able to build their own exclusive online business. The advent of these mini-programs serving as virtual stores essentially epitomizes the new consumption model in this era. Because of the accelerated growth of information sources, marketing reach and channels, it is indicated that e-commerce is progressing into more complex, fragmented, and varied prospects [16]. Nevertheless, applets, like the deep-link in WeChat, have the privilege of holding the customers’ habits, preference, and need. On this basis, a business owner can actively offer selected choices for the customers to pick up, which is to filter excess information and provide a better-consuming experience by saving time for the customers.

4 Discussion

In response to the research propositions, the findings of this study and their implications should be relooked in the broader context. This research analyzes the specific role of digitalized social media service, focusing on the invention of applets. Now, it is discussed how this emerging techno-commercial platform could trigger a successful new retail plus networking e-commerce model in the future.

In order to improve its customer service, the IT infrastructure renders mobile e-commerce runners to connect all relative industries to provide their customers with ample service, including suppliers, freight forwarders, payment service providers, and referencing advertisers. Upon the mobile e-commerce platform, all services can be customer-designed and source-interexchange. This is as if an active e-marketplace opens to all who desire to participate. However, the Chinese enterprise thinks the current medium for business marketing still states in passive communication, but what the business runners desire is their proactive power to “drag in” customers. Therefore, business runners are digging out various “entrance” to connect to potential customers. Once it happens, the transaction possibilities visit.

Apparently, applets as the built-in program in WeChat become the role of the desirable entrance, allowing the new retailers to omit the customer-hunting concern from business and be able to devote to deepening customer relationships. In particular, through the WeChat mechanism, the business runners grasp the customers' preferences, tastes, habits, and lifestyles; they can adopt active action to serve their customers with an active attitude—inquiring if the customers “want” the goods they have already selected for them. This symbolic interaction is indeed built based on the new consumption model and for the purpose of maintaining long-term customer relationships. This new consumption model has thus been deemed a new 4.0 business operation of beauty consumption via social e-commerce.

The ambition of the Chinese cosmetics entrepreneurs to achieve the new consumption model also explains that in this utter media-related era, social media has mediated people's lifestyles, and its friends' circles become the vital reference framework for customers. This situation illustrates the theory of media-system dependency. The theory maintains that once society becomes more complicated and media bears multiple functions, people would be even more dependent on media [17]. When we all step into the era of new media, it means we are confronting a more complex and various world than ever. The appearance of social media simplifies the difficulties of our daily choices because we obtain most knowledge and common sense through our reference framework—the friend circle. Therefore, the new e-commerce extended from social media signifies the possibilities of future business models differentiating from before.

5 Conclusions

In following with prosperity of a rapidly thriving E-commerce with massive-scale B2C and B2B electronic platforms in China, the Chinese entrepreneurs are now seeking greater opportunities to combine B2C and B2B to develop a new integrative business model ushering in a brand-new consuming ecology. In the wake of Web3.0, it has embodied participatory communication, which brings forth users' access to the media with ease. Customer behavior has been the core of business research and practice; however, it has had a rapid change with the emergence of new media, also accompanied by the new consumption model and customer habits. In particular, as the second biggest economic market in the world, China forms its own particular consumption model, in which new media plays a critical role.

It is found that the up-to-the-minute application, “applets,” is invented to embed in WeChat. Deriving the huge number of existing users from the most powerful Chinese social media, applets have been developed into a new style of the virtual store, providing the customers with a symbolic entrance to the new retail plus networking e-commerce. Nevertheless, the study concludes that the value of the entrance is not embodied with NetFlow as merely collecting IP network traffic. It indeed acts as an interface that attracts the customers to step into the virtual store and imperceptibly accustom themselves to the new consumption behavior. Therefore,

this article concludes this new business model deriving WeChat’s great quantity of 800-million users changes the original customer relationship management into a new style that possesses the timely-oriented and active customer-maintaining features.

Worthy of notice is that portable consumer-centric service behind the deep-link and many-to-many customer management enabled by digitalized social media represents IT technology breaking down traditional consumption and restructuring consumers in new and invisible ways. In particular, an innovation of the mobile Internet and interactive technology, integrating cloud computing, big data, and social media applications will provide a future experience of specialized smart scenes. This would be the future observation.

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Understanding the Internal and External Drivers and Barriers for Digital Servitization in the European Textile Manufacturing Industry



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Abstract Organizations are increasingly transforming their business models from the provision of products toward the provision of services to gain a competitive advantage. This phenomenon is known as servitization, a form of transformation which is particularly accelerated by the impact of digital technologies. Digital servitization is a contemporary topic in academic literature, with few contributions investigating the main forces acting as drivers and barriers. Despite textile manufacturers are progressively developing advanced solutions to stay ahead in the competition, little is known about sectoral-specific drivers and barriers of digital servitization. By addressing this gap, this study aims to shed light on the phenomenon through semi-structured interviews with textile manufacturers and their business partners. This paper provides a first attempt of mapping drivers and barriers, and, by leveraging the contingency theory lens, these have been grouped into six main factors: “technology,” “organization,” “customer,” “competition,” “collaboration,” and “governments and other associations.”

Keywords Servitization · Digitalization · Textile manufacturing

1 Introduction

Digital transformation represents the “ultimate challenge” in the fashion industry [1], because it is impacting all its layers, dimensions, and processes [2], accelerating the already swift rhythms of the industry and empowering progressively customers who are expecting more tailored and personalized offerings [3]. The changes to this

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mutating environment occur along with all the supply chain steps: manufacture, management, marketing and sales, and communication [4, 5].

In this context of digitalization, manufacturing organizations are also confronted with another disruptive change: servitization. Servitization refers to the transformation of product-centric organizations toward a business model where they become service solution providers responding to shrinking product margins due to commoditization and competition [6–8]. Servitization has been comprehensively studied by academia, and scholars have always strived to understand which are the related drivers and barriers [6, 8–11]. Digital technologies are considered as “enablers” and “facilitators” of this product-service integration [7, 8, 12–14]. However, it is not clear for organizations how to cope with this transformation, and research is needed [13, 15–18]. The interplay of digitalization and servitization is known as “digital servitization,” and it has just started to be explored in current literature [12, 13, 19, 20], with few contributions investigating the respective barriers and drivers [17, 21].

In this panorama, European textile machinery manufacturers and solution providers have been the first movers, thanks to their “value-adding services around their products” ([3], p. 8) being a reason for the intrinsic fierce competitiveness of the sector, which has forced these players to embark on innovation trajectories and to focus on continuous improvement of quality and processes [22]. Thus, this competition has led textile manufacturers and service provider to gradually develop advanced solutions [23–25], which are presented each year at the ITMA, the world’s largest international textile and garment technology exhibition.

However, despite the continuous interest toward services and their integration in the future strategic agenda of the sector [3], textile manufacturing counts still a low percentage of servitized organizations in comparison to other industries [26]; thus there is a need to investigate the phenomenon.

Addressing this gap, this paper aims to answer the following research question: what are the drivers and barriers for digital servitization in the textile manufacturing industry? After scrutinizing the main theoretical background and introducing the methodology, the paper aims to answer the research question using the contingency lens and an exploratory research approach. Finally, the paper concludes with limitations and suggestions for future research.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 *Servitization and Digital Servitization in the Textile and Clothing Industry*

The textile and clothing industry represents a remarkable context of analysis for the study because of its long tradition in servitization, starting with the rental of workwear and fabrics for particular industrial usages [24], known as “textile services”, whose interests are represented by the European Textile Services

Association. Recently, due to increased customers' involvement and pressures and the increased digitization of products and processes, the industry has witnessed a radical reconsideration and reevaluation of business and consumption models [3], which constitute potential solutions and approaches to waste and resource inefficiency [27], which are vital hurdles of the sector.

Dos Santos et al. [28] have executed a literature review of the different product-service systems areas in fashion. They have studied "manufacturing monitoring," "laundry," "take-back," "repair and redesign," "clothing rental," "second-hand retail," "participatory customization," "consulting," "clothing swamp," "make it yourself," and "fashion result," while showing that most discussed business models in the literature are related to clothes exchange and mainly referred to business-to-customers relationships.

For instance, "platform-as-a-service" models [29] have developed because they unlock new sustainable opportunities for the sector, as the entire lifecycle responsibility is transferred to the textile manufacturer, who maintains the product ownership [30]. Furthermore, an extreme case is represented by the concept of "clothes as-a-service" [31] where the item is provided for free in exchange for the supply of all the services and whose revenues are generated from the entire lifecycle.

An additional successful servitized business model refers to new design-driven innovation approaches based on co-creation [32], thus revolutionizing the typical supplier-customer relationship and reversing the whole value chain. Vehmas et al. [33] have further tackled these consumers' attitudes toward new services and manufacturing, underlying the importance of communication in developing such services and the continuous contact and interaction with the end users to identify from the beginning which service elements need to be included.

Moreover, dos Santos et al. [28] have underlined that at the manufacturing level, just a single contribution tackling servitization in the industry was retrieved. Thus, there is an urgency to understand from a strategic viewpoint how these digital technologies are acting as "integral parts" of innovation in European textile manufacturers' servitization trajectories, justified by an under-investigation in literature [5, 34]. Furthermore, the classical servitization motivation is influenced by strategic and economic impulses [8]. There is the necessity to understand which are the drivers and the obstacles so that these textile manufacturers could remain ahead in the competition [3].

2.2 A Contingency Perspective on the Phenomenon

As pointed out by Eloranta and Turunen [35], servitization literature has failed to illustrate coherent theory application, resulting in a theoretical deficiency. Dehn et al. [36] have explained that this lack of knowledge could reflect not only the "immaturity" of the field but also the "practical nature" of exploration of the phenomena. As a consequence, in this paper, the contingency perspective was followed, as it reflects the pragmatic anchoring since it assumes that the organization's efficiency is

dependent on the relations of a set of environmental factors and their impact on the organizational setting [37]. In detail, contingency theory argues that the “efficiency of an organization depends on [the] ‘fit’ of internal organizational structure with environmental contingencies” ([38], 1191). Moreover, this theory was already employed in the field of digital servitization [39–41]. In the study, Donaldson’s [42] assumption was followed, and a contingency was considered as any possible variable intervening on any organizational feature and therefore influencing the organization’s servitization transformation [9].

3 Methodology

To shed light on textile manufacturers’ drivers and barriers of digital servitization, the investigation has proceeded with an exploratory research approach based on the selection of different case studies [43]. The study followed the approach by Eisenhardt and Graebner [44]. According to theoretical sampling logic, the first step coincided with the identification of the grounding in the literature. Cases from the practice were selected based on their relevance to the theoretical background, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with 22 key informants were conducted between May and July 2020. Each lasted for approximately one hour.

These key informants were managers and practitioners occupying leading positions in 17 companies along with 5 industry experts. These 17 companies consisted of 8 textile machinery manufacturers and service providers and 9 business customers, namely, weaving, spinning, and dyeing organizations. Due to the fierce competition around digital services in the industry, all the respondents have expressed their preference to remain anonymous. Respondents were chosen for their decision-making positions, their role inside the organization, and all these organizations belonged to the European region. To ensure variability, the sample included both SMEs (i.e., 7 companies) and medium-large manufacturers (i.e., 10 companies). The cases belonged to different micro-segments in the textile market, and the 8 textile machinery manufacturers and service providers presented different levels of digital servitization readiness, which was assessed based on the number of their digital services portfolio. Thus, 2 of them were assigned a low score, as their digital service offering was not yet in place, 1 a medium score as it was in the process of testing its digital services with its business customers, and 5 presented a high level of digital servitization readiness, as their portfolio consisted of varied and differentiated digital solutions. To assure the respondents’ accuracy and equal treatment, interview guidelines were drafted and distributed before the interview. They were developed in three main parts: industry-specific questions, organizational-related questions, and service-related questions. Data gathering and data reduction processes have followed methodological rigor. All the interviews were auto-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were coded to identify key patterns and themes, following the thematic analysis approach [45].

4 Findings

Through the analysis of the interviews, several drivers and barriers of digital servitization in the textile manufacturing industry were retrieved. The results are presented below, starting from an introduction to textile manufacturers and service providers' motivations to develop digital services, as antecedents and prerequisites in their business model transformations.

Although the level of digitalization in the industry has been perceived as low compared to other industries by most respondents, all of them have agreed on increasing demand for digital services, due to the growing competition from low-cost economies. On one side, digital services were recognized as an element to maintain a competitive position in the market [3], in detail improving the efficiency of the production, making the processes smarter, with a bettered management and maintenance of the activities. This is key evidence for the industry, which is highly disintermediated [25, 46–49]. A couple of respondents indeed suggested that these services could be also drivers to develop comprehensive solutions, enhancing and connecting the processes in the whole value chain. Furthermore, it reflects the typical servitization motivation for improved organizational total performance and rising revenues [6]. On the other side, respondents have acknowledged the importance of these solutions for an augmented textile output quality. Despite the sustainability and circular economy motivations appeared as critical service innovation notions in the literature [27, 32, 50], all the respondents are convinced that in textile manufacturing there is scarce awareness of sustainability about digital services, being the driver the business aspect rather than the resource and energy consumption. Just a couple of them have agreed on the potential of traceability resulting from digital services, incentivizing a tailored control of the resources. However, it is clear that the industry is still anchored on a logic of “possession,” and it is necessary to move customers' perceptions from the message of “owning services” to “acquiring and making use of services.”

Table 1 presents in detail digital servitization-related drivers and barriers. The study proceeded with a conjoint analysis of drivers and barriers, not only due to the application of the theoretical lens of the contingency theory but also because of the understanding of servitization as a process, following Oliva and Kallenberg's [8] “product-service continuum,” where external forces acting either as drivers or barriers influence and modify the organization's strategic positioning on the continuum accordingly. As it is possible to note, drivers and barriers have been considered as “factors,” the first ones—“technology,” “organization,” and “customer”—referring to the endogenous organizational environment and the others “competition,” “collaboration,” and “government and other associations” to the market characteristics and contingencies, thus endogenous. Customers were considered to belong to the endogenous environment to emphasize the role of co-creation and to underline the interdependence between the organization and its customers [51, 52] in the industry.

Table 1 Drivers and barriers of digital servitization in the textile manufacturing industry

| Factor | Drivers | Barriers |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Technology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological innovation as textile businesses' subsistence condition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problems in the adoption and the upgrade of digital technologies. • Technological immaturity and issues related to the compatibility of service offerings with the whole machine park • Insufficient technical infrastructure and scarce management of the service network. |
| Organization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open organizational culture and internal communication • Cross-innovation and collaboration between sales and technical functions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The complexity of actors, resources, and products. • Lack of organizational readiness and missing service culture. • Unfitting organizational structure. • Lack of qualified human resources and insufficient technical competencies. |
| Customer | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing service demand in the whole supply chain. • Open communication of the digital service benefit and testing of the offering with loyal customers. • Provision of modular solution. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership issues, fear of privacy violations, and security concerns. • Incomprehension and unacceptance of the service value proposition. • Unwillingness to pay and scarce financial resources. • Technological incompatibility and unreadiness to digital service adoption |
| Competition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital services provision as a key element to maintain a competitive position in the market. • Better performance, with increased sales, tailored control of resources, and better quality of the textile output. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different digital service strategies and cultures hindering the standardization of the offerings • Market volatility and fragmentation of the supply chain in many manufacturing steps (disintermediation). |
| Collaboration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers' systemic collaboration, interaction, and co-creation • Acknowledgement of global market cultural differences and provision of customized offerings. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customization as a barrier to systemic digital service innovation. |
| Government and associations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial incentives for the development of standardized solutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bureaucracy and extensive legislative requirements. |

While drivers and barriers belonging to the organizations' endogenous environment are transparent and referred explicitly to the single organizations, factors indicating the external environment and market contingencies need to be explained. First of all, the majority of the respondents have highlighted that the competition is perceived as a real pressure to innovate. The fear of losing dominant positions in the market has led textile machinery manufacturers and service providers to develop increasingly sophisticated solutions and customers to make use of them to survive.

The fragmentation of the value chain and the market volatility appeared as key barriers in the process, reducing the timeliness and responsiveness in the market. However, not only do actors, such as competitors, have a dynamic and propulsive role in these transformational processes, but also customers' actions have presented as galvanic. Thus, the open communication and collaboration between suppliers and customers could generate added-value and drive toward co-creation and customized service solutions. While these actors' influences are clear, respondents' reflections regarding intermediate and further actors such as government and associations require further investigations. For example, almost all the respondents have expressed the need for standardization and overall integration of services in the industry. However, efforts have been described as not collective and hindered by the competition, as each textile machinery manufacturer and service provider wants to provide its customized and differentiated solution to detriment of the others, resulting in increased complexity for the customer to integrate different solutions in its machines park. In this context, some respondents have presumed that plans and actions at an associative and even political level are envisaged but they turn out to prevent the natural and genuine competition from enhancing the respective services. This results in a paradox, and actions were described as limited to regulations and incentives toward digital services innovations, with no clear direct effect in relation to services.

5 Conclusion

The present study contributes to the extant digital servitization literature by representing the first investigation on barriers and drivers in the textile manufacturing industry. Several barriers and drivers were retrieved and confirmed in the extant literature, adding additional elements specific to the market, considered as exogenous environmental contingencies, thus answering the research question.

The paper contains several limitations that call for future research. The most evident limitation is the application of the contingency theory. If on one side it has helped to underline specific textile manufacturers' hurdles and motivations to embark on a digital servitization transformation and therefore be a useful orientation for managers and practitioners, on the other side, it has offered an oversimplified view of this industrial reality. This was evident especially in the examination of further actors involved in the process, like intermediaries and associations. Future investigations could apply the lens of the ecosystem theory, in order to analyze the complexity of the environment and take into account the role and relationships of multiple actors. Secondly, due to the methodology of exploratory research, the study is characterized by limited representativeness. It would be interesting to reproduce a similar study in another geographical area. However, it remains questionable whether the identified barriers and drivers can be generalized to other industrial domains or even further textile and clothing value chain stages. Thirdly, the research provided just a mapping of the respective barriers and drivers, and future research

endeavors could aim to establish the underlying patterns thanks to descriptive statistics or prioritization of the different moderating, mediating, and antecedent factors. Finally, the study examined business-to-business customers, as it was centered on the manufacturing processes. The contribution calls for further research, having seen the prevalence in the academic literature of servitization and digital servitization examinations in the subsequent steps of the value chain referred to a business-to-customer perspective.

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Mediatization: Understanding the Rise of Fashion Exhibitions



Marta Torregrosa  and Cristina Sánchez-Blanco 

Abstract Fashion exhibitions are no longer a novelty in art museums. At a time when institutions are immersed in a continuous struggle for resources, these exhibitions have become a key element in their programming agendas thanks to their ability to attract large audiences and wide visibility in public opinion. Academic research on the rise of their popularity has been developed mainly from the field of fashion studies and from the field of museology or fashion curation. The paper aims to summarize these two fields and describe how the digital communication ecosystem influences the conditions of production, distribution, and consumption of exhibitions. The main conclusion reached is that communication studies are a necessary approach to explain the popularity and visibility of fashion exhibitions in museums robustly, and to account for the progressive normalization of the cultural offerings of such exhibitions.

Keywords Fashion exhibition · Mediatization · Digitalization

1 Introduction

The most prestigious art galleries around the world surrender to fashion. The success of exhibitions such as *Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty* (2011), *Heavenly Bodies: Fashion and the Catholic Imagination* (2018), or *Camp: Notes on Fashion* (2019) at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, *Items: Is Fashion Modern?* (2018) at MOMA in New York, *Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams* (2019) at the Victoria and Albert in London, and *Sorolla and Fashion* (2018) or *Balenciaga and Spanish Painting* (2019) at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid shows how the public's interest in exhibitions dedicated to fashion is growing. At a time when institutions are immersed in an ongoing struggle to find resources, exhibitions have

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become a key feature on programming agendas thanks to their capacity to attract large audiences and wide visibility in public opinion. The simple accessibility of fashion compared to the complexity of contemporary art and the media coverage of events such as the annual *Costume Institute Gala* that opens the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York make the exhibitions true mass phenomena that place them at the top of the most visited museums.

Academic research on the rise of fashion exhibitions' popularity has developed mainly from the field of fashion studies and from the field of museology or fashion curatorship. But these are not the only possible approaches. This paper aims to summarize the traditional explanations from these two fields and to explore, from the paradigm of mediatization, how the ecosystem of digital communication influences the conditions of production and distribution of exhibitions and to account for the progressive normalization of the cultural offerings of such exhibitions.

2 Framework Perspectives on the Rise of Fashion Exhibitions

From the point of view of fashion studies, the contributions of Fiona Anderson [1], Lou Taylor [2], Alexandra Palmer [3], and Valerie Steele [4] must necessarily be taken into account. These were the first academic studies devoted to the phenomenon of the popularity of fashion exhibitions in museums, and they also discussed the most common criticisms of this phenomenon. With these publications, the academic debate implicitly assumed that certain reasons for controversy existed. This is partly because the legitimacy of such events is linked to another wider question that has also been subject to controversy: whether fashion is or is not art [5, 6]. These publications also explicitly stated the three main causes of such rejection and controversy: (1) doubts regarding curatorial independence in the face of possible pressure from brands and designers; (2) difficulties in terms of reconciling the social, philanthropic function of the museum with the business dimension of fashion; and (3) a certain questioning of curatorial practices in terms of articulating the exhibition space and the conceptual framework, an explicit allusion to the trend inaugurated by Diana Vreeland with her exhibitions, which prioritized spectacle and sensory experience over historical accuracy.

These studies reflected, once again, that the academic study of fashion tends to be accompanied by at least two difficulties: its complexity (it is a multi-faceted phenomenon) and the difficulty in throwing off reputation for superficiality, which means fashion cannot be tackled directly without first justifying its importance. By describing the debate in these terms, apparently "favorable" to doubts about a legitimate presence of fashion in museums, the curiosity of researchers was stimulated, and academic output consequently increased regarding the matter [7]. Today, the debate can be considered closed. This is not because the question has been definitively resolved or the differing perspectives of art critics, museologists, and the

enthusiastic public have disappeared, but because such issues do not seem to have retained the importance they had in the beginning. Three factors have contributed significantly to this change. First, we might mention the progressive inclusion of fashion within the realm of academia, as a phenomenon linked to identity and social representation. Second, fashion has become accepted as a product of popular culture: it is not just a question of exhibiting “dresses” or “clothing items,” but the creative expressions of society. Third, and in a wider sense, we might highlight the emergence of the “society of the spectacle” [8] and the disappearance of barriers between “high” and “low/popular” culture, as well as between the different artistic genres.

In addition to research within the realm of fashion studies, an interest in this phenomenon has also emerged from the fields of museology and curatorial practice [9–12]. As Julia Petrov, Curator of Western Canadian History at the Royal Alberta Museum, has shown in *Fashion, History, Museums: Inventing the Display of Dress* (2019), the number of academic congresses, publications, and training courses at universities devoted to fashion curatorship has increased considerably over the last two decades. “This demonstrates the professionalization of the discipline, as well as the increased opportunities for its discussion in a global network of professionals working in the field” [13].

Within the field of museology, the increase in fashion exhibitions at museums is explained in relation to the concept of “fashion museology,” which, contrary to “dress museology,” according to Melchior, “explains the recent developments of fashion in museums and the challenges museums have to address when including fashion as part of their scope” [14]. The fashion museology paradigm is characterized by the translation of the rhetoric of the commercial fashion shows or the fashion editorials to the rhetoric of exhibitions, focusing less on the actual piece of clothing and more on the creation of a visual impression, a narrative to engage and evoke the feelings of the visitor. Fashion has now become a strategic focus for museum management teams, appealing to new visitor audiences as well as attracting broad media attention. This approach emphasizes the intangible aspects—what the piece of clothing can evoke—and gives priority to a sense of spectacle and entertainment at the expense of historical description. These exhibitions have a goal beyond mere exhibition, which is the museum’s enhancement of practices that connect with the public and of its visibility as a relevant social actor.

In addition to the renewal of exhibition practices based on less historicist approaches, there is a key advantage offered by the phenomenon of fashion: fashion exhibitions can be easily understood by visitors, requiring little initial intellectual preparation or high culture and effectively generating an unprecedented degree of interest, popularity, and visibility—both for fashion and museums.

The emergence of this second paradigm at fashion exhibitions is inextricably linked to the financial pressures to which museums find themselves subject, based on a need to boost visitor numbers and attract new audiences. We might also mention the influence that “new museology” has exerted in terms of the theoretical and practical democratization of the museum as an institution. This movement has instigated a change in approach, shifting interest in the object—the collection—toward society [15]. Museums have traditionally focused on conservation, research,

education/interpretation, and exhibition of the collection. However, their necessary adaptation to social changes, as well as the growing importance that the public has acquired as a community that takes part in the institution, has effectively transformed museum practices and the hierarchy of traditional museum functions [16]. The International Committee of Museums (ICOM) is still searching for a new definition that properly reflects the practices that museums have pursued since the second half of the twentieth century [17].

3 Mediatization

The study of mediatization has become one of the most fruitful fields of academic research within the field of communication [18–20]. It has been defined and studied as a consequence of the social changes brought about by globalization and technological innovation, not to mention the commercialization, urbanization, and individualization processes characteristic of the last 30 years [21].

Mediatization, in its widest sense, refers to the interdependent changes that have been witnessed in the media and in culture and society. It shares its origins with the classic tradition of mass communication research, with the Toronto school and the works of McLuhan, Innis, and Altheide [22]. These academics shared an interest in researching the effects of the communication media, while also reflecting on the role of the media and technology within the development of civilization. However, they proposed objectives of different and wider scopes. The focus of research in the case of mediatization is not the media as such, but the ways in which people, their practices, and institutions are transformed by the presence and evolution of the media [23]. The concept of social change is what explains the difference between mediation, a paradigm linked more to the study of the media effects and the notion of communication as a mediated process of transmitting information, and mediatization, which refers to the impact that the media have on social and cultural institutions (including the fashion industry, brands, and museums).

According to Stig Hjarvard, the added-value dimension of this theoretical framework is based on two considerations. First, mediatization consists of a process of interdependence: “the media have become integrated into the very fabric of social and cultural life and, consequently, they condition and influence social practices; at the same time, the media are influenced by the particular characteristics of the contexts in which they are included” [24]. Second, mediatization explores the influence that media logic exerts on the logic of other institutions. That is to say, it analyzes how practices regarding the production, distribution, circulation, and consumption of the media have become operational characteristics at other institutions [25].

Winfried Schulz classifies four processes of social change that can be used to describe mediatization [26]. These four processes are not mutually exclusive. Schulz produces his list by considering the concepts of media and technology in their widest sense, continuing the media ecology tradition initiated by Marshall McLuhan. In this

respect, the media can include writing, print, electricity, or mass communication media such as radio and television. Schulz describes his four processes as:

- (a) Extension: media technologies extend the natural limits of human communication capacities. The effects of this extension are reflected in the way in which technologies reduce the obstacles that the human body imposes with regard to space, time, and the expressiveness of the communication. The perception of space and time becomes progressively independent with regard to the organic nature of the body. Advances usually increase the transmission capacity and/or enhance the encoding quality by improving the fidelity, vividness, sensory complexity, and aesthetic appeal of messages.
- (b) Substitution: media partially or totally substitute social and institutional practices that were previously performed face-to-face. That is to say, we have passed from a real or physical presence to a virtual presence. Furthermore, it is considered that “media events” often enhance the symbolic relevance of ceremonies.
- (c) Amalgamation: mediatization has the effect of combining mediated and non-mediated practices, in which the boundaries between one and the other tend to dissolve. Media use is woven into the fabric of everyday life; the media pervade the professional sphere, the economy, culture, politics, and the public sphere. As media use becomes an integral part of private and social life, the media’s definition of reality amalgamates with the social definition of reality.
- (d) Accommodation: the very existence of the media induces changes. The emergence of a new technology is not an isolated phenomenon in the ecosystem; it produces change and demands adaptations among the already-existing media and within society. Each form of technology has its logic, and to the extent that these technologies become important in society, they demand adaptation to their “rules.”

The heuristic value of this classification resides in its capacity to be applied to any technology. Table 1 lists the four processes and the factors that are distinctive of communication that have emerged from the technological innovation entailed by digitalization: interactivity, hypertextuality, hypermediality, and hyperconnectivity [27].

4 The Digital Ecosystem and Exhibitions

Below, this research offers an exploratory approach (in accordance with the description set out in Table 1) regarding the scope of mediatization in fashion exhibitions, specifically in relation to what is known as the second level of mediatization, which refers to the “places” where the display of fashion occurs (magazines, catwalks, events, stores, etc.), and now also exhibitions [28, 29]. Mediatization at this level focuses on both new possibilities regarding the production and distribution of contents (the effectiveness and scope of communication processes) and the cultural and structural significance they acquire (the capacity of digital communication to

Table 1 (Digital) Mediatization

| Effects | Digital communication: distinctive factors |
|--|--|
| Extension Amplification of the limits of space and time and of the possibilities of representation | Mass digitalization of contents. Condition that makes the rest of the distinctive factors possible |
| Substitution Virtualization of the experience | Interactivity. Active participation of users in the production of contents |
| Amalgamation Hybridization of mediated and non-mediated practices | Hypertextuality and multimedia. Existence of non-sequential contents that are continuously modified, and convergence of media and languages in the production, distribution, and consumption of contents. Different formats and languages (written text, audio, images, etc.) that were formerly independent are now combined in the same medium |
| Accommodation Ubiquitous and permanent presence of digital technologies and their logic | Hyperconnectivity. Reticular configuration that permits open exchange of one to many and many to many |

Own elaboration based on Schulz and Scolari

shape a view of reality). In this sense, the ecosystem of digital communication influences the conditions of possibility for exhibitions, while enhancing their visibility and contributing to their normalization in museum programming and in society.

4.1 Extension Regarding the Production and Distribution of Contents

The mass digitalization of contents can mainly be observed in three effects. First, it extends the categories of space and time and goes beyond the limits of physical presence. Next, it boosts the technical quality of reproductions and the hyperrealism of representations, and third, it facilitates the fragmentation, manipulation, combination, and re-composition of contents in such a manner that the convergence of cultural output is multiplied [30].

The extension of space and time turns exhibitions that are ephemeral, on-site, and linear into digitally recorded events that boost the visibility of museums, overcoming the restrictions of chronological time and physical space. Today, a fashion exhibition is also an audiovisual spectacle to be consumed on screens. Exhibitions have evolved from being ephemeral, temporary events that can be physically visited in museums, starting on the opening day and concluding within a set period of time, to events that are permanent within a virtual space [31].

Museums can generate digital content before, during, and after the exhibition. These contents are part of the exhibition in the same way as the objects in the physical exhibition. Once recorded and shared by users, museums, or brands,

content becomes part of the archive we know as the Internet, available for individual consumption in terms of space and time, whenever and wherever each individual chooses.

This extension is also reflected in the fact that contents are available immediately, frequently in the form of live broadcasts, and can be seen from any place, responding to the generalized sense of impatience characteristic of today's accelerated pace of consumption. This space-time extension creates an audience that tends to be unlimited, one liable to make any of the contents linked to the exhibition a viral phenomenon. In this manner, the production and distribution of cultural assets is divided among multiple players: it now depends on museums, brands, and users, generating a degree of visibility and awareness that was formerly impossible. The new technologies responsible for the ever faster worldwide transmission of images also open up opportunities for dialogical and participatory engagements with culture, which were, in their turn, at once technological answers to and producers of a collective demand for more mutual and participatory approaches in society at large [32].

The increasingly spectacular appeal of exhibitions can also be explained by the technical innovation that has emerged regarding the settings and displays. Spectacle is the only way to stand out within a society in which attention has become a scarce commodity and an overabundance of contents is available. Exhibitions have turned toward creating multi-sensory experiences that generate a certain escapist emotion, in line with the aspirational desires characteristic of the fashion dynamic. All of this can be achieved using theatrical staging, including hyper-realist performances and high-quality reproductions: "with the light, sound and (moving/static) images a theatrical surrounding is created around the textile object that optimizes its aesthetics qualities" [33]. The use of large-sized screens, which can broadcast images and sound of exceptional quality and exquisite appeal, presents an immersive potential that is effectively complemented by the low lighting levels in which clothing items tend to be exhibited in order to guarantee their preservation. This makes exhibitions appeal to the visitor in a much more comprehensive way, rationally as well as emotionally [34].

Innovations regarding exhibition displays have evolved from Stockman mannequins to the elaboration of invisible supports molded to the dimensions, design, and volumes of the fashion piece in question, not to mention the construction of supports via 3D technology that are personalized for every piece and every exhibition concept. In order to make up for the static nature of the clothing exhibits, exhibitions have turned increasingly to the audiovisual broadcasting of film excerpts, fashion shows, and virtual simulations in order to create a sense of life and movement, showing the items as if they were being worn by an individual [35, 36]. The illusion of realism created by these mechanisms for bringing clothing items to life not only multiplies the sensorial perception of the exhibition but also contributes to the exhibition narrative. That is to say, such innovations are not only important due to their technological possibilities but also due to the new experiential conditions they permit [37]. The result of all this is a truly memorable experience, which is sometimes interactive and, according to the digital logic, demands to be shared with others.

4.2 *Substitution and Amalgamation Regarding the Production and Distribution of Contents*

As a consequence of the progressive substitution and hybridization of the analogical and digital realms—for it has become increasingly difficult not to include digitalization within a production, distribution, or consumption process—the processes of substitution and amalgamation are becoming less differentiated. The hybridization of face-to-face and virtual practices, as well as mediated and unmediated approaches, has enhanced the active participation of users in the production of content. It has also facilitated the convergence of such content in one place, where previously it was much more dispersed.

In the twenty-first century, museums have become laboratories of change, opening to various media and interactive technologies, at the intersections of material and digital culture [38]. From the perspective of these two processes, the exhibition is no longer restricted to the creation of contents for a physical setting, but can be expanded with the creation of transmedia contents for different supports and channels. The creation of content such as “The Making of...,” the digital catalogue, virtual visits, and accompanying documentation with exclusive images have become commonplace. To all this we must add the fact that exhibitions today are designed to achieve a high degree of engagement with visitors, seeking to ensure their active participation in the interpretation of the show. It is increasingly common for the exhibition to invite visitors to interact with some of the items displayed or to take photos of themselves in specific parts of the exhibition; other activities include the organization of workshops, fun activities, and conferences linked to the theme of the exhibition. The transmedia dimension multiplies the points of contact, encourages an interest on the part of the public, and attracts potential visitors to the museum (and/or consumers for brands).

The circulation of contents through digital and analogical media helps to generate a dialogue of much wider scope and impact. According to Jenss, digital archives and memories of fashion made by visitors have helped to spread a growing interest in fashion, memory, and time as it has developed in recent decades. “In the present context of an increasing mediatization of everyday life, objects of material culture that make up much of the ‘stuff’ showcased on social media—and by extension in the institutions that own or show them—have the capacity to gain a whole new level of relevancy and appreciation” [39].

The hybridization of the analogical and digital realms also has repercussions for the curator, who has gradually acquired a much wider range of functions. The curator is sometimes even replaced by a film-maker, artist, photographer, or media professional, as the multimedia dimension requires skills different from those of the traditional curator. The huge popularity of such exhibitions has also had an influence on policies regarding new acquisitions in museums, which means that the conceptualization of the exhibition very often takes place before any collection acquisition decisions are actually made [40].

Substitution and amalgamation processes also have an impact on the consumption of users. All of the possibilities mentioned above permit an exclusively virtual visit to the exhibition, one that cannot entirely replace a face-to-face experience, but one that is an emotionally gratifying experience all the same [41]. As virtual consumption increases and becomes an everyday means of accessing reality, these experiences become part of users' daily lives, influencing their taste, knowledge, and expectations of that reality.

4.3 Accommodation Regarding the Production and Distribution of Contents

The process of accommodation refers to the way that digital technologies transform the possibility of a communicative experience through permanent contact, within the framework of a reticular configuration that permits an exchange based on both one to many and many to many. As a consequence of the distribution of digital contents and the increasingly widespread possession of personal devices, there has been a certain socialization of consumption. This is reflected in the emergence of new intermediaries in the creation and distribution of content, as well as in the meaning acquired by new communicative practices [42].

If we referred earlier to the scope of social media for dialogue, we can now also say that the process of accommodation effectively democratizes the production and distribution of content. As a result of this possibility, institutions and users have become increasingly independent from the mass media (press, radio, and television), having become media themselves [43].

Furthermore, new communicative practices place an emphasis on remaining connected and visible [44]. The digital medium facilitates an increasing flexibility in the relationships between individuals and groups, which means that "relationships" are less rigid and more dynamic and content is not necessarily the most important factor. These new forms of social interaction are highly emotional in content and tone, which facilitates the sharing of such messages, resulting in a flow of sentiment-driven content that is endlessly repeated, with little or no new input, but amplified by the dynamics of the digital realm through contagion [45]. The digital practices of users, which emerge outside the institutional context of the museum, also expand "the perspective of fashion as part of the dynamics of cultural and personal memory" [46]. This also leads to a considerable amplification of the audience.

5 Conclusions

Communication studies on the processes of digital mediatization are a necessary approach to explain the popularity and visibility of fashion exhibitions in museums robustly. Without the possibilities of digitization, interactivity, hypertextuality, hypermediality, and hyperconnectivity, which are the essential features of today's communication, it is not possible to explain the rise of this phenomenon.

The social, institutional, and cultural changes inherent to the processes of mediatization are a theoretical framework of interest to investigate this phenomenon because of the interdependence between the evolution of technologies and the everyday practices of production, distribution, and consumption of cultural goods. Digital communication is not only a medium that conditions the possibilities of expression and circulation of content—just another technological medium—but also contributes to the development and maintenance of culture. The consolidation of this new ecosystem has led to social interaction “in” the media, rather than “with” the media, in such a way that the analysis of the phenomenon of fashion exhibitions is inseparable from the digital space of interaction.

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Part II
Fashion Communication Strategies

Fashion Statements. Fashion Communication as an Expression of Artistic, Political, and Social Manifesto between Physical and Digital



Vittorio Linfante

Abstract Fashion is capable of becoming a “manifesto” in its own right, giving not only clothing but above all communicative form to futuristic visions and declarations of intent on the contemporaneity in all its aspects. These fashions manifesto have historically taken different forms, of clothing (as in the functional experiments that led to the creation of Thayaht’s *TuTa* and Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova’s *Varst*, through the Space Age visions of Rudi Gernreich, Paco Rabanne, and Pierre Cardin and the political actions of Archizoom with their *Vestirsi è facile*), of written texts (such as Giacomo Balla’s *Il vestito antineutrale. Manifesto futurista* or more recently in Franco Moschino’s *La Ricetta*, Virgil Abloh’s *Artist Statement*, or Martin Margiela’s type-written statements), as well as statements in the form of spatial, performative projects, increasingly suspended between the physical and digital worlds (such as those of Miuccia Prada and Alessandro Michele). In today’s fashion communication, a relationship is increasingly consolidated between the different communicative modalities (offline and online), creating different forms of public involvement becoming real manifestos. With the mediatization of fashion and the pervasiveness of social media, increasingly direct and engaging communicative actions are defined as statements of precise points of view, defining fashion communication activities capable of reading and staging contemporaneity in all its many aspects and facets: aesthetic, economic, but above all, social.

Keywords Fashion communication · Branding · Social media

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1 Manifestos: Statements Between Art, Politics, Society, and Fashion

Manifestos—in art, architecture, design, literature, and even fashion—have always assumed heterogeneous forms: essays, articles, books, flyers, pamphlets, postcards, as well as performances and artworks [1], becoming themselves part of the field of artistic experimentation through the definition of a message (complex, cryptic, verbose, synthetic, performative) and aesthetic and formal choices and, ultimately, through the experimentation of innovative media and languages.¹ This article is part of the debate undertaken in Factum19.² Indeed, it is becoming increasingly interesting to investigate how each brand communicates itself. Thanks to new technologies, communication tools and strategies are expanding, designed to increase and involve the public through attractive storytelling capable of generating new perspectives and innovative communication scenarios.

Fashion has enriched the abacus of expressive possibilities by using first of all its most congenial materials such as fabrics, clothes, bodies moving in space, and then also the countless facets of digital communication, as a medium to convey personal points of view but also aesthetic, political, and social statements. Even in fashion, today, it is increasingly difficult to separate form from content in the artistic field. In fashion, the dress, its *mise en scène*, its photographic representation, and its presence in the digital world represent a declaration of intent which, by its very nature, loudly declares: “NOW! HERE!” [2]. Fashion manifestos define a complex relationship with temporality. They constitute and create a future that is already present in the very act of expression: “the manifesto is defined by its oscillation between divinity and performativity, between indicating something that is already there and calling into being something that is not yet there” [3].

For many years fashion has been the object of “exogenous” manifestos.³ It is only since the 1960s of the twentieth century that it began to define an “endogenous”

¹The graphic form of the “manifesto” takes more and more the same meaning of its content: for example, the Manifesto Blanco by Lucio Fontana and the Spatialist group, published in 1946 in the form of a leaflet, or the manifesto of Nouveau Réalisme drawn up by Pierre Restany on October 27, 1960, signed by Klein, Arman, Dufrene, Hains, Raysse, Spoerri, Tinguely, Villeglé, and Restany himself and realized in nine original handwritten copies signed by the founding artists, seven on blue monochrome paper, one on gold leaf (monogold), and another on pink monochrome paper (monopink).

²As stated by Cantoni, Cominelli, Kalbaska, Ornati, Sádaba, and SanMiguel, the constant technological, strategic, and communicative updates constantly introduce new investigation topics that “require constant refinement and updates, as needed by such an evolving and exciting research area.” In Cantoni, L. et al., Fashion communication research: A way ahead. *Studies in Communication Sciences* 20.1 (2020), pp. 121–125. doi: <https://doi.org/10.24434/j.scoms.2020.01.011>.

³It is interesting to note how the first manifestos related to fashion were written by those who did not make fashion but wore it, or observed it as a social element, even though they already considered it to be art or social policy in its own right. It is enough here to recall some of the experiences developed from the beginning of the twentieth century, such as *Il vestito antineutrale. Manifesto futurista* [The Antineutral Dress] the Giacomo Balla’s Futurist Manifesto of 1914, the experiments

thought, achieving its point of view, choosing the path of political expression: fashion managed to build an autonomy of thought and design, has defined its role within the cultural and creative industries, and consequently has moved to the creation of “endogenous” manifestos and being the one which decides the direction to take.

Fashion is increasingly clarifying its “Ego” in the cultural, artistic, and social spheres, defining new trajectories and becoming a field of experimentation tout court. Fashion creators, stylists, or fashion designers—depending on the periods and the meanings—have defined, over time, personal aesthetic languages and have also given shape to the most diverse design approaches, realizing different relationships between fashion, intended as a productive and cultural reality, and society. These relationships have assumed different forms, both visual and narrative, and, coherently with the spirit of the times, have given life to manifestos—sometimes of the duration of a collection—presented and staged in the most different ways: list of programmatic points, notes in freedom, conceptual maps, performances, or in the form of products conceived as a communication tool (pamphlet in the form of a dress, billboard wall in the form of a coat, or programmatic points in the form of a jacket) but also through actions that waver between offline and online. Using the complexity of the system that interacts with it, with all the different phases of design, implementation, and presentation, fashion defines those modalities and languages that are the most appropriate to convey its point of view: as in all creative fields, the concept of the manifesto shows the “present moment, the urgent, the now, as the inevitable and necessary moment of action, the moment that marks the beginning of the radically new and self-determining future of the group” [4].

The creative process is increasingly hybridized with the communicative one, realizing a sort of contemporary Gesamtkunstwerk and following Andy Warhol’s thought: fashion becomes more art than art itself, manifested not only through the product and its commercialization but also on different channels and levels of communication.⁴

of Thayaht, Aleksandr Rodchenko and Varvara Stepanova, or Sonia Delaunay; the various feminist movements for the emancipation of women such as the Rational Dress League; up to the more recent political actions in the form of fashion of the Florentine group Archizoom with the project *Vestirsi è facile* [Dressing is easy]. For an in-depth discussion of these issues, see Guido Andrea Pautasso (ed.) *Moda Futurista. Eleganza e Seduzione* (Milano: Abscondita, 2016); Ina Ewers-Schultz, Magdalena Holzhey (eds.) *Tailored for Freedom. The Artistic Dress around 1900 in Fashion, Art and Society* (Munich: Hirmer, 2018); Radu Stern, *Against Fashion. Clothing as Art, 1850-1930* (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 2004); Kat Jungnickel, *Bikers and Bloomers. Victorian Women Inventors and Their Extraordinary Cycle Wear* (London: Goldsmiths Press, 2018); Elena Fava, *Vestire contro. Il Dressing Design di Archizoom* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2018).

⁴Andy Warhol, in fact, hybridized fashion and art not only through his activity as a fashion illustrator, but above all through the multiple forms of the Factory’s activities: through portraits (including many of the fashion designers of the time), through his own Polaroids (testimonies of the style of the time) and through fashion-artistic artifacts. For example, his paper dresses were not only pop, but “united art, fashion and entertainment, all of which were increasingly becoming part of the

The idea of producing clothes, but also and above all ideas and possible visions of the future—more or less utopian—has fascinated many creatives: people who would be reductive to describe only as stylists, fashion designers, or creative directors and who come from different geographical areas and cultural backgrounds, but who are linked by a common interest in the fashion scene as a cultural and social environment and who along their creative path have used all the tools to convey their point of view on fashion and society, on the creative process and the product: invitations, press kits, fashion shows, fittings, videos, advertising campaigns, catalogues, posts, stories, and the clothes themselves represent the most varied forms of programmatic manifestos, a form that becomes here the substance of the discourse, not only, therefore, a mere aesthetic choice, but a real communicative “necessity.”

2 Writing Manifesto

The word, the text composition on the page, and the typographic choice assume an essential role in the writing of a manifesto: the presence—as well as the absence—of the text, the choice of the typeface, and the touch of the handwriting create the visual form of the idea.

Typography and text have fascinated a large number of designers who have made the clothing artifact the vehicle for precise statements: a sans serif font announces the statements on Katharine Hamnett’s printed T-shirts, as well as in the collections of Antoni & Alison.⁵

Virgil Abloh, on the other hand, for the collections of his brand Off-White, as for his countless collaborations with very different brands—Nike, Ikea, and Vitra—marks the products with pleonastic statements, declarations, or simple captions which are printed as decorations on the object itself. He is one of the few who do not disdain direct contact with the public, both in discos and in the many conferences he holds, especially at schools of architecture, in which his poetics and point of view

developing popular culture [...] Pop art had been taken up by the art, advertising, fashion and design words.” In Cunningham, P. A., Voso Lab, S. (eds.), *Dress and Popular Culture*, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, Bowling Green (1991), p. 100.

⁵It is interesting to note the unusual approach of the pair of British designers who state, “We write the collection, from the very beginning, instead of designing we write it. It is really a brilliant way of looking at things. It became more interesting than thinking about a pair of pants or a single print, actually, that part became the most interesting thing for us. So, it was just a matter of thinking thoughts, wonderful things coming into your head.” And that concerning the 1995 Action collection they state, “The Action collection is supposed to spur you into action literally, so you do not have regrets, and no one knows how much time we have. You would think that if there is a pattern to someone’s situation, it is a matter of human nature, maybe if we could spur a person into doing what they have always wanted to do that would be great, but we will not hear about it. I know it is just a dress or a T-shirt, but potentially, because of the value of communication, maybe it could happen.” In Farrelly, L. (ed.), *Wear Me. Fashion + Graphics Interaction*. Booth-Clibborn Editions, Oxford (1995), p. 25.

materialize as Artist's Statements: slides built through careful use of infographics and typography [5].

Franco Moschino's approach to communication was quite different [6]. As in a futurist composition, he defined his poetics thanks to the typographic forms of the written word and consequently all the meanings that can be attributed to it; the font declares the very identity of the brand: the handwritten letter "A" recalls the symbol of political movements and takes on the anarchic meaning; the "B" in a Script font immediately refers to *Bon Chic* and *Bon Genre*; the "C" in a Serif font for *Classic* and the letter "M" with a Sans Serif Condensed to define the Moschino logo; the words and their meaning, always twofold for the Milanese designer, become the stylistic and content cypher. The text, for Moschino, has a strong communicative value even when it is devoid of meaning and becomes only a placeholder, as in some advertising campaigns of 1984, or when it is arranged according to a free composition in *La Ricetta*, or becomes a series of mottos, revised and modified, which appear in a more or less evident way in all collections: a manifesto in progress that is always enriched with new chapters.

Other designers also use precise typographic languages for their staging: Martin Margiela, in the opposite direction to Moschino, works on apparent absence; his non-identity (real and visual) is thus translated into fashion by adopting Neoist [7] concepts: "Towards Nothing. Notes from the Generation Positive on the Nature of the Conspiracy" becomes the non-manifesto of Maison Martin Margiela [8] that takes up and renews the Neoist salient points, so "We are the White Colours" takes shape in the white paint strokes that annul every sign of history on clothes, furniture, shoes, accessories, and packaging; "Second Coming" defines the continuous renewal of archetypes and clothes of the past and sees the history of fashion as an eternal return in an endless second-hand clothes store; "We refuse to be limited to one name" and "We reject the notion of genius. Artist are the same as everyone else. Individuality is the last and most dangerous myth of the West," for Martin Margiela, become the concept of *Maison* to transcend the singularity of the individual; and also the Neoist sentence "We reject the notion of copyright" became the Margiela's collective approach: there is no name, no logo, everything and every shape, sign, the symbol becomes common and shared design heritage.

*My personal possession*⁶ by Paul Smith—a poster and a manifesto that requires precise interaction and a magnifying glass to be read—presents the countless objects owned by the English designer, an exhaustive, but not complete, list of everything that can inspire a collection; a list deliberately written in a typeface with an almost infinitesimal body, to force the reader to pay close attention in reading, the same attention that should be given to the ironical and unsettling details hidden inside the products of the English designer.

⁶The poster and the magnifying glass needed to read it were inside the limited edition of the book *You Can Find Inspiration in Everything* (*and If You Can't, Look Again!)* published by the London-based Publishing House Violette Editions in 2001. An object-book built halfway between an art object, a book, and a game.

In 2009, the words gave life to Umberto Angeloni's *Uman* project, which defines a new concept of men's style by the publication of issues that create new multi-faceted manifestos of the menswear wardrobe.

Words contribute more and more to building new ways of narration, of affirmation of an idea, or the identity of a brand: so, Prada works on the concept of the acronym as a synthesis, as a narrative form, creating *Prada Acronyms*, a book-manifesto written by one hundred and eighty-one authors, a not anonymous collective of authors who have contributed to tell the many facets of the brand. Prada, like Dada, becomes a word-manifesto; not only the name of a company, these acronyms take on different forms and different meanings: "[...] all made up of a myriad of words with multiple meanings, these Prada acronyms are contrasting, dialoguing and contradicting, both in themselves and in their mutual relations" [9]. Miuccia Prada creates contrasts, dialogues, and contradictions, not only between one collection and another but within each collection thanks to her ability to bring together formal and informal, "high" and pop culture, art, and market, redesigning and redefining each time new meanings of the concepts of beautiful, correct, and adequate.

3 Performing Manifesto

If thought needs words, fashion needs bodies to dress and spaces within which these bodies must move; fashion as a language and dress/habitus [10] dress the body of meanings, becoming the expression of personal identity and a social one, for which to wear is to communicate [11]. The body and its dressed form, its aesthetic construction and its acting and interacting in the space, become part of an artistic and design discourse. It is used as a blank page on which we can build our identity manifesto: iconic figures such as Queen Elizabeth I of England, the Marchesa Luisa Casati, Claude Cahun, and Anna Piaggi, just to name a few, have made of their image a way of life, translating their personality into a vestimentary language, using the vocabulary of fashion to build a personal manifesto in dress form.

Loïe Fuller, wearing clothes designed for her "disharmonious, rude, antigracious, asymmetrical, synthetic, dynamic and free-speaking" dance, becomes the embodiment of the *Manifesto della Danza Futurista* [Futurist Dance Manifesto] of 1917. The Marchesa Luisa Casati (to whom the manifesto was dedicated), paraphrasing Balla, "thinks and acts as she dresses" [12]. She becomes a living manifesto, creating her own identity as performance, defining herself and the space around her as an act of total and all-embracing artistic expression, more similar to theatrical experimentation than simple masquerades [13].

The manifestos detached from the walls occupy the real space and take the form of performances, which define new expressive forms of the creative act.

Shows become tools capable of defining an immediate and multisensory dialogue; performances cease to be exclusively an art form [14] and represent a set of questions about how the arts relate to people and society in general [15].

In fashion, the performative act of fashion shows has been increasingly defined as a place for sharing a creative thought,⁷ as well as an explicit political stance.⁸ Fashion as a performing entity, as a personified character, was brought to the runway by Franco Moschino for the Fall/Winter collection 1990–1991, a fashion show, a theatrical performance, and a media event entitled *Stop the Fashion System!* which turned into a real political stance, ahead of its time, a real manifesto that today we would define omnichannel, which integrated a fashion show, an invitation/plot/manifesto, a collection, T-shirts, shop windows, and an advertising campaign that reverberated the Moschino-thought according to different forms, channels, and timing: the narrative became fundamental, the fulcrum not only of the event but of all communication and of the identity construction of the collection itself.

The storytelling is also the distinctive signature of Alexander McQueen's creativity, who was able to build fashion shows/statements "deeply and mercilessly autobiographical" [16], in which each staging was a manifesto about fashion and the relationship between art and fashion, "blurring the boundaries between fashion shows and a new form of artistic installation" [17].

However, for Miuccia Prada, it is the space—with its design and its form—that becomes an essential tool to convey her point of view. The catwalk is not just a simple passageway between the public, but it becomes an element that defines, in a different way each time, new perspectives and relationships between passive and active "players": each show becomes a piece of a mosaic that transfers Rem Koolhaas' urban manifesto [18] into the defined space of the catwalk.

Viktor & Rolf work in an almost opposite way, realizing their total artwork through collections and fashion shows [19]. Performance becomes clothing, and clothing becomes a performative act. The two Belgian designers have always used every communicative and design tool as an essential aspect of an artistic artifact: in 1996, using advertising, they wallpapered Paris with posters in which a model dressed in white with a white (and empty) sign declared "Viktor & Rolf on Strike" or, for the tenth anniversary of the brand, they created a magazine that talks about them using pages of newspapers and reports collected over time, book-not-book edited and unedited. Nevertheless, it is in the fashion shows and collections, which take the form of performances, that Viktor & Rolf give life to their reflections on fashion and on the contemporary, reflections that are realized through meta-dresses, concepts and statements in the form of fashion shows-events, during which the two

⁷In 1966 for Paco Rabanne the fashion show became the stage for his creative manifesto, a real performance to present his "12 robes importables en matériaux contemporains."

⁸An emblematic example of the political valence of fashion shows is represented by the experience of Serpica Naro, a non-existent brand (an anagram of San Precario [Saint Precarious]) that in February 2005 "presented eight allegorical models, designed to illustrate the humiliations of precarious work, which was followed by the presentation of models from European and Italian self-productions that did not recognize themselves in the world of official fashion and its flattery." Domenico Quaranta, "Impatto Digitale," in *Il Nuovo Vocabolario della Moda Italiana*, exhibition catalogue edited by Paola Bertola and Vittorio Linfante, Milan, La Triennale di Milano, November 24, 2015–March 6, 2016 (Firenze: Mandragora, 2015), pp. 44–49.

designers become protagonists, creators of the concept of the dress and of the collection and also a sort of demiurge, who through their actions on the catwalk reveal the creative process, undressing and dressing the models, dismantling pieces of the set design that become clothes, recomposing a Zen garden and giving new shape and meaning to the clothes; for the Fall/Winter 2008–2009 collection, the statements take the form of dress-word in which out-of-scale lettering redefines the volumes: large three-dimensional letters engulf the bodies, deforming the proportions of the dress and making the models real living statements. In the Spring/Summer 2019 haute couture collection, the models wear sculpture dresses, huge tulle cones in soft colors that display pop graphics with assertive messages: “No, I’m Not Shy I Just Don’t Like You O F* This I’m Going To Paris,” Instagram posts in tulle form, importable, but defining a clear statement of intent about the present and the use of social media and the digital world.

4 Digital Manifesto

In the digital world, fashion has implemented its communicative vocabulary, integrating the different channels (corporate websites and social media in addition to the social channels of the various creative directors) and the multiple levels of communication defining increasingly immersive, direct, and engaging actions. The digital technology allows to keep everything in the same place and time: fashion, design, graphics, photography, and video do not need different media anymore. Everything can be sampled, mashed up, and mixed into new original artifacts. It is in the syncretism of different sources and references in the virtual space—possible thanks to the digital instrument’s peculiarity—that a renewed design and communication approach is defined [20]. Thanks to digital technology, fashion’s social nature is fully realized [21].

It is also increasingly taking shape, a new idea of “*doing* fashion through media” [22] and of using fashion to generate or implement new media and digital tools. This mediatization contributes to building new and more immediate ways of interaction between brands, designers, and consumers. Contemporary fashion, while remaining anchored to exact dynamics of exclusivity, has undertaken a sort of democratization of communication, sharing more and more with the social audience, not only products (for the apparent purpose of selling) but especially narratives made of behind the scenes, sketches, tests, moments more or less tried, more or less spontaneous and every day.

The cinema had already in a certain sense shown the behind-the-scenes and the “reality” of fashion, creating cinematographic products halfway between documentary, fiction, and advertising and increasingly engaging those directly involved in defining a different language of communication, no longer filtered through the glossy pages of magazines but giving a direct voice to the protagonists, showing not only those who design fashion but also the people who develop, produce, and sell it. Starting from the 1980s of the last century, in fact, film productions related to

the fashion theme multiplied, and from time to time they narrated not only the designers, (such as Yohji Yamamoto seen by Wim Wenders in 1989s *Notebook on Cities and Clothes*, or Valentino Garavani in *Valentino: The Last Emperor* in 2008, or *Dior and I*, in 2014 about Raf Simons' arrival at the helm of the Parisian fashion house), but also those who have constructed and communicated the fashion imaginary (*Diana Vreeland—The Empress of Fashion* in 2011 or *The September Issue*, in 2009, about the genesis of the most crucial issue of the year of *Vogue America*). Cinema as a medium has undoubtedly contributed to constructing a broader narrative, making points of view, ideas, and processes visible. However, it has failed to become a useful communication tool for fashion, which has been outclassed or instead encompassed by digital media in a concise time. According to Rees-Roberts, indeed, "Contemporary brands no longer require the editorial filter of legacy media to communicate with consumers. The slow adoption of moving image by designer brands towards the later 2000s was subsequently accelerated by the rise through the 2010s of social media, particularly visual platforms, as the defining media practice of our age. The perception of fashion changed from a seemingly elitist and hermetic industry to its current mode of mass global entertainment, which has seen the rise of video to its status as the digital's story-telling medium" [23].

Social media have become the communication channel par excellence, thanks to their increasing storytelling possibilities, allowing a greater integration between languages and interactive transmedia modes. Actions that allow the user to participate in the life of the brand (or the designer), but also the designer to define more clearly and engagingly his creative process, his thought, his manifesto: posts and stories thus define new ways of narrating oneself, of sharing and declaring one's point of view. The boundaries between private and public, between designer and brand, are blurring; every digital action becomes not only a creative and aesthetic expression but a declaration of intent, a stance, and a sharing of a personal point of view. With the new generations of designers, we are witnessing the birth of what is now considered *Instabrand* personalities whose identity is difficult to define where the influencer begins and where it ends, as in the case of Jaquemus [24] and Virgil Abloh.

As pandemic and social distancing arrived, brands and designers found in social media the ideal tool for sharing, generating new forms of use of the digital tools, consolidating them as privileged communication media, a digital square as the ideal place to express their point of view, their thought, their programmatic manifesto.

Alessandro Michele's *Appunti dal Silenzio* [Notes from the Silence] posted on Gucci's Instagram channel, in the middle of lockdown, define six programmatic points for a change of pace: Michele's posts tell of the urgency of re-thinking the system, the production and creative processes, highlighting the emphasis given by the creative director to the written word; Michele, despite the digital media used, takes up the aesthetics of the typewriter as a privileged communication tool for

writing a manifesto,⁹ thus becoming an open letter that reads the present to re-think the future.

The digital and in particular Instagram, by sharing content, thus becomes the Speakers' Corner from where new forms of proclamations can be launched transcending the written word but becoming real digital performative actions, in which posts, live streams, stories, polls, and hashtags define new forms of a manifesto, like the one realized by Pierpaolo Piccioli, at the helm of Valentino, with the *#ValentinoEmpathy* concept. This project came from a reflection on the unprecedented ways of sharing creativity, production, and communication that the physical distance of the lockdown has determined, and which have been implemented by the need for connection and the possibilities offered by digital: "We are always connected—and I am not referring to Zoom, Skype or Facetime—I am talking about empathy, we are all made of emotions" he declares in a post that appeared on April 30, 2020, to present the project and the advertising campaign born during the pandemic and launched with the hashtag *#ValentinoEmpathy*, a statement on the need to move forward and not stop a production sector made of people, workers, and artisans who produce and give life to the collections. On the contrary, a distance does not mean standing still. It affirms the need to continue to design, produce, and present the collections, give new visibility, and celebrate those who produce fashion and make it.

Stefano Dolce and Domenico Gabbana also work in this viewpoint: on May 6, 2020, they present the *#DGFattoInCasa* project, to raise funds supporting Coronavirus research by the Humanitas Foundation of Milan. Launched on Instagram *#DGFattoInCasa* consists of a series of tutorials that show and explain how to create some of the iconic pieces made by the Milanese fashion house: from the construction of men's tailored suit to the creation of embroidery, from crochet to hand-decorating leather. In this way, they have defined a new idea of handmade, not only as an individual creative act but as an action to give a sense of community and a sense of sharing [25]. Through the use of social media, the project accomplishes something similar to what Amy Carlton and Cinnamon Cooper theorized in their *Craftifesto* [26]: "we believe: craft is powerful. We want to show the depth and breadth of the crafting world. Anything you want can be achieved by a person in your community. Crafting is personal. Knowing that something was handmade by someone who cares that you like it makes that item that much more enjoyable. Craft is political. We're trying to change the world. We want everyone to rethink corporate culture and consumerism. Craftsmanship is possible. Everyone can create something!"

Manufacturing that moves through sustainability declared—on a product and digital level—by Stella McCartney, which on the occasion of the spring-summer

⁹The typewriter—and its particular basic look—is one of the tools, or preferably styles, of communication most used to layout a thought/manifesto. In the field of fashion, it is also used by Rudi Gernreich (in 1974 his *Thong Manifesto*), Margiela (in 1998 for the manifesto about white written for "View on Colour"), Stefano Pilati (for his posters/catalogues for YSL), or Acne Studios (who in 2016 created the *For Those Who Desire* manifesto) thus becoming a favorite graphic language.

2021 collection, launches on its social channels the #StellaAtoZ project, a video manifesto, but also a collection and a fashion show, which defines in twenty-six letters a program for sustainability and responsible manufacturing.

Digital is increasingly becoming a key tool for communication, sharing, and, above all, involvement and interaction. Communication and design are more and more developed with direct participation, if not of real co-design as participatory actions expanded and amplified by digital. Sharing of ideas and thoughts is increasingly passing through the net, which can and must become an essential part of business processes, as Miuccia Prada has been able to achieve, who from being “wary [but has now] begun to look at technology as an ally” [27]. For the Milanese creative, the internet becomes a space to fill with “interesting contents,” in order to reflect the complexity of the present where everything is connected, a connection that becomes the fundamental concept of the project for the Spring/Summer 2021 collection, the first born from the collaboration between Miuccia Prada and Raf Simons and that defines, thanks to technology, new ways of representation and staging: we witness the writing of chapters of a manifesto in the making on contemporaneity. Even in its traditional form of *défilé*, the fashion show takes place in an empty space, populated only by models and lamps/cameras, which combine ornaments and utility and are animated in a sort of dance following the models’ steps. The technology becomes crucial in defining, not only the relationship between technology/machines and people [28] but also the images of the advertising campaign, which are not taken by a photographer but “by hundreds of cameras that rotate 360 degrees around the models” and thus define a plurality of points of view, which becomes the signature of the collection, not only because four hands design it, but also because it achieves, thanks to digital, multiple actions of discussion and sharing. The first action takes place immediately after the show, when the two creatives answer questions from fans of the brand, on the Instagram channel’s stories, opening, for the first time, the after-show, potentially to everyone. An action of involvement that continues in the definition of the advertising campaign conceived as a digital performance, as a reflection on the contribution of technology in shaping contemporary life, redefining new perspectives on the human being and, consequently, on the community. Through the website and social channels of the brand, this project has involved users who were asked to answer twenty-six questions about contemporary life.¹⁰ The answers contributed to defining the advertising campaign’s contents, which thus became a real collective manifesto. Social media

¹⁰*Is the future a romantic idea for you? What role does function play? Is novelty still relevant? Do you think in the form of language or images? Is creativity a gift or a talent? Do you have enough self-confidence to accept your contradictions? Do you speak more freely online? Can we still talk about novelty? Should we speed up or slow down? What is the difference between uniqueness and novelty? Does “Cloud” make you think of computer data or the sky? Do you look out the window or check the weather app first? What experiences alter your perception of time? Is repetition a release? Can your emotions be shaped? Is nature out there or in here? Is culture speeding up or slowing down? Do you ever feel like a machine? Is consent boring? Are there limits to identity? What utopia do you pursue? When was the last time someone changed your mind?*

become a place of expression and manifestation of a point of view, in which both presence and absence generate ideas and reflections; this is the context in which Daniel Lee, at the helm of Bottega Veneta, chose to disappear from social media, closing all the digital channels of the brand in January 2021. A choice that, although apparently anachronistic, was able to define a new communication strategy, recovering the exclusivity of fashion and, at the same time, using the pervasive character of digital communication, in which absence becomes a presence anyway, thus realizing the thought of T. W. Hodgkinson when he says that “the coolest person who has ever lived is someone we have never heard of” [29].

5 Conclusions

Fashion defines its role in society, not only as a manufacturing industry, as a field of creative and technological experimentation, but also as a field of communication and sociality. In its being mediatized and thanks to the new communicative opportunities offered by digital, it can talk about itself, thus amplifying the communicative possibilities. The implementation of digital channels has made it possible to express new forms of manifestos, no longer filtered by traditional media, and no longer limited to the clothing artifact, and the performative act of the fashion show or photographic and cinematographic communication; with the advent of social media there has been an ever-increasing desire and need to establish a direct dialogue between brand, designer, and the public in order to define effective languages and contents for communication, defining clear brand identity, thought, and intent.

The immediacy and pervasiveness of digital make every action a declaration of intent (cultural, creative, and social) capable of generating, if not a single manifesto, several chapters of a manifesto, *in fieri*, as is the nature of fashion. This change of course in fashion communication is capable of reading contemporaneity in all its many aspects and facets: aesthetic, economic, but above all, social.

In fashion communication, a relationship between the different modes of communication (offline and online) is increasingly consolidated, creating different forms of public involvement that become true manifestos. With the mediatization of fashion and the pervasiveness of social media, increasingly direct and engaging communication actions are defined as statements of precise points of view, defining fashion communication activities capable of reading and staging contemporaneity in all its many aspects and facets: aesthetic, economic, but above all social.

Communication actions that are increasingly transversal and hybrid and that, in the contemporary situation of accelerated Covid-19, are enriched with new languages and tools capable of reverberating the *aura* of fashion through the creation of real cultural manifestos and palimpsests.

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Virgil Abloh's Contemporary Discourse: An Academic Approach to His Communication Strategies



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Abstract This paper aims to document Virgil Abloh's approach to fashion through his own words. Abloh defines himself as an engineer, architect, DJ, and designer, thus embodying the figure of the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary contemporary artist. Since he built his luxury streetwear brand on social media and worked his way up until being named Louis Vuitton's menswear creative director in 2018, he has challenged the structure of the fashion industry on many levels. Therefore, he is loved and criticized by many in equal parts, and his story has problematized how fashion is defined and understood today. Still, it is his views on design, education, and social justice that characterize him. Consequently, it is by examining his career path through his design work, exhibitions, lectures, and media coverage—which will be treated as primary sources of study—that this paper takes an in-depth look into his creative process and the intentions, hopes, and mission behind it. Ultimately, Virgil Abloh will be considered in this paper as a contemporary phenomenon whose work and words can help understand how fashion communication works today, being the final purpose of this paper to contribute to the consolidation of fashion studies as an academic field.

Keywords Virgil Abloh · Fashion communication · Interdisciplinary · Contemporary fashion

1 Introduction

Virgil Abloh is a contemporary character whose role in today's fashion scene is relevant: he is currently the creative director for Louis Vuitton's men's collections, while he continues to be Off-White's chief executive officer. Abloh is also a

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graduated architect and a self-proclaimed artist *lato sensu* thus embodying the postmodern approach to art and culture. He is usually featured in magazines and fashion media, but he has also been an invited lecturer at the Royal College of Art and the protagonist of a solo exhibition in the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Therefore, Abloh is a multilayered character that will be framed in this work within the notion of the “contemporary phenomenon,” understood as the extraordinary event happening now, and whose complexity merits consideration.

Fashion is also a contemporary phenomenon, and this may be one of the reasons why fashion studies still have trouble being depicted as a legitimate academic field of knowledge. This research aims to fulfill a research gap in fashion studies by elaborating an academic approach to Virgil Abloh’s work and personality through the study of his communication strategies, because, unlike other big fashion players, Abloh is very open about the concepts and stories behind his collections and artworks. However, this research also wishes to contribute to the consolidation of fashion and fashion communication as an academic field.

This study wants to document Abloh’s intentions underlying his discourses to understand his creative process and analyze his language when communicating his artistic vision on fashion, art, and culture. Since this is shaping a new cultural identity within the spheres of contemporary fashion and design, this research aims for Virgil Abloh to become a subject of academic consideration.

2 Methodology

Fashion studies require an interdisciplinary methodological approach due to the very nature of the subject [1]. Virgil Abloh also embodies this interdisciplinary nature, which means that different methodological approaches have been necessary to understand and document Abloh’s discourses and design practices. Due to the lack of academic essays on Virgil Abloh and his work, the researchers have utilized Abloh’s personal websites, social media profiles, interviews, significant media publications, lectures, and an exhibition catalog as primary sources of investigation. Discourse analysis of these communication strategies has therefore proven to be the best research method to analyze Abloh’s perspective on his own work, the fashion system, and the larger social and cultural context.

Virgil Abloh is aware that artistic movements and fashion trends have an ending; he also believes that the only way to avoid that is through documental materials. Interviews, lectures, Instagram posts, or exhibitions in museums, among others, become Abloh’s documental materials that keep his designs and vision alive. In this paper, they will be considered as oral, visual, and material primary sources that set the context for an ethnographic approach to Virgil Abloh’s discourses and works. Following Abloh’s terminology, they are “archive proof” [2].

3 Virgil by Virgil, or How to Construct the Self through Discourse(S)

Coco Chanel created a myth around her biography. Virgil Abloh is quite the opposite: the story of his life constitutes an articulate and truthful speech that he repeats in all his communications. Abloh's situational and socio-cultural context can be understood through his websites. Located at the top of his page *canary---yellow*, a brief biography of him specifies his birthplace (Rockford, Illinois, 1980), studies (degree in Civil Engineering from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and master's degree in Architecture at the Illinois Institute of Technology), and his training in the Bauhaus principles, which "fused with contemporary culture, make up Abloh's interdisciplinary practice today" [3]. In addition to this presentation, he introduces the concept of inclusivity and his philanthropic approach on his other website *virgilabloh.com* [4].

Both descriptions might obey to an attempt to legitimize his work in relation to his origins and training. By emphasizing his training with the Mies van der Rohe curriculum, he justifies his interdisciplinary understanding of fashion and architecture. Similarly, the mention of his humble origins might endorse him in his activist and altruistic approach to fashion and design.

3.1 Virgil Abloh's Creative Process and the Activism Behind His Designs

Virgil Abloh has been openly communicating and disclosing his creative process in academic lectures, panels, and numerous interviews. It is himself through his own words who guides his public into his world by sharing his vision and aspirations and showcasing his creative process. He focuses on his work as a multidisciplinary designer with references to music, art, and architecture. Therefore, these lectures are rich primary sources for understanding Abloh as a cultural phenomenon.

It was in Harvard's School of Design lecture titled "Insert Complicated Title Here" where Virgil revealed his "Personal Design Language." Drawing from his iPhone Notes—his working tool—he deconstructs his creative methodologies and elaborates a list of seven "organizing principles" or "cheat codes" that gives the audience the keys to understand his work [5]. They are the following: (1) readymade (a new idea based on recognizable parts of human emotion, irony); (2) "figures of speech" or "the quotes"; (3) 3% approach; (4) a compromise between two distinct similar or dissimilar notions; (5) signs of "work in progress" (again human interaction); (6) a societal commentary: has a reason to exist now; and (7) speaking to the tourist and purist simultaneously. In his lectures, he shows them numbered as showed here, but he tends to compose his speech by intertwining them to offer a comprehensive and educational discourse to his audience.

Therefore, an essential part of this design process is communication. In his lectures, he speaks ironically and uses humor to connect with humanity (“you open up when you laugh”). He does so by using quotes—written in Helvetica font for his fascination with modernist design—to speak figuratively. For example, when he writes “SCULPTURE” in an Off-White bag, he questions the very nature of the object and challenges our understanding of art.

But the influence of Marcel Duchamp in Abloh’s work surpasses the use of irony. The Duchamp-inspired notion that “an artist overthought the game, understood the parameters, provided something provocative, something that became a launchpad for other forms of art” [6] becomes Virgil’s *modus operandi*: his designs are meant to be functional and to have a purpose. Off-White was born following this idea, meaning that his brand was meant to be the platform from which he could bring life to other projects. Even the brand’s name obeys this Duchampian ethos of provocation and game: Off-White is not black, nor white, yet every possibility in between. This gives him the creative freedom to explore and introduce himself in different industries and disciplines and helps him problematize the idea of originality. He knows it is impossible to create something new; instead, he prefers to collaborate, reference, take elements from the past, and give them the “Off-white” balance—the “ready-made” of Duchamp [7]. He followed this method in his first individual project, PYREX VISION, where he stamped Caravaggio’s *Deposition* (1600–1604) under the title “PYREX 23,” a homage to Michael Jordan’s basketball number, on a hoodie. It is a high-culture artistic reference impregnated with street style coming from Jordan, basketball, and the sweatshirt.

This compromise between two different concepts also defines his own audience: the “Purist” and the “Tourist.” The “Purist” is the one who finds value in essence and meaning; the “Tourist” is someone with curiosity, a generation of people eager to learn. This slogan, “Tourist vs Purist,” was last displayed in his Louis Vuitton Autumn Winter 21 fashion show written in the bags. He aims to attract the tourists that do not see themselves in institutions to his fashion brand to challenge the traditional fashion system. In that sense, Abloh reinterprets Entwistle and Rocamora’s [8] definition of the insider-outsider logic that defines the field of fashion and associates the tourist with the outsider, that is, Abloh himself. Therefore, the Louis Vuitton director considers himself, paradoxically, an outsider in the fashion field that wants to open the doors of the world of fashion to others like him and challenge the established model.

Tired of perfection, he applies the 3% approach to design, where he only edits things slightly thus allowing himself to remain a multidisciplinary artist and work on multiple projects simultaneously (Off-White, Nike, Ikea, Louis Vuitton). He puts into practice the “Domino Effect” to concatenate projects [9] while always speaking publicly about his logic of operation. In consequence, he constructs his body of work with two main purposes: to build a large body of work that lasts through time as a reflection of the zeitgeist and to communicate and inspire his community (both African-American and streetwear, many times joined).

Virgil Abloh always acknowledges his background, the support from his community through every obstacle (from his parents, the streetwear community, or

Kanye West [10]), and he continues that legacy supporting them and the new generations. He always refers to his team as mentors and collaborators, not interns or employees.

Therefore, Abloh thinks of his achievements as the success of his community. He built his brand out of social media, and he was appointed Louis Vuitton's menswear artistic director in March 2020, which were both considered a moment "belief" [11]: what he thought was impossible became possible as he was the first African-American designer to hold that position in the 164 years of the LVMH brand, and one of the few designers of color to helm a major fashion house. From there on, his mission is to keep the door open for other young black designers and creatives.

Along these lines and following George Floyd's death in May, his empowerment to the African-American community became more than a philanthropist mission. Abloh, aware of his powerful platform, intensified his public comments criticizing the racial prejudice still existing today. He shared messages on social media, participated in panels, and focused his last conferences at the Royal College of Art and in Chicago in 2020 on ways to improve the system and find tangible solutions through dialogue and youth education. He then encouraged students to fight systemic racism through their studies and work by learning: "You have to know better to do better" [12].

The consequence of these events was the announcement of the creation of scholarships for young black artists, with the name of "Post-Modern," managed in partnership with the Fashion Scholarship Fund. With this scholarship, he wanted "to foster equity and inclusion within the fashion industry by providing scholarships to students of academic promise of Black, African-American, or African descent" [13], not only by giving them funds but most importantly, by supporting them with vital career services and mentoring. With the help of his partners (Nike, Evian, and even Louis Vuitton), he raised 1\$ million.

In addition, he launched "Free game," a free digital resource that continues the commitment of the "Post-modern" scholarship foundation and provides mentorship to young black designers and those who come from non-traditional backgrounds and yet still being open to anyone to advance on the path of building their brands. This is a step-by-step program where Abloh altruistically shares the notions and tools he used to build his career, from online talks to tutorials [14].

These last projects are the result of years of inclusion and philanthropy across the different disciplines he has worked. They can be found in the digital archive, his websites, being virgilabloh.com probably the most complete. This display shows Virgil's transparency and willingness to educate by sharing. As he said in one of his lectures, it is his "democratic duty" to do this "reverse education," to educate through his work [9].

Virgil Abloh has become a reference for future generations of all races, colors, and social backgrounds. In today's massified and digitalized world, his positive educational message, encouraging young people to look at the world from a designer's point of view and to foster their curiosity, stands out. By not conforming to a system and "question(ing) everything," he encourages global change by fostering interdisciplinary thinking and teamwork.

Even though he considers himself “an eternal student,” he more so becomes a mentor, a professor, to the younger generations that look up to him. “The idea is to teach my demographic [...] I want to put culture on a track so that it becomes more inclusive, more open source. And then give kids the chance to ride in the express lane” [15].

4 Virgil by Others: Artistic Collaborations and Incursions into High and Popular Culture

Virgil Abloh has been working on several large-scale projects with social and cultural impact simultaneously for either Off-White or Louis Vuitton. In 2018, his brand’s success was recorded in The Lyst Index for popular fashion brands: “Off-White™ is officially the hottest brand on the planet [...] now surpassing Gucci and Balenciaga at the top of the table for the first time” [16].

However, Abloh does not seem satisfied with the prestige and validation that the fashion sector provides, with all its network of models, celebrities, and fashion journalists. He goes further obeying his vision of fashion considering it a phenomenon that allows the communication of ideas and the exploration of other territories, apart from an object of consumption. By using his own references and values, he places his narrative in other spheres that elevate his status and make him more popular.

Virgil Abloh has hence managed to take his speech to prestigious academic institutions, where he has exposed his design vision and fashion convictions. In most of his appearances, he exposes his narrative and creative process to the public honestly and plainly. Nevertheless, Abloh’s natural discourse must not be misunderstood as a nonchalant attitude toward academia. All his scholarly encounters appear on their multiple websites and biographical notes whether they are conversations, interviews, or keynote conferences certifying the designer’s pride with them.

The first academic conference that appears on his website dates from 2017 and was at Columbia University, entitled “Everything In Quotes.” This was followed by the Rhode Island University (titled “Theoretically Speaking”) and the Harvard Graduate School of Design (entitled “Insert Complicated Title Here” and later published as a book: *The Incidents*). In 2019, he lectured in conversation with Hamza Walker the fine arts master students in his city of origin for the Art Institute Chicago. Finally, he held three online conferences in 2020 due to the global pandemic situation at the Royal College of Art in London (“A Lecture on Potential Solutions: Ideas on Race in Areas of Art, Design, and Current Based on Past Experiences”), in Chicago to talk about his scholarship “Post-Modern” (“A Lecture on Potential Solutions”) and at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in China (“Art, Fashion, and Brandings Contribution to Society in a Post-Covid 19 Environment”).

The perception of a designer as a wise and cultured man is not new. Before Vigil Abloh, other fashion designers have entered scholar institutions. For example,

Christian Dior was invited by the University of the Sorbonne in 1955 to participate in a summer seminar dedicated to the "French Civilization," where he gave his first lecture in dialogue with Professor Jacqueline de Menou. They were both seeking prestige from the scholar community when making those forays into higher education. Similarly, it can be stated that Abloh has an interest in placing his fashion in the framework of art seeking validation and prestige.

Abloh's personality is defined by his multidisciplinary character that plays with the seriousness of his conferences in academic institutions and the streetwear essence in his collections. However, he seems determined to show that his ideas and works are serious, and his references are culturally loaded implying a transcendent meaning to everything he does. Following this purpose, he has succeeded in associating his creative work with the art world by participating in several art exhibitions in emblematic spaces such as the Kreo Gallery in Paris or the Twentythirtyfive installation that Vitra carried out in July 2019 at the Vitra Campus Fire Station in Weil am Rhein.

The solo exhibition held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago in 2019 was Abloh's highest achievement up to this day in the domain of art. It would be tempting to think that the exhibition was a consequence of his entry into the world of luxury and high fashion. However, as stated in the exhibition catalog with the eponymous title published by Del Monico Books, Prestel, and MCAC publications, the idea arose much earlier. Michael Darling, curator, and ideologist of the "Virgil Abloh: Figures of Speech" exhibition confirms that it took three years to carry out the research, documentation, and curation processes [17]. Consequently, Virgil Abloh entered the museum for all projects and products developed prior to his position at Louis Vuitton.

It is curious that the MCAC, a well-known institution in the contemporary art world, decides to dedicate one of its temporary exhibitions to a character who does not belong to the art world—in the traditional sense of the term. As Darling himself acknowledged in an informal telephonic conversation on the topic, Abloh had not yet reached the peak of his career when he suggested the idea of the exhibition to him. Despite this, Darling proposed it and Abloh accepted: "It is the art critic within me who led me to think about this exhibition. I wanted to do my job and let history do his" [18]. Darling is talking here about Abloh's future entry into the annals of fashion and art history.

However, the exhibition's curator casual approach to the MCAC exhibition contrasts with Abloh's response to Darling's invitation: "All the work I've been doing so far has been to attract the attention of a curator of exhibitions in order to enter an art museum" [9, 17]. Virgil Abloh is aware of the museum's capacity—understood as an institution of the art world—to validate, add prestige, and promote the work of any artist or creative [19]. Entering the museum means for Abloh the validation of his status as an interdisciplinary artist and creator, at the same time that he validates his work and his approach to arts and design.

"Virgil Abloh: Figures of Speech" is a fashion exhibition in a contemporary art museum. Abloh's satisfaction on entering the museum as a medium for gaining prestige and validation can be explained by the power relations that exist between art

and fashion: “As fashion seeks to attach itself to the value system of art, so art seeks to remove the stigma of such associations” [19, 448]. Fashion, that is to say, the facet of creative director of Off-White and Louis Vuitton, is the one that needs the prestige that art confers, while art benefits from the commercial nature of fashion and imports the values of fashion to the museum [20]. This tension does not seem to worry Virgil Abloh; on the contrary, it reaffirms him as a postmodern and interdisciplinary artist.

Along these lines, it is revealing that the artistic context that he chooses as the setting for his presentations is the contemporary pop aesthetic of Takashi Murakami as reflected in the joint work of LV’s last traveling parade in Tokyo. Murakami is an acclaimed artist for his ability to combine fine art and popular culture. Similarly, Abloh is also very comfortable creating where art, fashion, and commerce meet.

4.1 Virgil as Portrayed in the Media: From Veneration to Veiled Criticism

Since his beginnings in the fashion industry, probably after that Tommy Ton photograph went viral [10], Virgil Abloh has largely been featured in fashion media. He has been an easy target to react to considering his social media presence. This translates into a prolific amount of information about him and his projects in fashion magazines and newspapers, their digital editions, and other social media channels such as blogs, Instagram, or Twitter.

Abloh’s coverage raises antagonistic reactions. On the one hand, he is praised as the revelation of today’s fashion by the streetwear world and the Black (fashion) community. On the other hand, he is considered an example of what is wrong with fashion today. Fashion designers, fashion writers, critics, insiders, and hardcore fans feel compelled to comment on Abloh’s work and role in the fashion industry, and only some independent fashion media have explored Abloh’s work and personality with in-depth research that goes further the mainstream.

As said before, he has been openly supported by colleagues, celebrities, and other artists, who have openly spoken about his talent and generosity toward them, thus participating in the reproduction of fashion as a closed circle of insiders [8]. In this sense, he is a comfortable figure to feature in traditional fashion media, who have covered every new project he is involved in by publishing in-depth reportages on him and his work.

Along the same lines, The Business of Fashion has taken Virgil as a case study and has named him one of BoF’s 500 as the “boundary-breaking designers setting an example for others to follow,” “the disruptor” [21]. That same year, 2018, he was also named one of *TIME* magazine’s 100 most influential people. With an entry written by Japanese artist and Abloh’s collaborator, Takashi Murakami, he recognized that “the foundation of his value, or branding, is humanity itself, not a superficial trick” [22].

Nevertheless, he has been submitted to criticism from the insiders of the fashion industry coming from the “activators”—as Raf Simons defined them and himself to comment on Virgil's lack of originality in an interview with GQ [23]. A similar backlash came from Walter Van Beirendonck, from Antwerp Six, who stated in *The New York Times*: “Copying is nothing new. It's part of fashion. But not like this (...) It's very clear that Virgil Abloh is not a designer (...) He has no language of his own, no vision” [24]. *Diet Prada*, “the Instagram site that acts as the self-appointed moral police of fashion,” has also fiercely spoken against his “uncredited” designs [25].

Abloh has used social media and independent magazines such as *032C* or *System* as platforms to “defend” himself and be able to approach his audience. When Abloh has been subjected to criticism, he has used it to delve into his discourse and reveal his intellectuality. It is his opportunity to validate his vision and work and to address issues such as authorship/(re)appropriation [26] or plagiarism [27].

James P. Scully, the celebrated casting director, has been an important figure in fashion for his advocacy on diversity. He recently published on his Instagram Stories the following statement as a response to Louis Vuitton's last digital fashion show: “Whilst this was an amazing video with a stupendously talented team of people I admire, these were not good clothes (. . .) Which led me to deduce that fashion has slipped into two schools at the moment. Clothes that are designed with integrity and clothes that are designed for Marketing purposes (. . .)” He then finishes it with: “That said, Virgil's Louis Vuitton bags are pretty kick-ass!” [28].

Certainly, these words feel very personal to Scully, they were published on his personal Instagram page, but they reveal the contradictory opinions toward Abloh's world. He is at the same time “the perfect Renaissance man,” following British *Vogue*'s Editor-in-chief Edward Enninful words, and the “represent[ation of] everything wrong about the fashion system now,” as Angelo Flaccavento, *System* fashion writer, said [29]. He is the “disruptor” [21] in Amy Vermeer's words, shaking the traditional notions and perceptions of the fashion industry [30]. But he is doing it from the inside, because being Louis Vuitton's creative director, he is no longer a “tourist” in the fashion industry—using his own terms.

5 Conclusions

As it has been proven throughout this paper, Virgil Abloh is a multidisciplinary designer whose work can only be understood in our contemporary context. He is also a great communicator and has a thorough understanding of brand communication and marketing strategies. Abloh himself has acknowledged that everything is a matter of branding: “Off-White is not a brand. It is an artistic project that expresses through clothing. Clothes are just a medium to create a new language” [31]. Fashion is therefore regarded as a language; consequently, this paper is an approach to Virgil Abloh's unique fashion language as appeared on social media, fashion magazines, and other platforms and recordings available online certifying that fashion communication nowadays transcends the traditional fashion media.

Virgil Abloh has used his voice to go beyond the fashion industry and has engaged with social and cultural issues of his time. For example, his discourse on race and his take outs on black culture have taken on a new meaning this past 2020 after the filmed killing of George Floyd and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Virgil Abloh introduces social issues into the fashion industry agenda, which confirms his role as a contemporary phenomenon, as connoted in the introduction. In other words, he is a man of his time, our time, thus embodying the contemporary zeitgeist.

To conclude, this first approach to Virgil Abloh and his understanding of fashion and design highlights how important it is to study contemporary phenomena in fashion academia to merge fashion theory and practice. Virgil Abloh has his own vision of the world and has developed a distinctive language to speak and create about it. He and his work thus become an attractive subject of study for future research that aims to promote a deep understanding of contemporary fashion practices and contributes to the recognizance of fashion studies in academic fields.

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Advertising Format Evolution in Fashion Brands' Communication: Contagious Case Study 2010–2020



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Abstract This paper aims to understand the evolution of the use of fashion brands' advertising formats during the period 2010–2020. With the impact of digitization, the relationships of brands with consumers through communication and the number and type of formats used to reach them have changed. The communication campaigns of fashion brands selected by the prestigious *Contagious* magazine are analyzed from the point of view of the formats used. 116 fashion brand campaigns, which belong to 55 different fashion brands, were studied. It is demonstrated, through a correlation coefficient and a correspondence analysis, how fashion brands use varied formats to build cross-media communication and use those most related to the digital environment.

Keywords Fashion brands · Cross-media communication · Advertising formats

1 Introduction

As Noris, Nobile, Kalbaska, and Cantoni highlight, citing Guercini et al. (2018), “the increasing societal impact of fashion as a field has also been made possible due to the changes that occurred in technology and to the interactions that the fashion sector has been able to develop within the digital framework [1].

Fashion, in its communicative dimension, has aroused great interest in recent years thanks to the new opportunities offered by digital technologies and the social tools with which it is expressed. Fashion brands are a reference from the creative and

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strategic point of view in a world immersed in a cultural revolution that is transforming our way of communicating.

From an economic or commercial perspective, fashion is an industry and a business whose mission is to generate wealth through the creation, manufacture, and marketing of products and services. Most of the industrial sectors resort to marketing and advertising, but only fashion is based on it in a decisive way. Although, as a rule, advertising is an expensive mode of promotion, for large global brands with a considerable budget, it represents a high visibility promotional facet and one of the primary methods to convey and communicate the identity and message of the brand. Fashion “contributes to the development of commercial activities, relationships among people, fields such as art, music, literature, culture, beauty, and many more” [1, p. 33].

In the following study, how the fashion sector behaves in an eminently technological environment when it comes to establishing communication strategies with its audiences will be analyzed.

First, a literature review will be carried out to show how the use of advertising and communication formats has evolved over the years. Secondly, the communication campaigns of fashion brands will be analyzed through the selection made in the prestigious magazine *Contagious* during the period from 2010 to 2020. In this way, we will be able to analyze how the number and type of formats used have changed over these 11 years.

2 Literature Review

More than fifty years ago, products were just products. Advertising was a monologue of rational arguments, and power was in the hands of the manufacturers [2, 3]. The products were just products, and the strategies followed by the agencies when writing the monologue script had a name: Unique Selling Proposition (USP). When brands emerged—a way of distinguishing products that ran the risk of being as difficult to differentiate as two drops of water [4]—strategies based on rational elements began to lose prominence. The consumer already took for granted that the products were good, with a quality guarantee. Emotional aspects conquered a space in decision-making. However, the consumer still did not have the opportunity to talk with his brands. The monologue prevailed, and advertising agencies sought more emotional communication strategies, with emotional language for their one-sided communications. This new current brought new strategic formulations. For example, the multinational Havas Worldwide designed the Star Strategy, a philosophy that considered products as people not only because of an attribute—as opposed to the method of positioning or unique benefit—but because of their global personality. Another example is the Emotional Selling Proposition (ESP), which sought to find an emotional or appealing argument to the consumer that was associated with the product and became an incentive to buy [5, 6].

Today technology and interactivity have enriched conversations between the brand and the consumer and made them enormously complex [7, 8]. The consumer experience has shifted toward media consumption across multiple screens and devices [9, 10], with increasingly blurred boundaries between the online and offline worlds. Social networks have brought fundamental changes to “the way we communicate, collaborate, consume and create” [11, p. 4] and especially in how consumers interact with brands [12, 13]. Before, the brand spoke, and the consumer listened. The receiver could not respond and was isolated. Now, our way of communicating has changed: the consumer is the boss. Rather than being a passive subject, he becomes an active subject and seeks communication: he participates in it, lives it, expands it, and even feeds it with various marketing environments in a mobile-oriented world [14].

This territory has required a new approach when developing strategic solutions for brands. Smart strategies that require more knowledge, understanding, and respect for the consumer are needed. Exchange strategies where both parties have to benefit and where in many cases emotion must prevail in the communication carried out by brands are used.

Thus, Kevin Roberts, when he led the Saatchi & Saatchi agency worldwide, created a vision on how brands should face and build their relationship with the active recipient: Lovemarks. Lovemarks transcend brands: they go beyond brands and consumer expectations. Lovemarks reach not only the mind of the consumer but also the heart of him, creating an intimate and emotional connection, without which he simply cannot live. Another example of this trend can be seen in the global agency Leo Burnett, which began to work on the communication of its clients under a strategic prism baptized as HumanKind; the fundamental pillar on which it rests is the knowledge of the human being in all its aspects.

The rise of these new advertising strategies is within the digital ecosystem. If once advertising sent persuasive single-channel, one-way, brand-initiated hits in the traditional advertising ecosystem, it has now become an omnichannel set of actions, with two-way (or multiple) messages and with interactions generated (or generated by multiple actors) throughout the consumer journey [15]. In this way, the traditional notion of media planning, driven by the exposure that the user has, has evolved into a planning of interaction with consumers to foster a relationship of commitment. It is about cross-channel or multichannel marketing, which coordinates multiple channels to complement and reinforce the impact of each. The aim is more efficient and effective marketing. The combination has a stronger impact than if channels are used individually. Cross-channel or multichannel marketing is also known as “integrated marketing” or 360° campaigns. With smartphones and other portable media devices, the consumer is exposed to advertising everywhere, “as opposed to only while watching television or sitting in front of a computer” [9, p. 417]. Cross-media campaigns are proving to be the solution to fragmented attention. Specifically, “using digital media in tandem with traditional media can maximize reach and significantly improve campaign effectiveness” [16]. On the other hand, a multichannel campaign creates “consumption synergies, enabling advertisers to capture consumer attention at different points in their purchase journey” [17]. It

maximizes reach, which helps to reinforce the message from different angles with different advertising tactics: “Including offline channels in the mix is crucial as they can deliver significantly more reach than most digital vehicles” [18].

In this new digitalized scenario, brands should take into account some trends when planning their interaction experiences with users [19]:

1. The convergence of media, where the limits between the different media channels and between the advertising, technology, and media production sectors begin to blur [10], is important.
2. The rise of social networks has given access not only to more knowledge about consumer preferences [11], but also to new forms of interaction between consumers and brands, and between consumers about the brands [12, 13, 20]. It also allows the emergence of new actors as influencers [21, pp. 120–122].
3. Datafication—in other words, “the transformation of human life into data through quantification processes and the generation of different types of value from the data” [22, p. 3]. Activities that were previously non-digital (e.g., looking at a map, talking to a friend, or even turning on the lights) have been converted into digital data that can be (re) used for advertising purposes and brand interactions.
4. Tracking everywhere enables customers to be tracked on various websites and mobile devices and gives brands a more complete view of consumers’ lives [23].
5. With increased tracking and datafication, more opportunities for personalization arise. Consumers can be approached individually based on their (digital) behavior through online behavioral advertising [7].
6. The growing relevance of artificial intelligence (AI) and related technologies in this field provide great opportunities for advertisers [12]. Even computational advertising (CA) has changed the way brands generate and disseminate their content. Now, many brand messages are often generated by computers with minimal or no human participation [24].

Specifically, regarding fashion marketing, following Guercini, Mir, and Prentice [25, p. 4], emerging models cover various thematic areas, including the following: the impact of new technologies on consumer behavior, the integration of online fashion marketing and offline fashion marketing, the impact of new IT technologies and new marketing tools (such as search engine marketing and social media marketing), and the role of new emerging players in the digital environment (e.g., fashion bloggers), with particular reference to online opinion leaders and their influence and managerial implications for fashion marketers. The fashion industry, according to Ian Rogers, LVMH’s chief digital officer, started “very early on, on communication transformation,” and the fashion brands are leaders in “using social media” [26].

In particular, the behavior of sports fashion brands is relevant. In the last “2021 Outlook for the US Sports Industry” report from Deloitte, there are three critical issues for the sports industry to consider in 2021. Among them is redefining relationships with fans, in which “it is important for sports organizations to invest in multichannel digital solutions” [27, p. 3].

Furthermore, the revolution in digital technology and the advent of big data has caused advertising and its ecosystem to be transformed in a radical way [28]. The most notable changes in the new definitions of advertising are the elimination of the elements of “payment” and “mass media” and that the roles of consumers have been expanded [14, 29]. In recent years, advertising has become a communication initiated and created by the brand to impact people [29, p. 343], and all kinds of brand communication actions, paid and unpaid, are initiated by the brand and the consumer [30]. While the first definition apparently implies who initiates the communication, including the intention of the communicator and the specific effects, the second does not contain either the element “intention” or the “effect.” Currently, advertising includes all types of communication in the media, whether paid, earned, or owned, through “different mechanisms and practices initiated by both businesses and consumers, and call for revolutionary changes in our thinking of the advertising ecosystem and key actors in it” [31, p. 378].

3 Analysis

3.1 Methodology

As described in the previous sections, sociocultural changes, technology innovation, interactivity, brand strength, and the active role and power of consumers have transformed how brands are applying their communication strategies. Creativity strives to achieve the creation of meeting spaces, the cultivation of relationships, and the development of communication products with a strong capacity to attract. Communication strategies develop ideas for long-term, authentic, and emotional relationships between brands and the people who use them.

The objective of the research is to detect, analyze, and highlight the evolution of the advertising formats of fashion brands during the analysis period from 2010 to 2020. For this, the chosen sample came from the international magazine *Contagious Magazine*, which four times a year selects and shows the brightest and most effective marketing and branding ideas worldwide.

The years prior to 2010 were a period of uncertainty following the emergence of major digital technologies such as the iPhone (2007) and the birth of Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), and Twitter (2006): “The past five years have witnessed a period in which the diffusion of digital technologies created significant uncertainty about the pervasiveness of the digital revolution. But that stage is over, and the strategic options available to established firms and new entrants are now much clearer. The digital revolution is, and will remain, pervasive” [32, p. 77]. Between 2010 and 2020, social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest (2010) or TikTok (2016) arose and consolidated. As a result, “consumers can speak so freely with each other and businesses have increasingly less control over the information available about them in cyberspace” [33, p. 197].

Forty-four issues of *Contagious* magazine have been reviewed over 11 years, from 2010 to 2020. 1089 news items were published in these 11 years in the “News” section, of which only 10.65% (116) were communication campaigns for fashion brands. Those 116 campaigns correspond to 55 different fashion brands.

As we explained previously, the objective of the research was to analyze the evolution of the communication formats used by fashion brands over the years. To do this, we rely on the specification made about Nielsen formats in The Nielsen Global Survey of Trust in Advertising (2015) [34], and we analyzed each communication campaign of fashion brands from the perspective of which formats they had used. This is the list of the analyzed formats:

- On the one hand, the more traditional and general formats were included: point of sale; outdoor and ambient; TV; press; event/sponsorship; cinema; radio; and Internet.
- On the other hand, we wanted to specify other modalities of more specific formats. They are as follows: editorial content; emails signed up for; radio ads; newspaper ads; outdoor ads; ads before movies; TV ads; consumer opinions online; websites; magazine ads; brand sponsorships; TV show product placement; search engine ad results; personal recommendations; online banner ads; ads on social networks; ads on mobiles; apps; webfilm; music videos; gaming; social media; tech; VR and AR; artificial intelligence; and geolocation.

First, a correlation was performed to analyze the evolution of the formats during the study period. Second, the brands and the use of the formats were analyzed in depth through a correspondence analysis. A strong and positive correlation between the two types of formats (traditional and modern) suggests that we need to include both of them jointly in the second analysis, which consists of implementing a correspondence analysis between the different brands and the use of the formats (a component analysis with qualitative variables). This technique permits us to analyze in depth the preferences of each brand for one type of format over the others.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Evolution of Formats in Brands During the Period 2010 to 2020

With a Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.89, we can observe a directly proportional relationship in the evolution of publications in both formats (Fig. 1).

It is observed that the second type of format is present in more communication campaigns of fashion brands.

In the following graph, both formats can be disaggregated, showing the most used formats during the analyzed period, where the Internet, social networks, and websites are the most frequent formats used repeatedly throughout the period, followed by point of purchase (Fig. 2).

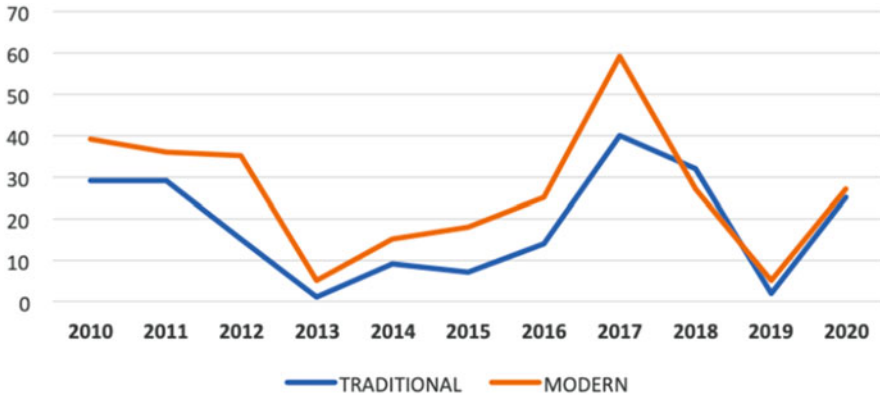


Fig. 1 Evolution of the types of formats (2010 to 2020)

3.2.2 Correspondence Analysis

This analysis was conceived to analyze contingency or double-entry tables, relating to double information: on the one hand, the brands (row), and on the other hand, the types of formats (column). This study analyzed 55 brands with 36 different types of formats from the quarterly publications of *Contagious* between 2010 and 2020. The different types of formats are classified as row profiles and the different types of brands as column profiles. The graphical representation of both together will allow us to see the positioning and preferences of brands for certain types of formats compared to others.

To weight the study between brands and types of format, it was decided to create three groups based on the total number of campaigns in which each brand was mentioned. First, we have group 1, with brands that have a number equal to or less than 5 campaigns. Group 2 has brands with between 6 and 10 campaigns, and the third group contains brands with more than 10 campaigns.

Group 1

In the first group, 29 brands can be found: Alexander McQueen, American Eagle Outfitters, Asos, Beyond Retro, Bonds, Burberry, Calvin Klein, Carlings, Dior, Dockers, Dr. Martens, Faribault, Fes Jeans, Freitag, General Pants, Ida Klamborn, Ipanema, La Redoute, Le Slip Francais, L'Oreal, Louis Vuitton, Myer, Paisley, Patagonia, Reebok, Ripley, RYV, Saucany, Vans, Wrangler, Yoox, and Zalando (Fig. 3).

It can be highlighted that the data appears very concentrated; therefore, we can conclude that the brands in this group, in a particular way, do not present an association with specific formats but rather choose varied formats. There is a high internal consistency, a direct relationship between all of the brands, except one, and the associated formats. The case of Dockers remains dispersed; it is separated from the rest of the brands since it is associated only with one format, which is TV. In the

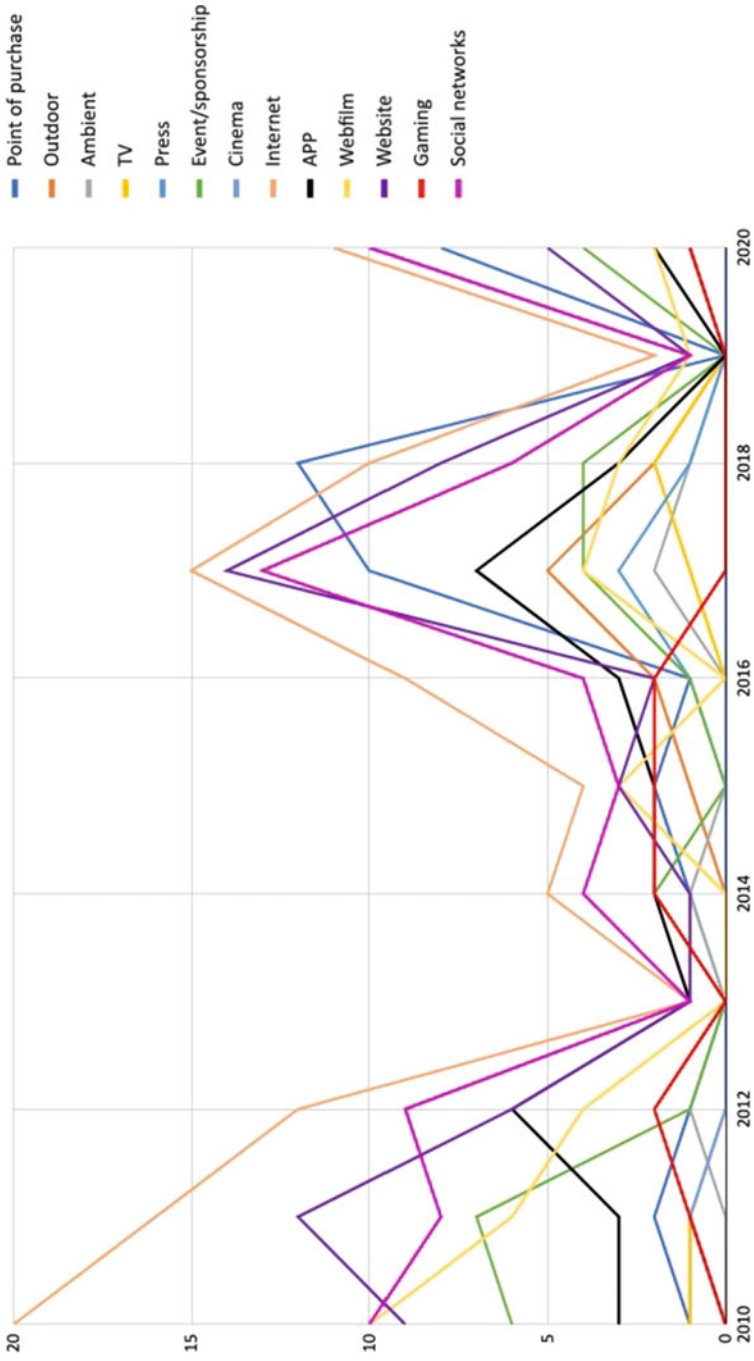


Fig. 2 Most used formats from 2010 to 2020

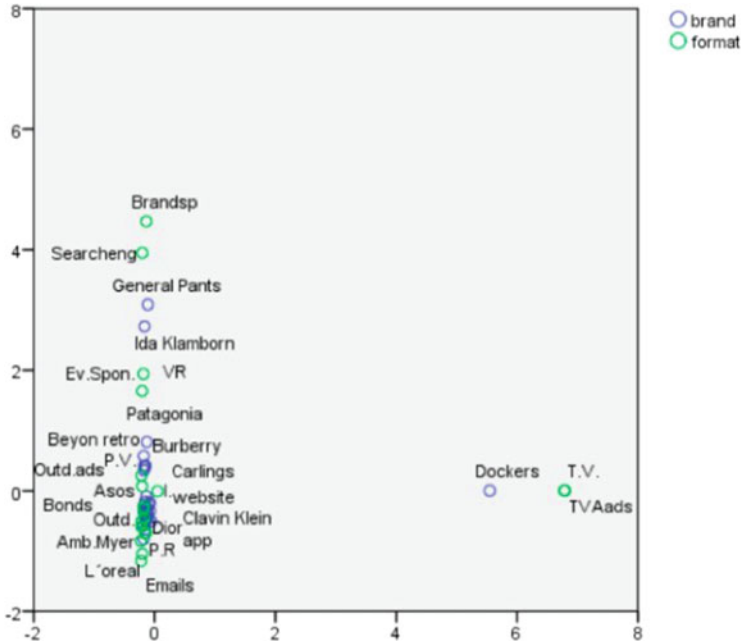


Fig. 3 Group 1

left section of the plot, we also highlight various behaviors. On the one hand, Ida Klamborn and General Pants, who separate themselves from the others by using brand sponsorship and search engines, are relevant.

We understand how these brands, which have had little representation in the selected campaigns, behave in a very similar way and adopt most of the analyzed formats in a homogeneous way.

Group 2

The second group is made up of the following 15 brands: Amaro, Benetton, Bjon Borg, Jigsaw, H&M, Joe Boxer, Everlane, Max Factor, North Face, Kenzo, Lacoste, New Balance, Asics, Under Armour, and Tesco Clothing (Fig. 4).

H&M, Kenzo, Benetton, and Asics choose the VR/AR, tech, and outdoor ad formats. The preferred formats of New Balance and Joe Boxer are webfilm and geolocation; Everlane, Max Factor, and North Face prefer websites, emails, or social networks. Tesco Clothing uses search engines and results and events/sponsorships or ambient media. Jigsaw has a differentiated behavior from the rest of the brands in this group. Its behavior is directly related to the use of the following formats: TV, editorial content, newspaper ads, and magazine ads.

Group 3

The third group is made up of the following seven brands: Puma, Nike, Diesel, Adidas, Converse, Uniqlo, and Levis (Fig. 5).

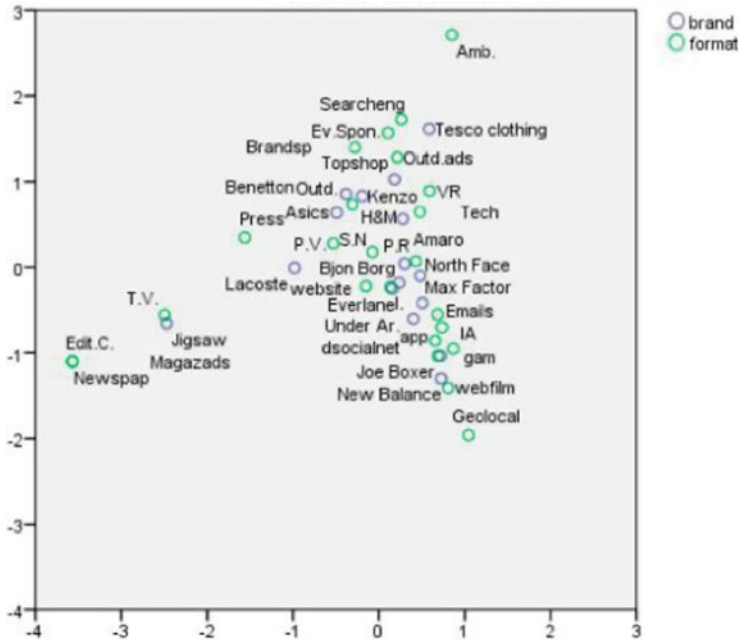


Fig. 4 Group 2

The similarity of the brands that fall into this group is striking. There are seven brands that collect the largest number of examples, and within them, four are sports brands.

Regarding their behavior, it can be highlighted how the TV, TV ads, and cinema formats behave separately from the rest of the brands; they are only associated with Levis. Adidas, Nike, and Puma behave more similarly, using formats such as geolocation, apps, artificial intelligence, or technology. Furthermore, Diesel and Uniqlo are also closely related to the use of events and sponsorships and the point of sale. Converse separates itself from the other brands and stands out for its use of music video campaigns, online banners, and sponsorship.

4 Conclusions

The article analyzes a decade of innovation in the types of formats used by brands. In particular, several of the social networks most associated with fashion brands have seen the light between 2010 and 2020. It can be observed that brands made a strategic decision to adapt their communication to the new digital ecosystem, which allows a closer relationship with consumers.

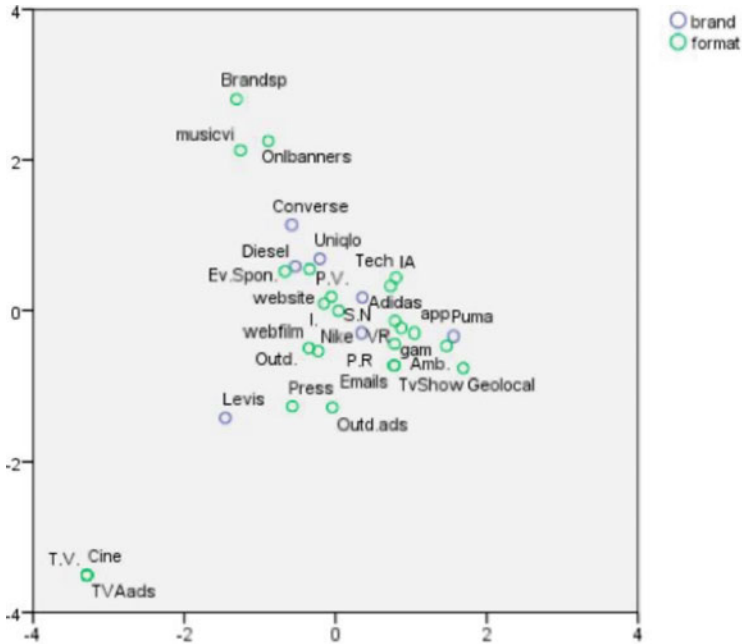


Fig. 5 Group 3

As we have highlighted in the literature review, in recent years, the communication brand trends have been focused on, among other things, working on media convergence and the rise of social networks. In the analyzed period, the number of formats used has evolved toward the digital ecosystem. Generally, of the 36 formats analyzed, the Internet, websites, and social networks are the most used in the period analyzed. Sports brands stand out in the number of campaigns analyzed and present a more innovative behavior.

In terms of the limitations of this study, it is necessary to express that, in this article, we have limited ourselves to taking into account the formats used, but it would also be relevant to analyze the campaigns qualitatively in order to understand the different narratives used.

Besides, the use of digital media increases the opportunity for fashion brands to communicate with consumers. This poses a new challenge for researchers seeking to understand not only how ad formats work, but how they influence consumers.

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Millennials and Fashion: Branding and Positioning through Digital Interactions



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Abstract Millennials, consumers born between 1980 and the early 2000s, are characterized by living their lives linked to technology and new forms of communication. In Spain, through social networks, millennials are connected to the main brands, multiplying their interaction and constantly evolving perceptions with them, a phenomenon that contrasts with other generations that could not relate so quickly and frequently with brands. By studying the perceptions that millennials have regarding Zara, H&M, Louis Vuitton and Gucci, we seek to discover the positioning of each of these brands within the selected target, Spanish millennials, as well as understanding the position they occupy amongst millennials. A moderate association exists between attributes and brand, together with a high degree of recognition and awareness.

Keywords Fashion; Millennials; Luxury; Perception; Positioning

1 Brands and Positioning

Originally, a brand was merely a name or a design created to identify and distinguish between the goods and services of one seller and another. According to the American Marketing Association, a brand can be defined as a name, term, design, symbol or any other feature that identifies one seller's goods and services as distinct from those of other sellers (American Marketing Association, 2017).

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Numerous companies use a brand as a symbol. Others develop a whole series of branding strategies in order to endow the brand with a much more profound and complex meaning, using it to create, maintain, protect and improve [1]. We can define a brand as a representation of a series of characteristics that are perceived by consumers. These characteristics constitute the product or service, the purchasing experience as well as values and other characteristics perceived by consumers and associated with the brand by consumers [2]. According to Kotler [1], brands can be perceived by their consumers or their target group through six dimensions. Companies seek to implant a positive brand perception in the minds of consumers. When designing a branding strategy, companies tend to consider the following aspects to be the six key dimensions: the brand's attributes (the indicators that the brand is associated with), the benefits it provides, its values, the brand culture (whether it conveys or represents a specific culture), the brand's personality and the user (which is to say, the segment it targets). Brands go beyond the name, concentrating on offering an extra dimension to the customer [3]. Consumers purchase products or services that enable them to express themselves through the product or service. In this sense, brand does not only set products or services apart from those of competitors but also attracts customers with preferences associated with the brand's personality [4–6]. Thus, brand constitutes an asset at companies, given that the perception that consumers have of a particular brand ends up becoming the most valued attribute of the product or service being offered. Brand effectively simplifies the purchasing decision, and this enables companies to set themselves apart from competitors and generate consumer loyalty [7]. Within the highly competitive environment that exists today, it is fundamental for companies to turn their brand into an asset. Keller [7] has analysed the importance of building and nourishing a brand from two perspectives: that of the consumer and that of the businessman. From the consumer's point of view, one key factor is being able to identify the source of a product. If consumers are able to recognize and get to know a brand, then the decision-making process becomes much simpler. In terms of risk reduction, brands limit the risk that a purchase might not bring any benefits, thanks to prior experience. Within the realm of electronic commerce, which requires a large flow of contents, or cloud journalism [8] within the context of the Broadband Society [9], the consumer seeks to minimize risk in business to consumer (B2C) or business to business (B2B). Delivery errors reduce the user's experience rating and place the reputation of the company and its financial resources at risk.

Another factor that consumers value is the reduction in the cost of searching for products or services. Brands enable consumers to reduce internal costs (they facilitate the process whereby a product is chosen) and external costs (they are required to devote less time to searching for an appropriate product). This depends on the information that the brand places at its customers' disposal, enabling consumers to generate expectations regarding the product or services that they wish to acquire.

With regard to the promise, bond or pact that is established with the brand, this is an especially sensitive indicator in the case of innovations such as HbbTV (hybrid broadcast broadband TV) [10].

Another factor is the brand symbolic value, according to which consumers can develop a strong devotion to certain brands that make them feel better about themselves because they provide the characteristics that the consumers desire, such as a high social status within the upper reaches of Maslow's pyramid.

Finally, consumers focus on quality indications. Thus, consumers will choose to purchase products or services depending on the level of quality they are looking for, which will depend on other factors such as price and reliability; thus market segmentation and product differentiation are both decisive aspects for brands [11], especially for those that are looking for financing via crowdfunding [12]. Positioning is based on the product, although it goes beyond the product and analyses the question of positioning in the minds of potential customers [13]. In order to create an appropriate positioning, a product must be designed that occupies a distinct place in the mind in order to maximize profit [14]. This will guide the marketing strategy, identify the objectives and clarify the brand's essence. The strategy will highlight certain product qualities that differentiate it from competitors based on certain attributes or benefits, these being important and beneficial to the customer, whilst also being delivered in a more effective manner than in the case of competitors. Certain elements exist that favour an association in the minds of consumers and can generate a favourable positioning [15]: degree of association (strength of the link between the brand and its attributes, which is determined by experience); degree of attractiveness (importance that consumers attach to certain attributes of the product or brand); and degree of differentiation (brand-attribute differences perceived by consumers in comparison with other brands).

Positioning strategies depend on the company. Each company presents different goals and different needs. Depending on these, it will emphasize different characteristics that are liable to distinguish it from its competitors, so that the company can boost its appeal on the market. Positioning corresponds to an analytical process founded on four questions [2]: what for? (the tacit benefit that our product or brand offers the consumer; for whom? (a clear and defined target group); why? (elements that make the product essential); and against whom? (direct competitors that might enter the mind of the consumer). A positioning strategy seeks to attract the attention of the market and occupy the consumer's 'top of mind' [16]. An effective positioning is one that cannot be imitated in the short term [17] thanks to characteristics such as attribute, benefit (rational and psychological) and relative quality and price.

For the purposes of positioning, various strategies exist regarding use and application (focusing on the specific or particular use of the product), regarding users (the brand is associated with a specific user profile, such as when an influencer or celebrity is used to link a brand or product with a segment) [18] and regarding competitors (competitive advantages compared with those of competitors).

2 The Millennial Generation and Consumption

The generation that grew up in the 1980s and reached adulthood after the year 2000 is known as the ‘millennial generation’ or ‘generation Y’ [19, 20]. This is the generation that succeeded the ‘baby boomers’ (born at the end of the Second World War) and what is known as ‘generation X’ (born between the 1960s and 1980s). Generation Y emerged at the end of the twentieth century, after two World Wars and numerous economic crises. The members of this generation were born in a period of apparent economic stability, but precisely when the new century started they began to witness a somewhat turbulent period: in less than 10 years they have suffered a global economic crisis and the consequences of terrorism, wars and viral pandemics such as the coronavirus. In 2020 they represented 75% of the world’s workforce, and this is what makes us want to target them as future consumers and users. They make up a growing segment featuring new characteristics, new needs and new demands within a digital environment [21].

The three generations mentioned before (baby boomers, generation Y and generation X) have different ways of regarding and living life, which means that their expectations, goals and ways of thinking and acting (and even purchasing) are also different. It is for this reason that it is so important to carefully consider their characteristics and perspective, so that we might understand them and predict their behaviour. Although some authors are sceptical about the ‘myth’ of studying target groups as generations, we consider this approach based on previous scientific studies mentioned in the references and along the study [22].

The factor that millennials identify with the most is technology, thanks to the leap from an analogue to a digital environment. Although this generation does not consider technology to be a defining factor, they accept that it enables them to forge their identity [23]. Technology is perceived as being essential when it comes to widening one’s horizons, communicating and establishing interpersonal relationships, from the very beginning [24]. Millennials admit that technology has given them the power to change the world in a positive sense by using their mobile devices, generating social movements and trends [25]. They are the first generation to grow up surrounded by digital media, and they are accustomed to purchasing goods and socializing online [26, 27].

In this respect, millennials experience a reality that combines both analogue and digital communication messages. This means that companies create omni-channel communication strategies, which means that they operate on various different channels at the same time and can switch channels.

The availability of terminals explains the consumer’s shift towards the Consumer 2.0, an expert in purchasing in a mobile manner, featuring a capacity to find offers, opinions and information regarding a product before proceeding to the actual purchase, with the corresponding skills based on triple play and quintuple play [28].

The millennial target can be defined as being highly critical and demanding [24]. In fact, a high percentage of consumers would cease to purchase products from a particular brand as the result of a negative purchasing experience. For

millennials, the purchasing experience and personalization can assume greater value than the product itself. It is for this reason that companies should focus on the customer as the strategic hub, employing tools such as Customer Relationship Management (CRM) and Social CRM, effectively getting to know the customer better, thus satisfying their needs and generating satisfaction, as well as a predisposition to repeat the purchase of a particular brand. This is where engagement and loyalty strategies come in.

Curiously, in relation to intangible indicators, millennials are satisfied and consider themselves to be happy, feelings that are reinforced by ideas of freedom and a capacity to express themselves. This generation is proud of its nationality (83%), but at the same time it is curious about the world (88%), which explains why the product that is most widely searched for and purchased online by millennials consists of airplane tickets, featuring growth of 15 percentage points compared to the previous year (Observatorio Cetelem España, 2017).

Millennials have become a key target group for fashion companies [29] and constitute an essential ingredient with regard to the development of electronic commerce [30]. Within the realm of retail fashion, sales are highly competitive due to consumer behaviour, which is characterized by its uncertainty and volatility. The situation is exacerbated by the increased range of products available, a result of the build-up witnessed during the recovery from economic recession.

Various studies have analysed the purchase of fashion products amongst millennials [18], including both fast-fashion brands and luxury brands [31, 32], whilst also analysing how they consume information regarding fashion [33, 34]. When it comes to consuming fashion, these studies concluded that millennials gave priority to searching for products in brick-and-mortar shops and on web pages [34], although this trend has changed during the pandemic, given that priority has now switched to generating fashion product needs and purchase demand through the social media [35].

As declared by the report entitled ‘The State of Fashion 2021’ [36]: ‘Digital adoption has soared during the pandemic, with many brands finally going online and enthusiasts embracing digital innovations like livestreaming, customer service video chat and social shopping. As online penetration accelerates and shoppers demand ever-more sophisticated digital interactions, fashion players must optimize the online experience and channel mix while finding persuasive ways to integrate the human touch’. In this new worldwide outlook, fashion companies interact with consumers through digital channels, this being the place where the attributes, values and proposals of each brand are presented. In this respect, branding and positioning strategies have reached millennials mainly through web sites and social media, Instagram and TikTok [34].

3 Methodology

The general objective of this research consisted of discovering the positioning of the main brands marketed in Spain in the minds of Spanish millennials, namely, Zara, H&M, Louis Vuitton and Gucci. The specific objectives consisted of the following: determining what attributes are associated the most with each brand; determining the attributes that are considered fundamental; determining the loyalty of millennials towards the brands; determining general brand perception; identifying the reasons behind these brand evaluations; determining the brands that possessed the highest levels of awareness ('top of mind'); and determining customer satisfaction with the different brands.

The criteria used to select the brands consisted of overall turnover in the financial year in which the information was compiled for the research, as well as their ranking in the Best Global Brands index. These companies are characterized by their adaptability and flexibility [36].

The hypotheses that were posed for this research consisted of the following:

- H1. Millennials situate the brands Zara, H&M, Louis Vuitton and Gucci at their top of mind.
- H2. Recognition of the brands Zara, H&M, Louis Vuitton and Gucci is high.
- H3. An association exists between brand recognition and possession of clothing made by the brands.
- H4. Customers of fashion brands reveal a high degree of loyalty.

With regard to fieldwork, the research method was quantitative. We used a questionnaire, a primary information source. When it came to choosing the brands, Interbrand is a consulting company that offers services linked to brand creation, with a view to endowing companies with an identity, purpose and role that may lead to a brand that enhances the company's profitability (Interbrand, 2019).

In order to select brands for our positioning analysis, we used Interbrand's Best Global Brands ranking, the first brand evaluation methodology to receive ISO certification. Four brands were chosen from the clothing industry that feature in this ranking (Louis Vuitton, H&M, Zara and Gucci), given that this is a key and growing industrial sector in the GDP of every country. Furthermore, these four clothing brands effectively target millennials, the segment being analysed.

In this sense, the fieldwork sample consisted entirely of this group, given that this is a relatively new target and one that features a series of unique characteristics, as described in the theoretical framework. Another factor when choosing these brands was that they are all direct competitors in their respective categories, whether this be within the realm of low-cost clothing or luxury clothing.

With regard to the method for compiling primary information for the fieldwork and the method of analysis used to process the data that was compiled, we employed a series of secondary sources, both internal and external with regard to the brands, in order to discover what attributes and characteristics they seek to communicate to consumers. However, in order to discover what attributes and other characteristics

millennials resident in Spain associate with the different brands, we employed a primary information source: the questionnaire.

In this case, the questionnaire was made up of 13 closed questions, including both questions relating to socio-demographics and positioning. The questions were formulated in order to fulfil the goal of either accepting or rejecting the initial hypotheses and discovering the positioning of the four brands (Zara, H&M, Louis Vuitton and Gucci) in the minds of millennials. For this reason, the responses of any individuals not between the ages of 17 and 37 years were eliminated from the survey. We achieved an $n = 950$.

4 Results

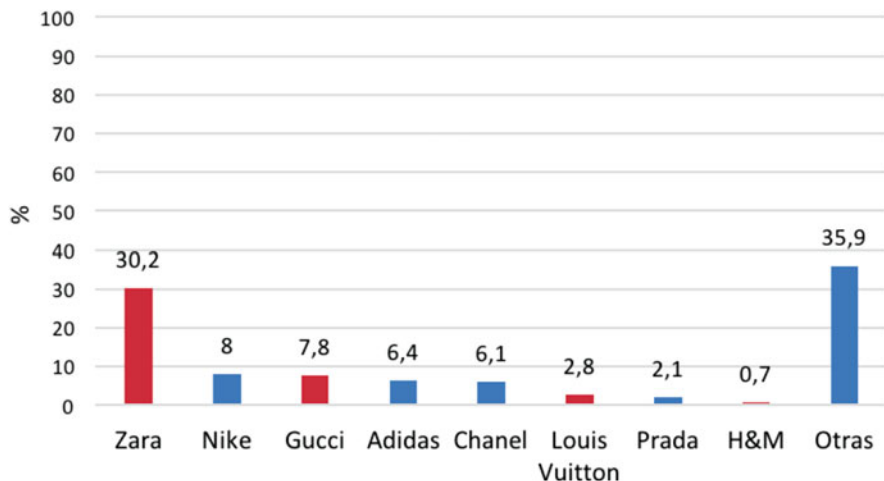
In relation to the demographic analysis, the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample interviewed were presented. In the univariate and bivariate analysis, the data relating to the positioning of the brand in the survey were presented. Finally, the hypotheses were accepted or rejected depending on a series of statistical results.

Demographically, it can be observed that, with regard to gender, the sample was correctly distributed in proportional terms, given that 47.2% were women and 52.8% were men. The average age was 22.4 years, featuring a typical deviation of ± 4.39 years. The majority of the respondents were students (34.9%), followed by working individuals (31.6%). A significant number of the respondents also studied and worked at the same time (24.1%).

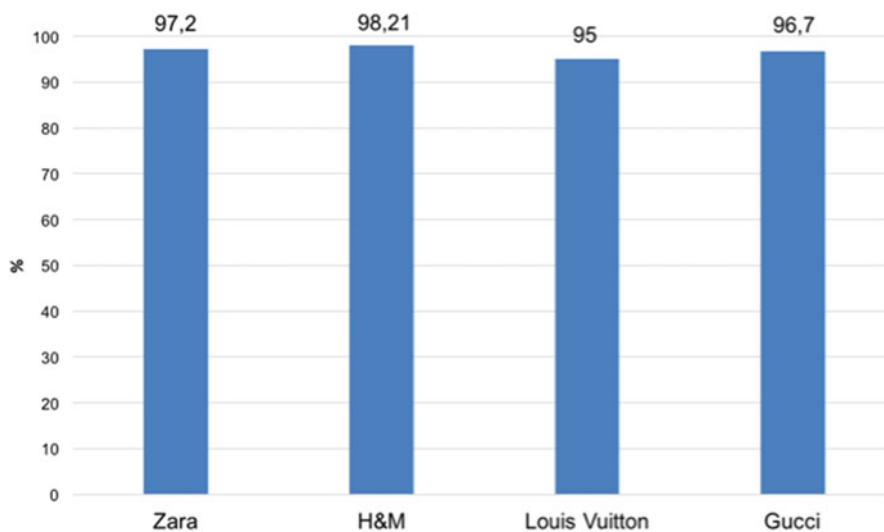
The working respondents mainly presented Vocational Training (FP) (35.8%) and University Studies (33.6%). Furthermore, the unemployed respondents presented Vocational Training (FP) (62.5%) and Basic Studies (25%). Finally, a large proportion of the students were pursuing University Studies (51.4%) and Vocational Training (FP) (26.5%).

It can be observed that three of the brands analysed by the study are amongst the top seven in the top-of-mind analysis for the brands most mentioned by the respondents (Graph 1). The leading position is occupied by Zara, with nearly 31% of the responses. Gucci is located in third place (with 6.49% of the responses), and Louis Vuitton achieves a meagre 2.88% of the responses. These figures are statistically significant. They mean that Zara, Gucci and Louis Vuitton enjoy a certain awareness. Conversely, the company that does not appear in the top seven for the sample is H&M, achieving a somewhat modest fifteenth place. These results partially validate H1 (Millennials situate the brands Zara, H&M, Louis Vuitton and Gucci at their top of mind).

In relation to brand recognition (Graph 2), it can be observed that all four brands chosen for this research present a high level of recognition, given that at least 95% of the sample identified them. Of course, given that we are dealing with a sector that is naturally attractive to young people, and in view of the intensive marketing that is carried out in both analogue and digital formats, it is quite understandable that brand recognition should be high. In other less popular or more specialized sectors, the



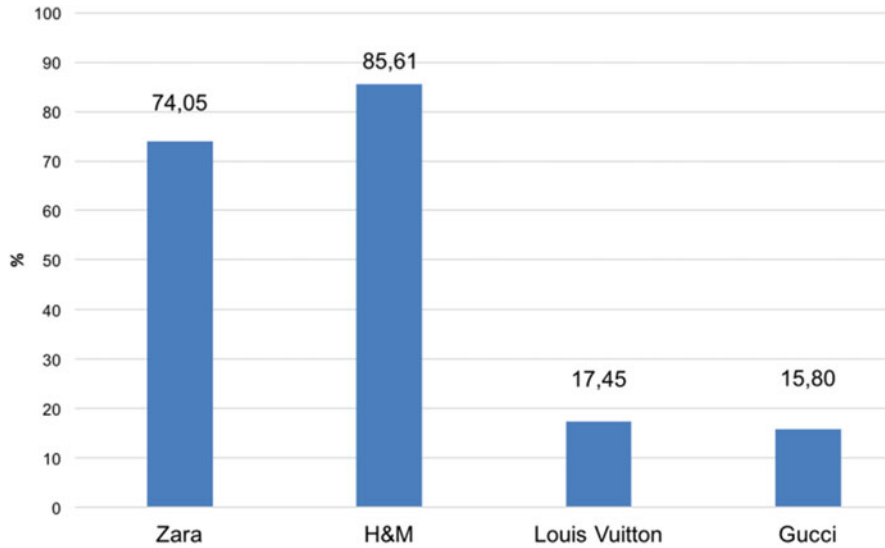
Graph 1 Top of mind for fashion brands. Source: Own elaboration in collaboration with Anna Martorell and Alejandro Garrido



Graph 2 Recognition of fashion brands. Source: Own elaboration

figures would probably be lower, in which respect we can state that the wider context helps to boost brand recognition. Nevertheless, these results confirm H2 (recognition of the brands Zara, H&M, Louis Vuitton and Gucci is high).

One of the indicators of attachment to a brand consists of consumption, which is to say, possession of products or services made by that brand. In this respect, we can observe (Graph 3) that the majority of the clothing items that the sample respondents declared they had purchased corresponded to H&M (in 85.61% of cases), followed

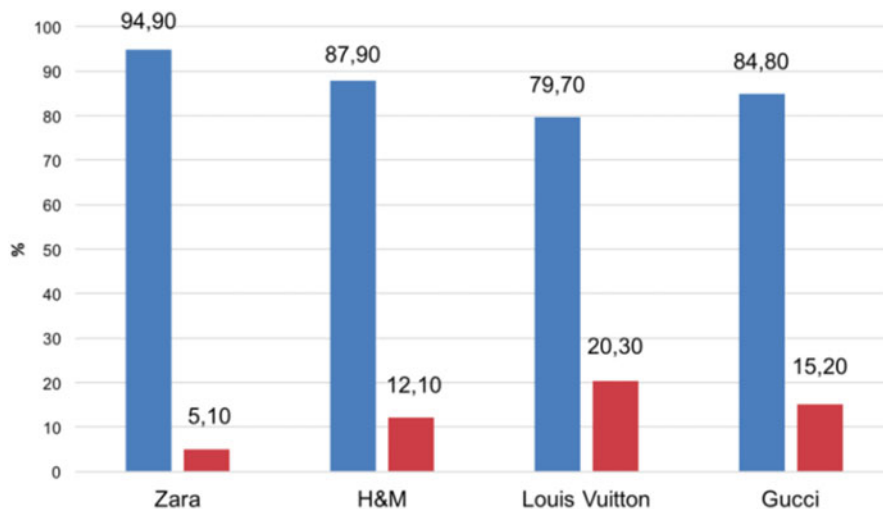


Graph 3 Possession of clothing made by the fashion brands. Source: Own elaboration

by Zara (74.05%). These results are not especially surprising, given that these brands make the respondents their principal target, effectively focusing a large part of their marketing strategies on these consumers. Furthermore, 17.45% of the sample possessed some item made by Louis Vuitton and 15.8% owned a product made by Gucci. These results reflect the respondents who made up the sample, given that both brands form part of an older market, although their strategies are currently undergoing a change. Thus, H3 must be rejected (an association exists between brand recognition and possession of clothing made by the brands).

Members of the sample who declared that they owned clothing items made by the different brands were asked whether they would purchase clothing from these brands again. This question sought to determine whether the brands demanded a certain loyalty from their consumers or not. Zara obtained the best results in terms of loyalty, given that 94.9% of consumers would place their trust in the brand again, whilst only 5.1% would cease to do so (Graph 4).

In the case of H&M, we can also state that its customers are loyal, since 87.9% would once again purchase its products, compared to 12.1% who would not do so. Gucci occupies third place, with a loyalty rate of 84.8% of the respondents. Consumers of Louis Vuitton’s products are the least loyal, although the figure of 79.9% loyal customers is high. These results confirm H4 (customers of fashion brands reveal a high degree of loyalty).



Graph 4 Degree of loyalty to the fashion brands. Source: Own elaboration

5 Conclusions

In general terms, we can observe a high level of recognition of the brands Zara, H&M, Louis Vuitton and Gucci amongst millennials when it comes to top of mind and brand awareness, notwithstanding the odd qualification of this statement.

The marketing activities (especially digital) carried out by these brands, especially on social media and even through innovative interactive channels such as HbbTV, constitute one of the reasons for these high levels of awareness [22].

Furthermore, we can observe a certain feedback between the positioning that exists in the minds of potential customers [13] and the loyalty of the brands' consumers. However, the same is not true if we attempt to make an association between brand recognition and possession of clothing by these brands.

Overall, we can highlight three factors that favour an association in the minds of consumers when it comes to generating an appropriate positioning. These consist of the degree of association (strength of the link to certain attributes that the brand wants the public to associate it with, and the real association generated in the mind of consumers), the degree of attractiveness (importance that consumers grant to certain attributes or specific attributes of a product or brand) and the level of differentiation (differences that consumers perceive in comparison with other brands). We can observe that the attributes of the brands are attractive, which explains the high levels of awareness, recognition and satisfaction, the positive evaluation and the high levels of possession and loyalty. We can infer that, for a brand to be perceived as being different, it must present a series of characteristics that endow it with a high degree of importance, distinction or priority, elements that it can use to set itself apart from the rest of the competing brands. This brand awareness amongst the millennial

generation is mainly created through digital channels. What is more, in the case of luxury brands, brand awareness is even higher in the digital environment, in view of the purchasing power of millennials and the exclusive positioning of these brands within offline and online environments.

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Digital Fashion Exhibition: Salvatore Ferragamo Museum and Google Arts & Culture



Daniela Candeloro 

Abstract Fashion exhibitions are undergoing epochal changes. Many of these transformations are the consequence of a digital era that is embracing new ways to communicate and experience fashion culture. In this scenario, digital exhibitions are emerging as an extension of physical ones, developing a valid alternative to the traditional methods of displaying items of interest. Since the eighteenth century, fashion exhibitions have evolved in their shapes and purposes, and, more recently, they continued this transformation, also starting to be present on online channels.

In order to analyse this development in fashion exhibitions, this article studies the Salvatore Ferragamo Google Arts & Culture online channel, revealing the communication structure that digital fashion exhibitions can adopt. In detail, the study underlines the platform's organisation, developed through 2D and 3D contents, virtual reality and augmented reality, explaining the logic and the significance behind them. These digital technologies divulge, in innovative ways, the genius of Salvatore Ferragamo, previously communicated only by traditional channels. In this context, tradition and innovation merge with the common purpose to spread fashion culture among people.

This analysis also tries to draw attention to interactivity, accessibility and inclusivity, highlighting opportunities and challenges that the digitalisation of fashion culture could create within society.

Keywords Fashion exhibition · Salvatore Ferragamo · Google Arts & Culture · 2D · 3D · Augmented reality · Virtual reality · Interactivity · Accessibility · Inclusivity

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1 Some Notes About Fashion Exhibition from Its Beginning to Its Digital Evolution

Museums and temporary exhibitions are dissemination means of culture, and as such, they curate, display, narrate and describe a story. In these spaces, items of interest have the potential to shape a unique experience for those who visit them.

Historically, museums and exhibitions have been mainly focused either on art or fine art. Much more rarely or almost none of them were dedicated to fashion. The scholar Julia Petrov underlined that it is possible to find information about just the “idea” of fashion museums within the eighteenth-century journal “The Spectator”. She referred to an article written by Sir Richard Steele in 1712, which describes an imaginary and surreal museum displaying different kinds of fashion objects. This article, characterised by a parodistic narrative, represents the earliest document that mentions a fashion museum’s concept.

At the time of Steele’s article and in the following century, there were not fashion museums yet. Fashion items were not considered conventional museum objects, even though they were kept within some museums in Britain, France, Eastern Europe and America. By contrast, at the beginning of the twentieth century, fashion reached an increasing interest in society, and, as Petrov affirms, Kensington Palace hosted the first permanent display in the UK dedicated to fashion in 1911. Another similar example, before this permanent display, was a fashion exhibition held in 1900 in Paris. In the International Exhibition, in the Palais du Costume, thirty tableaux revealed waxwork figures that showed historical costumes from the Roman Empire to the latest fashion of that contemporary period [1].

Historically then, fashion started to be part of museum exhibitions worldwide gradually. The first appearance of fashion in the Victoria and Albert Museum’s gallery was in 1913. In New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art showed fashion in its exhibition rooms in 1929, whereas the first fashion items’ appearance in the Brooklyn Museum’s gallery was in 1925. In Canada, specifically in Toronto, the Royal Ontario exhibited fashion in 1933, whereas in Montreal, the McCord Museum in 1957. In those years, also the Fashion Museum in Bath commenced displaying fashion, precisely in 1963 [2].

Consequently, several cultural establishments started to organise spaces dedicated to fashion. However, it is mainly in the last decades that fashion exhibitions began to follow one after another, proving that fashion is not merely limited to being an object to wear and sell, but instead that it can also be studied, displayed and understood as a cultural phenomenon. Indeed, more recently, an increasing number of fashion exhibitions have been organised and also displayed in museums, for example, “Valentino a Roma, 45 years of Style” in the Ara Pacis in Rome (2007), “Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty” in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City (2011) and “Christian Dior: Designer Of Dreams” in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (2019). In other words, fashion has started to be consistently seen with its cultural, artistic and historical significance.

In this historical discourse, it is also necessary to underline that more recently, technology strongly affected society and its cultures, and also the world of fashion exhibition gradually embraced technological transformations. Indeed, the Internet of things of the Fourth Industrial Revolution drastically altered people's lives, attitudes and behaviours, creating a superb interconnection among realities. In this sense, exhibitions previously reachable only physically, now have started to be also present and visible through online channels. This transformation brings challenges and opportunities since the digital exhibition tries to be pleasant and interesting, despite the lack of comprehensive empirical experience.

The cultural heritage industry is currently creating cutting-edge ways to communicate and disseminate knowledge, and online exhibitions are starting to rise, as a potential extension of the physical displays, showing some peculiar qualities and advantages. In this respect, virtual exhibitions establish a symbiotic relationship with physical ones. They create a familiar environment for online users, trigger people curiosity, build interaction between online users and the exhibition and attract people who could not attend them physically. Besides this, virtual exhibitions have the advantage to be updated whenever a new element is integrated within the exhibition [3].

Besides, virtual exhibitions usually focus their attention on the visual qualities of the collections. The technological process can indeed be a change gamer, like the highly detailed 2D images or 3D objects. In fact, many virtual exhibitions have a 2D user interface, and they are mostly web-based, organised through the use of pages, subpages, hyperlinks, images, animations, 3D objects and related media that can create accurate digital collections replicating the physical ones. On the one hand, these technologies can entirely recreate offline visits; on the other hand, they can complement and enrich them, for example, with further information or integrating other artefacts presented in novel ways. Finally, digitalisation can also shape entirely new and different exhibitions compared to the physical ones [4].

In this visionary scenario, also fashion exhibitions have changed and evolved, divulging cultural heritage through digitalisation. The Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Fashion Museum in Bath, the Kyoto Costume Institute in Kyoto, the MET Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Palais Galliera Musée de la mode de la Ville de Paris and the Museo del Traje in Madrid are only some of the many fashion institutions which show and share their masterpieces through online channels. Among them, the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum is indeed part of this increasing group of fashion organisations that desire their exhibitions to be also digital. This article aims to illustrate how this fashion institution has been able to reach this objective.

2 Research Objectives and Methodology

This article aims to understand how a physical fashion museum can create a virtual extension of cultural heritage through dedicated online channels. More specifically, the present essay analyses the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum on the Google Arts & Culture online platform. This museum is a well-known cultural point in Florence, Italy, and it is a historical institution that communicates a comprehensive Italian fashion heritage through the glorious story of the famous fashion designer Salvatore Ferragamo. The methodology applied is the case study analysis, which allows moulding an in-depth description of a social phenomenon. This methodology builds a realistic vision of circumstances, considering that it designs an analytical structure that enquires questions like “where”, “who”, “what”, “how” and “why” regarding the case [5].

In fact, the case study methodology, as Thomas [6] assures, is a scientific tool that confers completeness of the phenomenon through many different perspectives; therefore, this essay attempts to visualise heterogeneous elements that shape the digital fashion exhibition on the Google Arts & Culture platform of the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum. In detail, this study aims to understand where the online fashion exhibition is developed and how it is framed. Moreover, the essay explains the reasons behind this online fashion exhibition’s design and the main characteristics through which it is shaped. Analysing these aspects helps to discover what can be learned from Salvatore Ferragamo Museum’s strategy.

3 Salvatore Ferragamo Museum Case Study: The Story of the “Shoemaker of Dreams” and the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum

Salvatore Ferragamo today is one of the most well-known fashion brands worldwide. Behind this success, there is an Italian man born in 1898 in a little village near Avellino, Bonito. The eleventh of fourteen children, Salvatore Ferragamo, belonged to a poor family, but this economic condition did not hamper him from becoming the “shoemaker of dreams”, as he used to call himself. Even though at that time being a shoemaker was not seen as a respectable job, he started to follow his passion since his early life, firstly as an assistant in a shoemaker shop and then selling his handmade shoes in his hometown, within his parents’ house [7] at the age of thirteen [8].

However, his fashion journey did not stop in Bonito; in fact, he emigrated to the USA, specifically to Boston, reaching his brother and working for a shoe factory, where he noticed how a big production could reduce the quality. Then, in the early 1920s, he decided to move to California, Santa Barbara; here, he opened a shoemaking and repair shop. Historically, in those years, the cinema industry was flourishing, and therefore Salvatore Ferragamo started to create shoes for movies

and, in the meantime, he studied human anatomy, chemical engineering and mathematics at the University of Southern California. He then moved to Hollywood, following the cinema industry's development, where he opened his business called "Hollywood Boot Shop". After his experience in California, Salvatore Ferragamo returned to Italy in 1927, in Florence, and here the fashion designer began to have a close flow of exports to the USA, but the great crisis of 1929 forced his company to close. Nevertheless, this temporary economic difficulty did not hamper his passion for shoes, and he continued to design his creations, renting in 1936 two workshops and a shop in Palazzo Spini Feroni. His success brought him to buy Palazzo Spini Feroni, the company's headquarters ever since, and, from this moment, his creativity flourished, inventing iconic shoes for the most desirable divas worldwide, from Marilyn Monroe to Sophia Loren.

The fashion designer Salvatore Ferragamo claimed that he was profoundly fascinated by Palazzo Spini Feroni, considering it one of Florence's most loved and admired buildings that he desired [7]. Later, this place became the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum, which was established in 1995. Once, the Palace hosted the managerial and innovative world of the Ferragamo's factory, and today has been indeed transformed into a temple of the Italian fashion heritage, devoted to divulging the unique history of Salvatore Ferragamo enriched with related heterogeneous cultural aspects which are linked to fashion, such as art, design, costume and communication. This eclectic and multidisciplinary attitude towards fashion led the museum to be recognised through various prizes and partnerships. The institution indeed won the Prize Guggenheim Enterprise and Culture in 1999 because of its valuable cultural value, and it continues its passionate commitment through the participation to the organisation which gathers the most important business Italian museums: Museimpresa. The company itself is part of the group Intrapresae Collezione Guggenheim, which has the goal to preserve and support the Collection Peggy Guggenheim of Venice [9].

4 Google Arts & Culture, "We Wear Culture" and Salvatore Ferragamo Museum

As the introduction of this essay highlighted, technology truly affected the field of fashion exhibitions. In this fast transformation process, it is possible to find one tech giant, Google, that cooperates with the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum.

Google indeed created "Google Arts & Culture", a non-profit project which is based on the collaboration among Google, institutions and artists worldwide. It is a digital platform that enables online users to access a staggering quantity of artefacts and items of interest from all over the world via technology, involving people to discover arts and culture through high-resolution images, videos, stories and simple games. This online channel had grown throughout time and, even more recently, helped people access culture digitally when they cannot physically reach an

exhibition. A blatant example of this fact is proven since March 2020, when the online searches for “Google Arts & Culture” quadrupled according to an analysis of Google Trends. A spokesperson for the digital company affirmed that Google Arts & Culture increased to over 2000 cultural institutions from over 80 countries [10]. It is a fact that is consequential to the sudden dramatic pandemic that began spreading worldwide in that period. The online channels are essential for shortening the social distancing and keeping knowledge and culture alive despite the physical barriers and limitations that a sanitary emergency can require.

The application boasts an enormous amount of art collections worldwide, and in this vast treasury, fashion also plays a significant role. Indeed, in 2017, Google Arts & Culture launched the global fashion project “We Wear Culture” at the Metropolitan Museum of Art [11], which has the scope to democratise the culture of worldwide fashion, digitalising it and consequently making it available to every online user of the Google Arts & Culture platform. The title reveals in itself the intrinsic cultural meaning hidden behind clothes or a pair of shoes: they can indeed uncover and portray many diverse aspects of fashion, from the economic to the psychological ones, from the sociological to the historical ones and from many other perspectives that confirm its essence.

Since 2017, Google Arts & Culture gathers more than 180 museums, archives, schools, fashion institutions and organisations from the fashion environment coming from many parts of the world, and in this way, it has been able to communicate three millennia of fashion available online, browsing 30,000 circa of fashion items and more than 450 exhibits [12].

As explained earlier, one of the partners of this project is the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum, which strongly wanted to build a consistent extension of its offline cultural heritage through the online platform Google Arts & Culture.

5 The Online Fashion Exhibition in Salvatore Ferragamo Google Arts & Culture

The organisation of exhibitions is essential to express a particular type of message; therefore, it is crucial to explain how heterogeneous kinds of displays can lead to specific purposes.

Kalfatovic classified the exhibitions into five categories: aesthetic, emotive, evocative, didactic and entertaining. As the adjective suggests, the aesthetic exhibition is organised through a logic guided by the beauty of the objects. In comparison, the emotive exhibition tends to centre its presentation triggering emotions and feelings of visitors. Instead, the evocative exhibition is mostly focused on creating a specific immersive atmosphere, whereas the didactic exhibition is developed with the scope of enriching visitors with knowledge about a specific topic. Finally, the entertaining exhibition has the main objective of creating fun for visitors.

Applying this straightforward classification to an online exhibition can help to analyse it. However, it is necessary to consider the multidimensional aspects that the online world can create and, consequently, the possible overlapping of more than one type of category. Indeed, the Salvatore Ferragamo Google Arts & Culture webpage demonstrates how these kinds of exhibitions can coexist in the same online visiting path.

Besides the type of exhibition (aesthetic, emotive, evocative, didactic and entertaining), the display can be developed through various logic, such as object-oriented organisation, systematic organisation, thematic organisation, organisation by material type and organisation by multiple schemes. The object-oriented organisation is exceptionally focused on objects, and simple logic is implemented through the presentation of the objects (e.g. alphabetical or chronological order) since there is the willingness to maintain the attention only on the objects. The systematic organisation can be planned through a methodical logic, and highly often, it is framed following chronology. Instead, the thematic organisation is disclosed through a specific topic around whom the objects' exhibition tells a story, whereas the organisation by material type is assembled considering the primary materials of the object presented. Finally, the organisation by multiple schemes has the peculiar characteristic of merging all the organisation types listed before and overlapping them: this kind of exhibition can be mainly applied on the web [13]. Due to its digital format, the Salvatore Ferragamo Google Arts & Culture belongs to the latter classification.

6 The Homepage of Salvatore Ferragamo Google Arts & Culture

Thus, having clarified how to evaluate an exhibition, it is possible to start analysing the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum's homepage on Google Arts & Culture, which has an initial brief description of the museum of 262 words. Telling the story of how the cultural institution was born indeed provides a didactic purpose to those who visit the online exhibition, teaching them about the history and cultural background of the Palace they are digitally visiting. Nevertheless, the written content of the webpage is accompanied with consistent and meaningful attention to the aesthetic side of the page, promoting a visual communication of the artworks which has the purpose of transmitting the grade of beauty created by the fashion designer: the photographs on the homepage occupy the majority of the online space indeed.

7 The “Stories-Exhibitions” of Salvatore Ferragamo Google Arts & Culture

Below the written introduction, there are eight “stories” that imitate the compact and visual communication of the homonymous social media format, mainly focused on visual communication such as photographs or videos and brief written explanations. Each of them has specific topics titled: “Audrey Hepburn and Salvatore Ferragamo”, “Made in Italy: Salvatore Ferragamo’s Ideas, Models and Inventions”, “Salvatore Ferragamo: Is Fashion Art?”, “Marilyn Monroe and the Power of Her 4-Inch Stiletto Heel”, “Salvatore Ferragamo: Equilibrium and What It Means to Walk”, “Salvatore Ferragamo: Famous Feet of Hollywood”, “Salvatore Ferragamo: Florence A Palace and the City” and “The Amazing Shoemaker: Fairy Tales and Legends”.

In the “Audrey Hepburn and Salvatore Ferragamo” section, there are up to 21 slides, through which the user is introduced to the actress’s historical path through Ferragamo’s eyes. Each slide presents a brief exhibition label and large pictures with some videos as well. The very first introduction written is a claim of the fashion designer Salvatore Ferragamo referring to the diva: he spent gentle words about her, applauding her elegance and profound culture about philosophy, astronomy, art and theatre, underling her aristocracy and artistic soul. After a brief biography of Audrey Hepburn, the slides follow the story between her and the fashion designer. Salvatore Ferragamo designed many shoes for the actress at the start of her career in the 1950s [14]. The slides continue, showing shoes made by Salvatore Ferragamo specifically and uniquely for Audrey Hepburn, alternating her and his citations for each creation. This “exhibition-story” certainly concentrates its attention on visual communication, mainly accenting the image of the famous actress through memorable black and white photos of her and focusing on other pictures that reveal the beauty of the shoes made by Ferragamo.

These characteristics shape this online exhibition through a thematic organisation, centred on a specific topic. Besides, there are both elements of aesthetic and didactic purposes, meaning that it is possible to acculturate and simultaneously communicate the heritage of Salvatore Ferragamo, which express itself through beauty, design and cultural knowledge.

Along with Audrey Hepburn, many other actresses had the privilege to wear the fashion designer’s shoes, such as the timeless myth Marilyn Monroe, who tragically died on 5 August 1962. After 50 years after this date, the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum wanted to pay tribute to her through the exhibition “Marilyn Monroe and the Power of Her 4-Inch Stiletto Heel”, which was the result of meticulous research of documents, photographs, films and writings [15]. With a similar narration of the one dedicated to Audrey Hepburn, the “Marilyn Monroe and the Power of Her 4-Inch Stiletto Heel” exhibition is styled with excellent visual communication, displaying mainly large photos of her 4-inch stiletto heel, accompanied with famous citations of the actress that enhance the power of the images. In the 29 slides, the protagonist is again the visual communication, which expresses the actress’s unique personality and beauty through photos and video, linked to exhibition labels that

describe her life or the characteristics of the shoes presented. In this “exhibition-story” the aesthetic goal merges with the didactic one, similarly to the previous “Audrey Hepburn and Salvatore Ferragamo,” and the organisation, telling a story specifically around the actress and her stiletto heel, is thematic.

The story “Salvatore Ferragamo: Famous Feet of Hollywood” recalls in 60 slides the strong connection between the fashion designer and the cinema, showing photos of shoes made for famous artists such as Sophia Loren, Ingrid Bergman and Katharine Hepburn, accompanied with emotional citations of the actresses or historical explanations regarding the life of Salvatore Ferragamo [16]. This story is developed through more than one thematisation. There is the macro theme of the relationship between Salvatore Ferragamo and the cinema; then, there is a ramification of sections dedicated and developed for each actress shown. Every actress is displayed through historical portrait photos, followed by a slideshow where the unique shoes made for each of them appositively from Ferragamo are exhibited. The extreme majority of visual elements in this story suggest the exhibition’s predominant aesthetic organisation, even though linked with the emotive and didactic goal.

If the previous section is focused on the story of the actresses and their shoes made by the fashion designer, “Made in Italy: Salvatore Ferragamo’s Ideas, Models and Inventions” in 26 slides [17] and “Salvatore Ferragamo: Is Fashion Art?” [18] in 34 slides, allow the virtual viewer to have access to the fashion designer’s historical documents, which are part of the museum’s archive, such as patents and sketches of the shoes. Compared to the previous ones, this story is more didactical than aesthetic since the exhibition labels are more exhaustive and longer, and the organisation of the slides is more focused on the written cultural explanation of the exhibition.

Instead, the section named “Salvatore Ferragamo: Florence A Palace and the City” reveals the interior of the building where the museum is held. There are pictures accompanied by historical descriptions of the Palace that emphasise Italian culture and beauty, which are also expressed through the elegant architectural style intersecting sublimely with the unique creations of Salvatore Ferragamo [19]. In the 14 slides, the visual contents represent mainly the Palace’s interiors and its ambience where there are shoes of Ferragamo and modern and ancient artworks from different artists. In this story, the structure moves the single object’s attention to the internal space that hosts these objects, rather than focusing on only one object like what often happens in the previous stories. This story has a didactic purpose developed through extended exhibition labels about the Palace’s history and the precious cultural treasure held inside.

The story titled “Salvatore Ferragamo: Equilibrium and what it means to walk” [20] illustrates through pictures and more videos, compared to the other sections, the field of science, art, architecture, archaeology, circus and dance intersected with the art of Salvatore Ferragamo. Indeed, these fields’ connection is well explained, underling how the fashion designer shaped its creations, mixing and absorbing notions and studies from these heterogeneous but essential disciplines. With 24 slides, the online exhibition starts with an introductory aesthetic and entertaining video of the iconic red stiletto of Salvatore Ferragamo walking the streets of Florence

and through images representing some of the greatest artists' names in history, such as Rodin, Picasso, Degas and Bourdelle.

The story "The Amazing Shoemaker: Fairy Tales and Legends" [21] underlines the fashion designer's talent, showing in a brief slideshow with one video and pictures, the works of Salvatore Ferragamo narrating a world of beauty, imagination, technology and invention. This online exhibition tries to recreate the offline exhibition's ambience through photos and one video; the display is simultaneously aesthetic and didactic. This organisation is undoubtedly evocative: it focuses mainly on the immersive experience, emphasising the atmosphere, which appears to be mainly mysterious and magical thanks to a meticulous game of lights and shadows, also enriched with music in the video that evokes fairy tales and legends.

Below the section dedicated to the "stories", there is the museum's collection [22]: the online visitor can visualise it, choosing the organisation of it either for the most searched items and popular ones in the sections or from the chronological point of view, clicking on the year where the fashion items were created, or based on colour.

Besides this, in both sections (stories-exhibitions and the museum collection), the labels' role is fundamental since online visitors would not have a comprehensive understanding of what is displayed otherwise. Labels have indeed the aim to answer in advance all the probable questions that a viewer can have during the online experience [13]. The written content of the labels must be synthesised and small. Therefore, they have to be understandable, discouraging the use of a non-exclusionary vocabulary that can exclude part of the audience since they are crucial in disseminating knowledge [23]. These are characteristics that have been implemented in the Salvatore Ferragamo Google Arts & Culture online page and strengthen the whole didactic aspect of the display.

8 Salvatore Ferragamo Google Arts & Culture Through Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality

Technological progress had also created innovative ways to experience new dimensions of reality through augmented reality and virtual reality. Even though slightly different, these two terms are not equal: the augmented reality adds elements and information to the real world; on the contrary, in virtual reality, everything is simulated.

On the one hand, it is possible to merge the online world with offline reality, thanks to "augmented reality" [24]. This system overlays computer-generated information over the real world [25], creating a mixed reality between the real and the virtual world [26]. On the other hand, virtual reality masters a unique way to involve the senses (visual, auditory, haptic) [27]; moreover, wearing a virtual reality headset allows the user to have a stereoscopic vision [28], building an environment that surrounds him. Considering these fascinating potentials, both augmented reality

and virtual reality applications can reinforce all the purposes that a fashion exhibition desires to acquire in terms of entertainment, didactic, aesthetic, emotive and evocative atmosphere.

The Salvatore Ferragamo Google Arts & Culture home page uses all the features offered by the augmented reality and virtual reality in terms of entertainment, evocative, didactic, emotive and aesthetic purposes. In this sense, the online user can click on the pictures of the collection revealed on the Salvatore Ferragamo Google Arts & Culture platform, and it is possible to zoom in on the object. Moreover, the user can choose the visualisation of the objects and the spaces in augmented reality. This modality allows the user to interact with the fashion item since he has to focus the floor with his camera phone, where it will appear a virtual space where the user can position the photography that he chose. Once the photography is virtually installed, moving the smartphone like the image projected was really there in front of the camera, creating the illusion to be near the object portrayed or in the place shoot. The user can take photos and videos of the image projected, which have the same realistic output to shoot physically inside the offline Salvatore Ferragamo Museum.

Google Arts & Culture has also realised a virtual reality video with the collaboration of the Museum Salvatore Ferragamo called "How did the stiletto become the height of fashion?" This video, uploaded on the official YouTube page of Google Arts & Culture, describes the fashion stylist's work, underling the iconic stiletto. The video is entirely developed with the augmented reality technology: the user needs to point his mobile phone on the floor, and, moving the device, he can move within the virtual space. The online visitor can also watch this video wearing a virtual reality headset, experiencing a 360° presentation of the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum's cultural heritage. In addition, in the last section below, it is possible to virtually visit the museum through an outline similar to the Google map space. Through this online tool, it is possible to walk within the museum's rooms virtually immersed within the spaces [29].

9 Conclusion and Discussion

Nowadays, technology strongly affects the fashion world, proving that innovations could lead to new fashion forms. Indeed, technology helps build a more sustainable fashion system [30] to develop digital fashion communication [31] and, as demonstrated in this article, shape online fashion exhibitions.

In particular, Google's technological tools have been essential to divulge the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum's collection. Indeed, Salvatore Ferragamo Museum, participating in the project "We Wear Culture" promoted by Google Arts & Culture, helps disseminate the cultural aspects of fashion too often undervalued or still ignored. Through the Google Arts & Culture digital format, the museum can display its collections and fashion exhibitions through different forms, and it has available a range of high technologies to show them better. In this way, the visual and the

written contents create a digital journey with heterogeneous structures, from 2D to 3D visualisations, from written explanations to auditive ones. These arrangements shape the digital exhibition's principally thematic organisation and the type of exhibition that often overlaps didactic, aesthetic, emotive, entertaining and evocative characteristics.

The technologies adopted to build the visual content allow the visitor to observe both objects and fashion exhibition's atmosphere meticulously, thanks to the high definition of the images also shown through the augmented reality, which plays another crucial role to encourage online visitors to participate actively in the discovery of the fashion culture. The possibility of interacting with 2D and 3D images shapes the online journey as an engaging act: the visitor can decide how to experience the exhibition.

Moreover, exploring the digital fashion exhibition through the 3D visualisation wearing a virtual reality headset enhances, even more, interactivity, deepening the intensity of the digital visiting. The auditive and the visual senses are significantly involved, reproducing the cultural setting through a new reality between virtual and real (real because the auditive historical explanations are real, the exhibitions' objects are real, virtual because the visitor is "apparently" inside an exhibition). This systematic organisation developed through augmented reality could empower the online visitor to experience an immersive interaction with the fashion exhibition. Components like vividness and attractiveness are vital to creating effective communication; therefore, the implementation of heterogeneous and comprehensive technologies is necessary.

Furthermore, partnering with the digital tech giant Google allows reaching a wider audience, due to Big Tech's technological advances and brand awareness. In this way, access to fashion culture through digital exhibition builds a new era of cultural dissemination, where knowledge can rise because of the easy use of digital platforms where they are displayed. Therefore, this kind of technology can indeed have a didactic role within society, involving people to fashion culture with easiness and free access when there is an Internet connection. These factors can undoubtedly be useful also during epidemics or pandemics, since they can fill the social distancing when necessary, connecting people to fashion culture digitally. COVID-19 demonstrated how digitalisation helped reduce social distancing virtually and that people could culturally enrich themselves through online channels; therefore, digitalisation of culture is suggested since it can be a valuable solution to spread knowledge also during an emergency period. Besides, all those people living with particular health problems that could limit them to reach a physical fashion exhibition could in this way experience fashion exhibition online, without being totally excluded by visiting them.

A new era of democratised culture is disclosed since cultural heritage can be accurately spread through current and future technologies if carefully communicated. This essay proves how a fashion museum could extend its presence digitally, divulging its cultural heritage by means of different digital communication structures. However, it is necessary to underline that there is still a large world area without Internet or devices to explore this virtual cultural space. Half of the world's

population does not have access to the Internet [32], and hence, it is still not possible to fully affirm that access to the Google Arts & Culture can “totally” democratise fashion culture and culture in general. For this reason, it would be desirable that global governmental and non-governmental organisations provide more usability of culture, also guaranteeing equal access to technology in all parts of the world, filling the gap that inevitably drives inequality between and within countries. When these differences disappear, online fashion exhibitions will play their role in democratising culture to the fullest.

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Harper's Bazaar en Español (1967): The Failed Attempt to Start a Spanish Edition of *Harper's Bazaar* in the 1960s



Daniele Gennaioli

Abstract In the context of post-World War II fashion media, *Harper's Bazaar* attempted to incorporate Spanish haute couture into its field of interests by including on its staff a new professional personality as its Madrid correspondent. After Elizabeth Howell Buckley became “Madrid editor” in 1963, *Bazaar* launched, as part of its international expansion plan, an unsuccessful local edition of the magazine. The aim of this paper is to contribute to this field by describing the single pilot issue of *Harper's Bazaar en Español*, published in May 1967, and by studying the situation that led up to this event. To carry out this research, which is still at an early stage, I used both hemerographic material found in different libraries in England, Italy and Spain, as well as oral testimony from Renée López de Haro, who was the Spanish editor of *Bazaar* between 1971 and 1973.

Keywords Elizabeth Howell Buckley · *Harper's Bazaar* España · Renée López de Haro · Spanish fashion · Francoism

1 Introduction

In May 2010, the media outlet Spainmedia Magazines began publishing the Spanish edition of *Harper's Bazaar*. Melania M. Pan, then director of the magazine, disclosed the objectives of the new periodical in a section called “Letter from the Director”, where she strategically expressed:

Harper's Bazaar arrives in Spain and our intention is to talk about many things and at the same time, stop saying others [...] We want to talk about the New Feminine, represented in

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strong women [...] And we also rely on history. We look at Harper's Bazaar's 142-year life not with vertigo or nostalgia, but with admiration and aspiration.¹

Despite the interest shown by the editorial team in the trajectory of the legendary American fashion magazine, which at the time celebrated 142 years since its founding, the first issue of the *Harper's Bazaar España* did not mention two key events that occurred in the 1960s and that were crucial to its relationship with Spain: the hiring of a correspondent in Madrid and the failed attempt to create a Spanish edition of the publication.

Although the story of Spanish haute couture has traditionally occupied a peripheral place in the history of contemporary international fashion, as evidenced by its under-representation in the prestigious retrospectives by Caroline Rennolds Milbank [2], Elizabeth Ewing [3] or Didier Grumbach [4],² during the two decades following the Second World War, Spanish fashion design had featured in the American edition of *Bazaar*. A fact that reflects the inclusion of Spain in the field of interest of the international fashion media was the hiring of a correspondent in the Spanish capital from 1963 to 1973. The position of *Madrid editor*,³ initially held by Elizabeth Howell Buckley, represented a new position in the masthead's organizational chart and came after the equivalent posts of *Paris* and *Rome editors* had been created for the French and Italian fashion scenes [6]. At the start of the 1960s, as the collections of the main designers in Barcelona and Madrid began to be systematically reviewed, the magazine organized its pages in an almost hierarchical way, ordering them with reports on fashion shows in the United States, Paris, London, Italy and Spain.⁴

In addition, since 1929, *Bazaar* undertook the construction of a network of international editions that, by the end of the 1960s, extended to Germany, England and Italy. In 1967, when Spain emerged internationally as a new fashion centre, the magazine considered gaining a foothold in the publishing scene of the time by editing a publication specifically aimed at the Spanish market. This project was not finally implemented, and the American magazine only published a single pilot issue of *Harper's Bazaar en Español*.

¹“Llega a España *Harper's Bazaar* y nuestra intención es contar muchas cosas y a la vez, dejar de contar otras [...] Queremos contar el Nuevo Femenino, representado en mujeres fuertes [...] Y también contamos con la historia. Miramos a los 142 años de vida de *Harper's Bazaar* no con vértigo ni nostalgia, sino con admiración, como una aspiración” [1, p. 44].

²I have cited some of the best-known histories of fashion. In all of them, interest in Spain is limited to the professional biographies of a small group of designers who achieved world-wide fame, specifically: Mariano Fortuny, Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, Cristóbal Balenciaga, and Paco Rabanne.

³In *Bazaar's* organizational chart, the position of representative in Spain was shown with the label of “Madrid editor” until 1971 when, in parallel with Renée López de Haro joining the magazine's staff, the role was renamed “Spanish editor” [5, 6].

⁴In this regard, it is important to mention an advertisement published by *Harper's Bazaar* in August 1965 and entitled “Coming in September”, whose text highlights: “The great new fashion collections from America, Paris, London, Italy and Spain” [7, p. 36].

To carry out this research, which, far from being an exhaustive study, only intends to provide a first analysis of the matter, I consulted the hemerographic material kept by the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* (Madrid), the Courtauld Institute of Art Library (London) and the Bovisa Candiani Library (Milan). Considering the role that oral testimonies of personalities from the publishing world and the fashion industry have acquired in the field of Fashion Studies, I decided to interview Renée López de Haro, *Spanish editor of Bazaar* between 1971 and 1973. According to the scholar Lou Taylor: “Oral history and testimony form another, still underused but now established, tool in dress history and fashion studies” [8, p. 35].

2 The Beginnings of *Harper's Bazaar*, William Randolph Hearst and the Correspondent System in Europe

The fate of fashion media has been tied to France since the late seventeenth century. However, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the United States had taken control of the publishing industry. The scholar Caroline Seebom listed at least 18 American magazines in operation by 1880 [9, 10].⁵ Among these was *Harper's Bazaar*, originally founded in November 1867 by publisher Fletcher Harper, who also owned other newspapers such as *Harper's Magazine* and *Harper's Weekly* [10]. Published weekly and known as *Harper's Bazar*—with a single “a”—until 1929, the magazine was inspired by the Berlin publication *Der Bazar* [11, 12] and was aimed at upper-middle-class women, featuring a heterogeneous editorial content that combined art, science, gardening, society notes, “household literature” and fashion [9, p. 41].

According to Caroline Seebom, in 1900 the magazine still belonged to the category of what today are called “mass market magazines”, and it was only during the first decade of the twentieth century that it opted to print on a monthly and limited edition basis, stabilizing its circulation at around 140,000 copies [10, p. 37]. At the time of its acquisition by the magnate William Randolph Hearst in 1912 [13], the magazine switched to the segment known as “Class Publications” [11, p. 16] and became a competitor of *Vogue*, a magazine that since its foundation had identified its audience as the upper strata of New York's erudite and cosmopolitan society.⁶

⁵The first magazine to include fashion in its editorial content was the French periodical *Le Mercure Galant*, published from 1672 onwards. However, as Kate Nelson Best explains, the first proper fashion magazine was *Le Cabinet des Modes*, which circulated between 1785 and 1793 [9].

⁶*Vogue* was born in 1892 as a weekly gazette for the New York elite focused on Europe. Its founder was Arthur Baldwin Turnure, a wealthy member of American high society who had studied at Princeton University [10, 14].

Like Condé Montrose Nast, who after acquiring *Vogue* in 1909 launched the British (1916) and French (1920) editions of the magazine [10, 14, 15], Hearst pioneered a network of international branches for *Bazaar*. In 1929, he established an English edition of *Bazaar*, which operated independently until the early 1970s when it merged with the publication *Queen* and was renamed *Harper's & Queen* [9]. Initially, British *Bazaar* adopted an editorial line very similar to the US edition, reproducing the same stories and organizing, in similar fashion, its content around three main axes: society pages, fiction and fashion. This last section included trends in both Paris and New York, initially prepared by the correspondents Marjorie and Kathleen Howard, as well as news on English fashion, written by editor Cherry Poynter.

Bazaar did not establish an edition in the French capital, considered the international centre of haute couture, until at least 1983.⁷ Despite this, the publication had a correspondent in Paris since 1869,⁸ only 2 years after its foundation. In 1885, the magazine also had opened a “Parisian shopping service” [9, p. 41]. Since 1926 when the article “The Paris Office of Harper’s *Bazaar*” mentioned the existence of a transoceanic branch of the magazine at number 2 rue de la Paix (Paris) and mentioned editor Marjorie Howard as its director [17, p. 45], the post of *Paris editor* had passed through the hands of Daisy Fellowes, Lee Creelman, Gina Androusow and Louise Macy, to finally settle in the figure of Marie-Louise Bousquet towards the beginning of the 1940s [18].

Former *Vogue* fashion editor Carmel Snow served as editor-in-chief at *Bazaar* from 1934 and, as Eleanor Dwight explains, “successfully molded the magazine around her personal understanding of what *Bazaar* should provide to ‘the type of woman’ to whom it pandered” [19, p. 81]. At the same time that *Harper’s Bazaar* became a cutting-edge magazine—also due to the innovative approaches of art director Alexey Brodovitch and fashion editor Diana Vreeland—Snow became very receptive to trends from other regions outside the traditional France centred fashion world. In October 1952, for instance, she named journalist Irene Brin as *Bazaar* Rome correspondent, marking, at least in theory, the official entry of Italian haute couture in the prestigious fashion magazine [20].

⁷The French edition of *Harper’s Bazaar* first appeared in 1983 and was probably active until the early 1990s. This information is based on the description of *Harper’s Bazaar France*, provided by the general catalogue of the *Bibliothèque nationale de France* (BnF).

⁸In the November issue, the editorial team introduced readers to Emmeline Raymond, editor of the French periodical *La Mode Illustrée* and the person in charge of “Paris Fashions”: a column that *Harper’s Bazaar* regularly dedicated to Parisian haute couture [16, p. 738].

Spain officially joined the international circuit established by *Bazaar* in the 1960s, when it added to its staff a professional role based in the Spanish capital, named “Madrid editor” [6]. At that point, *Bazaar* was in the midst of a transformation process. Nancy White, who had replaced her aunt Carmel Snow at *Bazaar* in 1958, was orienting the magazine’s editorial content towards a “less literary and more current” dimension [21, p. 40]. Elizabeth H. Buckley was included in the *Bazaar*’s organizational chart as the publication’s representative in Spain in August 1963 and held this position until 1972.

Originally from New York, Buckley (1933–2004) belonged to a distinguished group of American expatriates that settled in the Spanish capital. She came from a wealthy family linked to the sugar cane trade in the Dominican Republic and Cuba for generations. In 1958 she moved to Spain with her husband, the novelist Fergus Reid Buckley, and their children, living first in Marbella and later in Madrid [5, 6]. Her arrival in the Spanish capital was marked by her entry into cultural circles linked to the theatre. According to historian Javier Carazo Aguilera, Buckley was one of the founders of the *Teatro Estudio Madrid* (TEM), an avant-garde school inspired by the Actors Studio in New York [22].

Apart from contributing in an important way to the internationalization of both designers and the main Italian and Spanish cities, while also providing visibility to the most prominent personalities of the Barcelona, Madrid or Rome social scene, the correspondents often represented the first step in the creation of a local edition of the publication. Taking as an example the case of Italian haute couture, which, like Spanish haute couture, only attained prestige and a recognized profile abroad after the Second World War [23], it should be recalled that the transalpine edition of *Bazaar* emerged precisely in the late 1960s,⁹ when the magazine already had Irene Brin as Rome editor.

⁹*Harper's Bazaar Italia*, which launched in 1969, was edited by publisher Cesare E. Beltrami and hired renowned figures from the Italian scene, such as journalist Silvana Bernasconi and photographer Bob Krieger, as fashion director and art director, respectively. At that time, Maria Pia Chiodoni held the position of director. This abbreviated description of the Italian edition of *Bazaar* is based on the November 1969 issue, which is the earliest copy preserved by the Bovisa Candiani Library [24].



Harper's Bazaar en Español, May 1967. Photography by Michel Malka. Courtesy of Biblioteca Nacional de España

3 *Harper's Bazaar en Español* (1967)

In the early 1960s, at almost the same time as Manuel Fraga Iribarne became a minister,¹⁰ *Harper's Bazaar* established a very strong link with the Ministry of Information and Tourism. Aware of the importance of Spanish cultural media in

¹⁰Manuel Fraga Iribarne (1922–2012) was a Spanish university professor, diplomat and politician. His fame is due, in particular, to the work he carried out as Minister of Information and Tourism, a position he held from 1962 to 1969 [25].

guiding US political action, Fraga understood that haute couture could play a fundamental role in the strategy of promoting a modern image of Spain abroad [26]. Along with tourism, fashion was a tool that could be used to improve the regime's reputation and promote acceptance of Spain by international economic institutions. This was so much so, that while Fraga promoted wide coverage of Spanish fashion design in the main North American media, he also awarded Nancy White the Silver Medal for Tourism Merit in July 1964 [27]. Three years later, the Spanish institutions in charge of controlling information even considered creating a local edition of the magazine. Interviewed on this matter, the former *Spanish editor* Renée López de Haro recalled: "Apparently there was an attempt to make *Harper's Bazaar* in Spain [. . .] I started working there in 1968 and this had already happened, maybe it occurred in 1965 or 1966 [. . .]".¹¹

Indeed, the goal of providing Spain with a local edition of *Bazaar* materialized in May 1967, when a pilot issue of the Spanish version of the magazine was published. Its first issue was supervised both by Nancy White, who travelled from New York to Madrid to witness the event [28, p. 6], and by Juan Carlos Victorica, editor of the new publication and managing director of the Patyc S.A. company.¹² *Harper's Bazaar en Español*—the name that appeared on the cover—represented the magazine's third attempt to achieve greater European impact. From a chronological perspective, *Harper's Bazaar en Español* was in line with two previous experiments: the British *Harper's Bazaar* and the German *Harper's Bazaar*, launched in 1929 and 1963,¹³ respectively. On the other hand, it preceded the first issue of *Harper's Bazaar Italia* by two years, which launched in January 1969. On that occasion, Irene Brin, long-time correspondent in Rome, signed the article "Rivelare un genio sì, un amore segreto no" [20, p. 7]. Curiously, Elizabeth Buckley, who since 1963 coordinated all the stories related to Iberian fashion in the American *Bazaar*, did not participate in the pilot issue for the Spanish edition of the magazine.

Basing my paper on the description of the copy kept by the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* (BNE), the intention of organizing the editorial team around figures linked to the Franco regime is evident. The organizational chart included Emilio Romero Gómez, director of the *Pueblo* newspaper from 1952 to 1976 [31], and Manuel Salvador Morales Rico, deputy director of the same evening paper and secretary of the *Delegación nacional de Prensa y Radio del Movimiento* until 1974, as technical advisor and director, respectively. The post of editor-in-chief was also

¹¹"Por lo visto, hubo un intento de hacer *Harper's Bazaar* en España [. . .] yo entré a trabajar allí en el año 1968 y esto ya había pasado, a lo mejor ocurrió en el 1965 o en el 1966 [. . .]". Renée López de Haro, in conversation with the author, October 17, 2017.

¹²Juan Carlos Victorica's profession is mentioned in an article in the Spanish newspaper *ABC* [29, p. 8]. Based on the little information that I have, the company Patyc S.A. seems to have been involved in activity related to advertising from its headquarters in Madrid at Avenida José Antonio (today Gran Vía), number 26 [30, p. 11].

¹³The German edition of *Harper's Bazaar* first appeared in December 1963. This information is based on the description of *Harper's Bazaar Deutsche Ausgabe*, provided by the general catalogue of the *Deutsch Nationalbibliothek*.

held by a former journalist for the Madrid daily *Pueblo*: José Antonio Plaza. The predominately male nature of the staff, unusual for the fashion publishing industry which had historically been viewed as a female sector, was reflected in the “Letter from the Director”, which emphasized:

Perhaps because those of us who make this magazine are men—although advised by a competent female team of specialists—, but precisely because we are men and because we have a virile conscience of fashion, because we love and admire women, precisely for that reason, we have been impressed by the new fashion trend 67 and we see it attractive enough to go on our first date with the women of Spain.¹⁴

To paraphrase the words of Morales Rico, the “competent female team of specialists” was made up of Alicia Otero, Ponesa de Sas and Ana de Zuñiga, authors of the fashion section, and by Ana L. De Victorica as public relations. Among the contributions to the first edition of the Spanish version of *Bazaar*, is also included an interview of Wallis Simpson by Fleur Cowles [34, pp. 16–18]. A friend of Elizabeth Buckley, Fleur Fenton Cowles was the wife of magnate Gardner Cowles, owner of *Quick* and *Look* weekly newspapers. The article-interview of the Duchess of Windsor, a reissue of the story that appeared in the American *Harper's Bazaar* in May 1966 [35, pp. 158–159, 201], followed the editorial line set by the director. Morales Rico wanted *Bazaar en Español* to be a magazine with mainly domestic content but with an aesthetic comparable to the North American journalistic style. To achieve this objective, he intended to resort to the practice of adapting articles and reports from the other international editions of the periodical. In fact, in an introductory section called “Propósito”, it was noted:

But our *Harper's Bazaar* is not an international magazine, but a Spanish one. Despite the selection of texts by her sisters from other countries, our magazine has accumulated collaborations that amply testify to national life. These pages will collect the advances of Spanish fashion, social relations at all levels, the peculiarities of the home in our country, the uses that typify the national community and the intimate, daily and endearing problems of our families. And all this testimony of the fashions and ways of life of Spain will be, in turn, informative material for the *Harper's Bazaar* of North America, England and Germany to satisfy the curiosity and sympathy of millions of readers.¹⁵

¹⁴“Tal vez porque los que realizamos esta revista somos hombres—aunque asesorados por un competente equipo femenino de especialistas—, pero precisamente porque somos hombres y porque tenemos una conciencia viril de la moda, porque amamos y admiramos a la mujer, precisamente por esto, nos hemos sentido impresionados por la nueva corriente de la moda 67 y le vemos el suficiente atractivo para acudir a nuestra primera cita con las mujeres de España” [33, p. 5].

¹⁵“Pero nuestra *Harper's Bazaar* no es una revista internacional, sino española. Sin perjuicio de la selección de textos de sus hermanas de otros países, nuestra revista ha recabado colaboraciones que atestiguan ampliamente la vida nacional. Estas páginas recogerán los adelantos de la moda española, las relaciones sociales en todos los niveles, las peculiaridades del hogar en nuestro pueblo, los usos que tipifican la comunidad nacional y los problemas íntimos, cotidianos y entrañables de nuestras familias. Y todo este testimonio de las modas y los modos de España será, a su vez, materia informativa de las *Harper's Bazaar* de Norteamérica, Inglaterra y Alemania para saciar la curiosidad y la simpatía de millones de lectores” [42, p. 4].

Together with articles on the Spanish personalities with the greatest projection abroad—this is the case of two stories on the Countess of Quintanilla [38, pp. 90–91] and the Duchess of Alba [37, pp. 24–27], an interview with the designer Elio Berhanyer [36, pp. 19–21] and a report by the bullfighter Luis Miguel Dominguín [39, pp. 92–94]—the first issue of the Spanish edition of *Bazaar* addressed controversial topics within the national public debate. The subject of the contraceptive pill, whose sale was prohibited in Spain until 1963, was treated from both a scientific perspective, through Dr. Octavio Aparicio [32, pp. 32–33], and religious one, with *padre* Arias [41, pp. 34–35]. To a certain extent, Arias's conservative stance represented a common component in the general discourse of Spanish publications in the early 1960s. *Telva*, the quintessential women's magazine of the domestic market, debuted in October 1963 under the direction of Pilar Salcedo. Despite her feminist zeal, its first years of activity were marked by articles with a very traditional tone, such as "Psicología: los que no nacen" [43, pp. 24–25], a text against birth control through contraceptive measures. It is not surprising, therefore, that *Bazaar en Español* adopted a similar approach and reproduced certain structures of the magazine that Salcedo directed. "Juvenil" [40, pp. 96–97], a section aimed at a younger audience, seems to be directly inspired by the model of "Gente Joven", a *Telva* section coordinated by Covadonga O'Shea in which avant-garde themes and trends appear.¹⁶

In contrast to the other editions of *Harper's Bazaar*, whose audience was made up especially of women, the Spanish version had the peculiarity of having families as its target audience. "*Harper's Bazaar* is a Spanish magazine of fashion, news, instructive readings and amenities, which aspires to deserve the attention and preference of families"¹⁷ was the initial sentence of its first issue. Although statements like this suggest an orientation towards heterogeneous editorial content—it is worth recalling that, during Carmel Snow's tenure, *Harper's Bazaar* began publishing fiction: a material traditionally associated with a heterogeneous audience [10]—the ultimate result was placing the magazine in the category of fashion media. In fact, haute couture was the most widespread topic occupying more than twenty pages, distributed between fashion editorials and advertising. With a level of detail unusual even for the American *Bazaar*, the captions for the photoshoots included the credits of designer, models, hair and makeup. The effort to give the magazine a patina of modernity, unprecedented in the Spanish journalistic scene, is confirmed with the use of more dynamic photography, the choice to print almost all stories in colour and the selection of models with elongated figures, exotic features and English sounding names, like Kit Talbot, Susan, Emi o Sharon Lobo.

¹⁶As an example, the section "Gente Joven" in the second August 1965 issue was dedicated to the innovative *Teatro Estudio Madrid* [44, pp. 48–49].

¹⁷"*Harper's Bazaar* es una revista española de modas, noticias, lecturas instructivas y amenidades, que aspira a merecer la atención y la preferencia de las familias" [42, p. 4].

4 Conclusions

This study, still at an early stage, is proposed as a first contribution to aim to establish a Spanish edition of *Harper's Bazaar* in the 1960s, applying a diachronic perspective and a comparative approach with the contexts of Germany, France and Italy. Far from being an exhaustive analysis of the causes that frustrated this attempt, this research gives a first description of both the purpose pursued by the journal and the actors that participated in this project.

However, with the data at our disposal, no satisfactory consideration can be made as to why *Harper's Bazaar en Español* published a pilot number and it was not followed up. The revision of the documental fonds of the *Archivo General de la Administración*, related to the *Dirección General de Prensa* of the *Ministerio de Información y Turismo*, has not provided a more specific bibliographic reference or any evidence that explains why the magazine ceased after launching its first issue. The question of what factors determined that the publication of a Spanish version of *Bazaar* was not continued, as well as other questions about the magazine's financing system, leaves open a line of future research.

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Part III
Communicating Sustainability

Adolfo Domínguez: The Role of Sustainability on the Social Media Engagement in 2020



Elisa Regadera , Paula Gárgoles , and Lucía Pérez 

Abstract The purpose of this study was to explore if sustainability is a driver for consumer engagement on social media in the case of the Spanish brand Adolfo Domínguez. A mixed methods approach was used in this study. Quantitative analysis was used to analyze and measure the engagement during two communication campaigns about sustainability in 2020. The Fanpage Karma, a social-media monitoring tool, was used to collect the data. Data were analyzed for quantity of Likes, Shares, and Comments (engagement) on Facebook and Instagram. Additionally, a qualitative methodology, deep interview, was used for better understanding the communication strategy in these campaigns. The engagement is mostly higher on the post about sustainability on the social media of the Adolfo Dominguez brand and also has generated a positive impact on the reputation of the brand. This study compares Adolfo Domínguez's engagement on social media between the post about sustainability and not in the same period of time.

Keywords Sustainability · Social media · Fashion brand · Customer engagement

1 Introduction

The crisis caused by the global spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus has shaken the foundations on which we were built, confirming some suspicions about the unsustainability of our lifestyle. We are invited to rethink from the business

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perspective of fashion, how we got here, and how to move forward in the future. To contribute in a positive way, we look to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), as a benchmark of something that affects us all and on which we have committed to work, in order to contribute to improving the living conditions of the 8000 million inhabitants that populate the earth [1]. This is the context in which this research is framed, a context in which the purpose is on the rise, because, in addition to the economic result, they assume social and environmental goals and commitments [2].

In order to explore sustainability as a driver for consumer engagement, a study has been carried out of the Spanish brand Adolfo Domínguez (AD) and its commitment to sustainable fashion, specifically, the communication strategy: its target audience, messages, and the impact it has had on brand reputation and sales.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Adolfo Dominguez Brand*

It is necessary to understand the DNA of the company, and this is only possible from a historical perspective. Adriana Domínguez [3], current executive president of the firm, affirms: “it is necessary to know the spiritual character of my father and how he has managed to transmit it.” Adriana classifies the management model as humanist “because we understand the human being very well, who we are and how we are changing. The great success of Adolfo Domínguez,” she explains, “it has not been the creation of a dress style, but rather what he has done is to dress a feeling, the feeling of the Spanish transition, taking it towards modernity, relaxing clothes, making them more comfortable.”

Thus, we only understand the “purpose” of the brand if we look at the creator: Adolfo Domínguez Fernández was born in his parents’ workshop, in Puebla de Trives, a town in the Ourense province, on May 14, 1950 [4]. He began his career in the fashion sector after studying Philosophy and Literature, specializing in art, in Santiago de Compostela. In 1968 he moved to France, where he studied Art and Film at the University of Vincennes (Paris). After staying in France and another 2 years in England, where he was fascinated by the country’s industrialization, he returned to Spain, determined to transform the family business [5]. His beginnings in the world of fashion date back to 1975, the date on which he began to design his own men’s fashion garments [6]. In 1980, the company paraded, for the first time in Cibeles, with a men’s collection. In 1984 the Adolfo Domínguez woman line was born with the aesthetic premises of the men’s collection, already recognized nationally. It soon reached the brand’s own popularity.

The international jump takes place in Paris, where the firm holds a historic parade in the Wagram Room. In 1990 he launched the perfume “Adolfo Domínguez,” becoming the first Spanish designer to work on this line of products. Seven years later the company went public, becoming the first listed fashion brand in Spain.

In 2017, Adriana Domínguez was appointed General Director of the company, after her election to the Board of Directors. With this appointment, a new era begins in the company that is reflected in the improvement of the results and in the renewal of the image. The improvement in results is consolidated and the Board of Directors promotes Adriana Domínguez to the position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and Antonio Puente is appointed General Director of the group in 2019. Tiziana Domínguez led the creative direction of the collections' design, thus consolidating the generational change of the signature fashion firm [5]. In the last 4 years (2016–2020) and coinciding with the new era of the company, comparable sales grew by 30%. The impact of the specific campaigns cannot be quantified, but they are part of the global transformation that has guided the growth of the company until the arrival of the coronavirus crisis [7].

2.2 *Adolfo Dominguez Communication Strategy*

Within the historical context of the brand, and since the object of our study is communication, we want to highlight the relevant place that the campaigns carried out will have throughout the entire trajectory. To begin with, In the first place, “the wrinkle is beautiful,” which according to the Company profile [5] became the most popular slogan in Spanish fashion, symbolizes the taste for nature, inherent in the designer and the brand. The designer himself talks about how he was born: “True, the most secret history of each human being is written on each face. I wanted my clothes to be like second skin” [8].

It is in 2004 when the company publishes its Corporate Social Responsibility Policy, consolidating one of the values with which the brand was born. Four years later, they published the Ecological Manifesto on the principles of the trademark relating to this matter. We highlight the launch of the UNICA perfume, in 2017, with a communication campaign faithful to the firm's values of naturalness: “I'm not perfect, I'm unique.”

Subsequently, “This is not a selfie” received the Silver AMPE, an award given annually by the Association of Advertising Media of Spain to recognize the best ideas, work, and campaigns carried out by the advertising industry in the Spanish media. And the latest bets have been “Limited edition,” a collection produced 100% in Ourense, without gender, timeless, and with a vocation to endure. The same year, 2019, the campaign “Be older” received a gold award in the gold awards for creativity: Adolfo Domínguez received the National Design Award. A year later, the “Old Cloth” campaign received, among others, a gold in ideas in the CdeC and a Great Eye in PR. This campaign is based on the defense of the wisdom that old age brings in a world in which “only the latest, the new, what has just come out matters.” They invite society to think like old men and women. The manifesto of this campaign is a plea to wisdom: “Old people know things. The old have seen. And they know that not everything new is necessarily better. That there is something absurd in buying something and not wearing it. That you don't have to buy more, but

choose better. If something is perfect, you should repeat. That the sustainable thing is to have a skirt that lasts ten years. That it is better to know about style than about fashion” [5].

That year the campaign “Repeat more. You need less” was launched; it is considered a call for common sense when it comes to consuming. Under this motto, Adolfo Domínguez deepens his speech claiming that true sustainability is to surround oneself with what is durable. In the middle of the COVID-19 era, with society stopped and consumption contained, the campaign recalls that the true style is in oneself, choosing timeless and well-made garments that resist the passage of time and can be combined with each other. A call to common sense from a minimalist spirit that raises the repetition of garments as a pattern of behavior that is kind to the planet. The campaign raised the repetition of garments combining Adolfo Domínguez garments with other brands such as Nike, H&M, and Prada. A plea for the durability and timelessness of well-billed clothing.

After the arrival of the CEO, Adriana Domínguez, communication has become one of the strategic pillars of the firm. As a result of her strategic vision of the brand, there was a shift in the focus and dissemination of communication actions. In addition to producing different editorial images for online sales, a communication campaign is launched every 6 months focused on transmitting brand values.

Since 2018 the campaigns have been a call for reflection and social debate. The latter have focused on promoting awareness about the consumption model that we choose in a society in which “use and throw away” prevails [5]. Currently the mission of carrying out the company’s strategic plan, in the hands of Adriana Domínguez, puts her strategic vision on returning to being what they are.

This research frames communication within the humanistic management model. Paradoxically, with the incorporation of technology into the world of organizations, there has been a change in its “modus operandi,” incorporating management models, increasingly focused on the person [9]. Following Pérez López [10], the management model will be defined by the conception that the organization’s management has of conceiving the person, which gives us different business models. Our research, part of a more complete vision of the human being and in addition to efficiency and attractiveness, also seeks the unity or identification of collaborators and stakeholders with the company and its mission. In addition, it considers society’s demand for companies that demand a change in their mercantile and short-term model for another where, in addition to growing and earning money, the contribution to a better world with sustainable growth must prevail [11], thus, generating a sense of belonging, which is revolutionary in the twenty-first century.

2.3 Social Media Communication

Social media has grown exponentially in the last 10 years [12]. Due to the global growing popularity of social media, businesses are exploring different perspectives of promoting their products and services in order to capitalize on the relevance of

social media. While in traditional print media the important measurement was number of views, the goal of social media is to encourage active engagement to get the audience to “talk back” [13]. This conversation with the users is through likes, hearts, shares, and comments [12].

The two most important social media for fashion brands are Instagram and Facebook. Instagram is mostly visual, and that is the reason why brands focus on the creativity behind the image, “creating a place for fans to get inspired and create community, and at the same time, allows consumers to interact with one another” [12]. Instagram allows fashion brands to connect with their potential customers and monetize on that connection through awareness, loyalty, and engagement. Facebook has become an important marketing channel due to brand pages as they establish direct communication with their customers and potential customers. Moreover, Facebook fan pages allow a brand to create an online community of brand users through the social networking site. The people who “like” the page become fans [14].

In that sense, evaluation of social media is key to know how these communication tools are used. In our understanding, their evaluation should be twofold: on the one hand, knowing the content or what is communicated through the analyzed social media, and on the other, observing whether they use all the potentialities of social media as public relations tools to create dialogue with the public or simply as one-way channels of information [15].

2.4 Sustainable Social Media Engagement

Social media platforms use diverse indicators of Customer Engagement behaviors [16, 17], for example, Facebook uses “likes,” whereas IG uses “hearts” to engage people. The benefits of customer engagement are desirable outcomes such as brand visibility among consumers [18]. Nowadays, in the fashion industry brands with a focus on sustainability have gained consideration among consumers. They have incentivized more brands to place emphasis on sustainable efforts [19, 20]. For example, four of the five fashion brands which have growth during coronavirus-lockdown were sustainable. These sustainable brands are Patagonia, Veja, Pangaia, and Anine Bing [21].

McKinsey (2020) [22] have measured the consumer sentiment on sustainability in fashion through a survey, and some of the results are as follows: 57% have made significant changes to their lifestyles to reduce their environmental impact, 67% consider the use of sustainable materials to be an important purchasing factor, and 63 % consider a brand’s promotion of sustainability as a relevant purchasing element.

While fashion brands communicate both fashion and sustainability messages, it is yet unknown which category of messaging receives a stronger response from consumers [20]. The purpose of this study was to explore if the sustainability message is a driver of consumer engagement with fashion brands via social media

(Facebook and Instagram). Engagement in this study was operationalized through quantitative terms with the Fanpage Karma tool.

The current situation shows that consumers are more sustainably aware and there is an increased awareness of fashion responsible consumption. At the same time, many of the fashion brands that are developing sustainability initiatives are using social media to communicate their campaigns linked to sustainability.

Sustainable messaging to consumers has been researched in academia [23–25]. Dovleac (2015) [23] studied the appropriateness of social media as a tool for spreading information about sustainability issues and found it to be an appropriate and impactful tool.

Testa et al. (2021) [20] declare that while research exploring sustainability-engagement has been conducted in academia, best practices for communicating brands sustainable values and actions through social media have yet to be formally researched. Their study explores consumer engagement with sustainability messaging via Instagram posts for sustainable fashion brands, sustainably aware fashion brands, and traditional fashion brands. The findings show that the responses to sustainability-themed posts were different depending on the perspective. General Sustainability posts engaged followers with traditional fashion brands but not through sustainable fashion brands and sustainably aware fashion brands. Environmental sustainability was the most engaging sustainability topic for sustainable fashion brands, while social sustainability was the most engaging sustainability topic for sustainably aware fashion [20].

3 Methodology

A mixed methods approach was used in this study. Quantitative analysis was used to analyze and measure the engagement during two communication campaigns about sustainability in 2020. The Fanpage Karma, a social-media monitoring tool was used to collect the data. Data were analyzed for quantity of Likes, Shares, and Comments (engagement) on Facebook and Instagram. Additionally, a qualitative methodology, in depth interviews, was used for better understanding the communication strategy in these campaigns.

As quantitative content analysis research, Fanpage Karma [26] was used as a monitoring tool to measure likes, comments, shares, and interaction/engagement achieved levels. Fanpage Karma converts raw Facebook and Instagram analytics into a report that highlights essential social media utilization and engagement metrics for social media [27]. The research on the Facebook account is @adolfodominguezofficial and on Instagram: @adolfodominguezofficial. The number of likes, comments, and shares messages and engagement have been measured through the Fanpage Karma tool that elaborates the engagement based on the number of followers it had at that time.

The first campaign was #Oldcloth, with a duration from October 29, 2020, to February 21, 2020. There are a total of 17 posts on Facebook: 9 about the campaign

and another 8 that do not talk about the campaign during the same period. On Instagram there are 26 publications, 10 of which are from the campaign and 16 do not coincide with the campaign. The second campaign #Repeatmore was from September 27, 2020, to October 12, 2020. There are a total of 17 publications on Facebook; 12 of them refer to the sustainability campaign and 5 are not from the campaign. On Instagram there are 15 posts, 11 of which followed the campaign and the 4 do not coincide with the campaign.

The qualitative methodologies such as in-depth interviews are essential to developing theory in marketing and authors such as Gummesson (2002), Alam (2005), Daymon and Holloway (2010) [28–30] have emphasized the need for more studies based on qualitative research methodologies in marketing. “In-depth interviewing is a time-consuming, expensive data-collection technique relative to some other types of data collection such as mail or telephone survey” [31, p. 151]. For the purposes of this study, in-depth interviewing offered an opportunity to gather a rich database of responses to questions about the role of sustainability in social media engagement. This database, in turn, provided the depth of responses necessary to validate the quantitative methodology.

The technique of in-depth interviews was weighed by an appropriate methodological vehicle given the goal of obtaining richness in data [32]. The in-depth interviewing was based on a series of ten open-ended questions (Appendix A). In this case, the person who has been interviewed was Carlos Arjiz, Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) and Visual Merchandising Director. The interview was recorded and detailed notes. It was via Zoom and lasted more than one hour, on January 26, 2021.

4 Findings

We comment below on the results on the engagement obtained by Adolfo Domínguez in the two campaigns under study on Facebook and Instagram, making a comparison between the posts of these campaigns (1 and 2) with that of the posts that do not refer to them in the same period of time. As the number of posts can be different between both variables, we have carried out an average (likes, shares, comments, and engagement) to be able to make a more exact comparison of the results.

Results on Facebook

The engagement on Facebook related to the posts of Campaign 1 #Oldcloth (Table 1) is clearly higher than that of the posts published on other topics not related to sustainability on the same dates. In addition to the average, the difference is clearly seen in the number of likes, shares, and comments.

The results on engagement in the same social media in relation to the posts of Campaign 2 # Repeat more (Table 2) corroborate the same thing indicated about Campaign 1: the posts about this campaign have obtained a greater engagement than those that did not refer to this campaign in the same period of time. Therefore, the

Table 1 Campaign 1 #Oldcloth in Facebook (January 29th to February 22th)

| n° post | Date | n° likes | n° shares | n° comments | Engagement |
|---------------------------------|---------|----------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| Posts related to Campaign 1 | | | | | |
| 1 | 29 Jan | 132 | 31 | 4 | 0.00109805 |
| 2 | 30 Jan | 194 | 34 | 24 | 0.00160639 |
| 3 | 31 Jan | 89 | 12 | 3 | 0.00064234 |
| 4 | 31 Jan | 3950 | 235 | 136 | 0.02605223 |
| 5 | 1 Feb | 173 | 33 | 7 | 0.0013805 |
| 6 | 2 Feb | 224 | 24 | 7 | 0.00165278 |
| 7 | 3 Feb | 122 | 18 | 0 | 0.0009303 |
| 8 | 3 Feb | 105 | 16 | 1 | 0.0007699 |
| 9 | 10 Feb | 107 | 18 | 0 | 0.0007525 |
| | Total | 5096 | 421 | 182 | 0.03488499 |
| | Average | 566 | 46 | 20 | 0.00387611 |
| Posts not related to campaign 1 | | | | | |
| 1 | 31 Jan | 24 | 1 | 1 | 0.00014988 |
| 2 | 4 Feb | 171 | 21 | 6 | 0.00118124 |
| 3 | 5 Feb | 75 | 14 | 1 | 0.00057086 |
| 4 | 6 Feb | 164 | 19 | 6 | 0.0012021 |
| 5 | 8 Feb | 160 | 20 | 2 | 0.00109465 |
| 6 | 9 Feb | 98 | 13 | 1 | 0.00067798 |
| 7 | 11 Feb | 75 | 14 | 1 | 0.00054421 |
| 8 | 12 Feb | 156 | 19 | 7 | 0.00114155 |
| | Total | 923 | 121 | 25 | 0.00656246 |
| | Average | 115 | 15 | 3 | 0.00082031 |

Source: authors with Fanpage Karma

results of both campaigns on Facebook confirm our hypothesis: the engagement obtained by the brand is higher in the posts of the campaigns focused on sustainability than the rest of the posts not related to these campaigns during the same dates.

Results on Instagram

Regarding the results of engagement on Instagram on the posts of Campaign 1 (Table 3), we can affirm that the engagement is also higher compared to posts that do not belong to the sustainable campaign on the same dates. On the other hand, the results found on the posts of Campaign 2 (Table 4) show a higher engagement in those that do not refer to Campaign 2 (something that is especially perceived in the number of likes).

Therefore, in this case our hypothesis is only partially validated, since the posts of Campaign 2 #Repeatmore have not obtained a higher engagement than the rest of the posts. However, a possible reason that the engagement in this campaign is not validated on Instagram may be due to the publication format. According to Testa et al. (2021) [20], it is proven that the format with the most engagement is the single-photo and, on the other hand, the video in the Instagram feed gets less. In this case, 80% of the publications of Campaign 2 have been in video format, and those that do

Table 2 Campaign 2 #Repeatmore in Facebook (September 27th to October 12th)

| n° post | Date | n° likes | n° shares | n° comments | Engagement |
|---------------------------------|---------|----------|-----------|-------------|------------|
| Posts related to campaign 2 | | | | | |
| 1 | 27 Sep | 347 | 83 | 8 | 0.00254295 |
| 2 | 28 Sep | 625 | 91 | 23 | 0.00428936 |
| 3 | 29 Sep | 159 | 25 | 1 | 0.00112647 |
| 4 | 30 Sep | 125 | 19 | 0 | 0.00086802 |
| 5 | 1 Oct | 105 | 13 | 5 | 0.00075945 |
| 6 | 2 Oct | 146 | 25 | 2 | 0.00098664 |
| 7 | 3 Oct | 143 | 23 | 0 | 0.00093479 |
| 8 | 3 Oct | 437 | 127 | 16 | 0.00340347 |
| 9 | 4 Oct | 114 | 15 | 1 | 0.00071774 |
| 10 | 5 Oct | 90 | 11 | 1 | 0.00058341 |
| 11 | 11 Oct | 91 | 13 | 0 | 0.00056751 |
| 12 | 12 Oct | 91 | 7 | 0 | 0.00052102 |
| | Total | 2473 | 452 | 57 | 0.01730084 |
| | Average | 206 | 37 | 4.75 | 0.00144173 |
| Posts not related to campaign 2 | | | | | |
| 1 | 06 Oct | 135 | 30 | 3 | 0.00097063 |
| 2 | 07 Oct | 130 | 12 | 1 | 0.00082081 |
| 3 | 08 Oct | 89 | 10 | 4 | 0.00056263 |
| 4 | 09 Oct | 137 | 16 | 1 | 0.00083607 |
| 5 | 10 Oct | 117 | 9 | 1 | 0.00072242 |
| | Total | 608 | 77 | 10 | 0.00391257 |
| | Average | 121 | 15 | 2 | 0.00078251 |

Source: authors with Fanpage Karma

not speak of sustainability on the same dates are unique photos, which agrees with the explanation of these authors.

Although the number of likes is fewer in the Sustainability campaign #Repeatmore, the average of comments is double. This perspective shows a higher engagement that supports our hypothesis.

On the other hand, the study by Testa (2021) [20] indicates that videos tend to have fewer comments but more likes. In our research, the publications of the posts that did not talk about sustainability obtained more likes, although less comments. Hence, in this sense, the authors' conclusions are not validated in our research.

5 Discussion

We have been able to contrast the results obtained with the information derived from the interview with the Chief Compliance Officer (CCO) and Visual Merchandising Director, Carlos Arjiz, and with the document "Adolfo Domínguez Company Profile

Table 3 Campaign 1 #Oldcloth in Instagram (January 29th to February 22th)

| n° post | Date | n° likes | n° comments | Engagement |
|---------------------------------|---------|----------|-------------|------------|
| Posts related to campaign 1 | | | | |
| 1 | 29 Jan | 647 | 15 | 0.00313805 |
| 2 | 30 Jan | 892 | 18 | 0.00431026 |
| 3 | 31 Jan | 3964 | 139 | 0.01941798 |
| 4 | 1 Feb | 1578 | 32 | 0.00761125 |
| 5 | 2 Feb | 1430 | 36 | 0.00692225 |
| 6 | 3 Feb | 1082 | 19 | 0.00519389 |
| 7 | 10 Feb | 1160 | 10 | 0.00549298 |
| 8 | 12 Feb | 370 | 18 | 0.00181965 |
| 9 | 15 Feb | 834 | 12 | 0.0039622 |
| 10 | 17 Feb | 679 | 7 | 0.00320961 |
| 11 | 18 Feb | 491 | 1 | 0.0023007 |
| 12 | 19 Feb | 1345 | 27 | 0.00641334 |
| 13 | 21 Feb | 344 | 7 | 0.00163929 |
| | Total | 14,816 | 341 | 0.07143145 |
| | Average | 1139.7 | 26.23076923 | 0.00549473 |
| Posts not related to campaign 1 | | | | |
| 1 | 4 Feb | 2372 | 16 | 0.01125682 |
| 2 | 5 Feb | 617 | 2 | 0.00291571 |
| 3 | 6 Feb | 848 | 1 | 0.00399646 |
| 4 | 7 Feb | 282 | 10 | 0.00137372 |
| 5 | 8 Feb | 945 | 5 | 0.00446691 |
| 6 | 9 Feb | 587 | 0 | 0.00275825 |
| 7 | 11 Feb | 812 | 3 | 0.00382408 |
| 8 | 12 Feb | 1217 | 10 | 0.0057544 |
| 9 | 13 Feb | 461 | 2 | 0.00217033 |
| 10 | 14 Feb | 592 | 5 | 0.00279717 |
| 11 | 16 Feb | 715 | 1 | 0.00335143 |
| 12 | 20 Feb | 1218 | 12 | 0.00574672 |
| | Total | 1666 | 67 | 0.05041202 |
| | Average | 888.83 | 5.583333333 | 0.004201 |

Source: authors with Fanpage Karma

2021” [5]. As reflected in this report, “AD intends to launch a communication campaign focused on transmitting brand values every six months. Since 2018 the campaigns have been a call for reflection and social debate. The latter have focused on promoting awareness about the consumption model that we choose in a society in which ‘use and throw away’ prevails”. In our work we have analyzed the engagement of the two sustainability campaigns launched in 2020.

The first campaign #Oldcloth is, according to the aforementioned document, “a plea for what was well done. Declining the root message of ‘Be older’, the focus is placed on the essential quality of the clothing by showcasing iconic Adolfo Domínguez garments that have stood the test of time and remain in good condition.

Table 4 Campaign #Repeatmore in Instagram (September 27th to October 12th)

| n° post | Date | n° likes | n° comments | Engagement |
|---------------------------------|---------|----------|-------------|------------|
| Posts related to Campaign 2 | | | | |
| 1 V | 27 Sep | 444 | 6 | 0.00198853 |
| 2 V | 28 Sep | 1027 | 43 | 0.00472594 |
| 3 V | 30 Sep | 540 | 10 | 0.00242683 |
| 4 V | 02 Oct | 462 | 13 | 0.00209384 |
| 5 V | 3 Oct | 633 | 20 | 0.00287706 |
| 6 V | 3 Oct | 1202 | 22 | 0.00539283 |
| 7 V | 4 Oct | 438 | 6 | 0.00195526 |
| 8 V | 5 Oct | 369 | 14 | 0.0016858 |
| 9 | 11 Oct | 749 | 6 | 0.00331341 |
| 10 | 12 Oct | 698 | 7 | 0.00309246 |
| | Total | 6562 | 147 | 0.02955195 |
| | Average | 656.2 | 14.7 | 0.0029552 |
| Posts not related to campaign 2 | | | | |
| 1 | 6 Oct | 1442 | 17 | 0.00641875 |
| 2 | 7 Oct | 1094 | 10 | 0.00485456 |
| 3 | 8 Oct | 626 | 2 | 0.00276011 |
| 4 | 9 Oct | 842 | 5 | 0.0037208 |
| 5 | 10 Oct | 881 | 5 | 0.00389023 |
| | Total | 4885 | 39 | 0.02164445 |
| | Average | 977 | 7.8 | 0.00432889 |

V: Video format
 Source: authors with Fanpage Karma

A manifesto that recalls the DNA of the brand through garments that continue to last and serve 10, 20 and 30 years later through private donors who donate them for the campaign. Thus timeless design and good materials are claimed as maxims against fast fashion. A call to attention to the consumption of clothing and its quality, reminding the consumer that the good endures.”

Under the motto “Repeat more. You need less,” AD explains in the aforementioned report that the second Campaign, “deepens its speech claiming that true sustainability is to surround oneself with what is durable. In the middle of the COVID-19 era, with society stopped and consumption contained, the campaign recalls that the true style is in oneself, choosing timeless and well-made garments that withstand the passage of time and can be combined with each other. A call to common sense from a minimalist spirit that raises the repetition of garments as a pattern of behavior that is kind to the planet. The campaign proposed the repetition of garments combining Adolfo Domínguez garments with other brands such as Nike, Zara or Prada” [5].

This explanation of the purpose and content of the campaigns is fully consistent with the purpose of the brand, expressed in the “Mission, Vision and Values” contained in the same cited document. The superior engagement found in the two campaigns analyzed (on Facebook and Instagram) compared to other different posts

on the same dates is reinforced with the data provided by Arjiz in the interview on the 30% increase in web traffic in 2020.

Arjiz explains that the campaigns launched for these purposes by AD since 2018 were conceived as the beginning of a conversation with consumers, as the brand has proposed in recent years a medium-long-term strategy to reconnect its customers with its purpose. In fact, before the campaigns, the youngest AD's target was between 34 and 44 years old, and contrary to what might be expected, the "Be older" campaign (2018) connected with a younger audience from 18 years old, who have left incorporating the brand and will already be present in the 2019 and 2020 campaigns, according to Arjiz.

On the other hand, in June 2020 AD carried out a focus group to analyze the perception of the brand by its consumers, and they discovered that it has changed radically compared to 2 years ago; from being perceived by them as a rather unremarkable brand, now the brand is perceived as cool, and the customers feel more identified with the brand's purpose, says its Chief Compliance Officer. Therefore, it seems to us that the data obtained for this paper on engagement also supports the brand research about the brand reputation.

All the campaigns related to the sustainable values of the brand have been carried out by CHINA, a communication agency, which has worked closely with AD and made its proposals after long conversations about the values that it wanted to transmit. The "Repeat more" campaign—Arjiz explains—was launched only online, taking risks and with reluctance on the part of legal services, when naming many other brands. But the reality is that hardly any problems have arisen, because "it is undeniable that the consumer has a closet full of different brands and what we were saying is that we can live with any of them." They have been organic campaigns, with hardly any advertising, reminiscent of the 1950s, according to Arjiz: a photo and a copy; we were not looking for a short-term marketing strategy, but rather an improvement in the brand's reputation.

According to Arjiz, the communication that AD intends to carry out through its channels and campaigns wants to avoid greenwashing, explaining with transparency only what is 100% true. For example, if the production of the garments is not fully organic yet, they will not say that they are 100% sustainable. In this sense, the brand will publish an ambitious plan on AD's commitment to sustainable production and the circular economy, says Arjiz.

As a limitation of the work, we find that it is limited to the analysis of two communication campaigns of a certain brand (case study) during one year (2020). However, we think that the results obtained make it a clear reference on how the coherence between the company's purpose and the communicative transparency of its campaigns has a positive impact on brand perception. AD has been able to generate a conversation with consumers about sustainability through social media, and this conversation has had a positive impact on greater adherence to its brand values.

We can conclude by pointing out that the engagement found in AD campaigns related to sustainability on Facebook and Instagram during 2020 has generated a positive impact on the reputation of the brand and a conversation between the brand

and the consumers. It is evident that these campaigns have been clearly linked to the AD purpose which, according to Arjiz, is summarized in an expression of its founder, Adolfo Domínguez: “We are not the Earth’s owners, but its children and we want to leave a better world. This is the objective of our communication campaigns” [5].

Appendix 1

Questions for Carlos Arjiz, CCOA and VM Director of Adolfo Dominguez

The main objective of this deep interview is to know the main features of AD’s commitment to sustainability in its two communication campaigns: its target audience, the messages, and the impact they have had on the reputation of the brand and in sales.

1. How is sustainability understood in AD at those times? Is it possible to pursue it also in times of pandemic?
2. Is AD’s humanistic management model reflected in your communication in any way?
3. Could it be said that AD has always been sustainable? Is the commitment to sustainability more present in the company’s strategy today than it was years ago, or is it that it now communicates better?
4. While fast fashion brands are frequently focusing their campaigns on end-of-life recycling of clothing or the launch of very specific collections with organic or recycled materials, AD’s latest campaigns around sustainability make a call to a more responsible and conscious consumption, appealing to the durability of the garments and the repetition.
 - What are the goals of the latest campaigns?
 - Have they all been designed by CHINA Advertising Agency?
 - Were they intended to be released separately, progressively, and concatenated?
5. Already in 2018 in the “Be older” campaign, older people appeared together with a Manifesto demanding the wisdom of old age. From which it is deduced that the brand is also wanting to address a wide audience of ages. What characteristics does the current AD consumer target have? Do you think that older people also connect with these values of sustainability?
6. In February 2020, AD launched the #OldCloth campaign—also accompanied by a contest—where issues such as the length of the seasons are questioned, whether repeating is in bad taste or whether the new is the best. Then, with the “Repeatmore” campaign (September 2020), the brand has launched the message

“Repeat more. You need less. Be older” plus a Manifesto. We wonder how these campaigns are impacting public opinion and your clients:

- Have you been able to measure its impact in any way?
 - Was your objective really to sell more or to impact brand reputation by associating the brand with these values?
 - Has there been an increase in turnover after the campaigns?
7. #Repeatmore is the last campaign of 2020. Something new is done: ask the consumer to repeat the AD garments with other brands from luxury like Chanel, Balenciaga, or Prada to COS to ZARA or H&M and sportswear brands like Nike or Adidas. This is something that no one in fashion has ever done before.
- Was there any kind of internal resistance to approve this campaign?
 - Could you have measured the results?
8. We would like to know in a summarized way:
- The main objectives of AD around transparency, traceability, and the contribution to the circular economy.
 - What production percentages do the brand currently have in other countries and if you plan to bring the production of your garments closer to Spain.
9. According to author Dana Thomas in her latest book *Fashionopolis*, the future and hope for fashion and sustainability lie in technology. Do you agree?
10. One of the biggest trends in brand reputation is the purpose-driven businesses. What is the purpose of Adolfo Domínguez? What would be the brand’s legacy aspire to leave in the fashion industry?

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Label Conscious: Communicating Verifiable Sustainable Impact by Labelling Garments with Smart Technology



Hilde Heim 

Abstract The circular economy has led to consumers demanding access to trustworthy information about a garment's provenance as well as more detailed transparency on the second hand or recycled products they buy. Emerging digital technologies such as smart tags coupled with blockchain technology are offering solutions which promise to resolve some of the issues surrounding fibre origin, quality and ethical practice. However, although smart tags are accessible through open access, blockchain technology which verifies the claims on the tags, is less accessible, poorly understood and currently not universally available. Through the textual analysis of garment labels and interviews with designers, this study adds to the literature on communicating sustainable practice to consumers through digital garment labelling (smart tags) and contends that consumers as well as technology developers need simplified and standardised information on garment labels not only regarding content and care but ecological impact, to inform conscious sustainable practice and contribute to systems change.

Keywords Smart tags · Communicating sustainability information · Blockchain technology

1 Introduction

In a 2019 tweet, the innovations hub Fashion for Good asked:

Where do the fibers in our garments come from, how big is the climate imprint and what do the working conditions look like in the factories where they are sewn? [1]

The tweet led to the [TrusTrace](#) website, a Swedish start up relying on blockchain technology, to trace garment production. While this seems a positive step,

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consumers currently have very little reliable information about the contents of the textile products they purchase. Consumers are unaware if the garments they purchase have been complicit in detrimental processes—whether social or environmental. The fashion industry is guilty of various negligent practices including the application of toxic dyes and solvents, excessive water use, harmful pesticides and other chemicals, soil degradation, human labour exploitation, carbon emissions and vast unwarranted waste [2, 3]. Measures can be taken to reduce these harmful effects. One step is to modify consumer behaviour—to reject the purchase of garments that are produced with questionable processes. Studies show labelling information can be pivotal in purchasing decisions [4, 5]. However, according to Cass [6], consumers require impetus as well as information to change their behaviour. This can come from many channels including media, education and regulation as well as through simple communications such as labels on garments. If buying behaviour reveals a preference for environmentally friendly garments, according to scholars Niinimäki [7], Joshi and Rahman [8] and Gwozdz et al. [9], brands will adjust their practices, communicate that improvement and meet consumer demand. Therefore, the humble clothing tag could facilitate the drive for change. Unfortunately, current textile product labelling regulations do not require information on environmental impact even though recent technological advancements offer improved communication formats. This information would not only inform but lead to positive social, economic and environmental effects and transition stakeholders in the market towards ‘responsible production and consumption’ (UN’s Sustainable Development Goal 12).

This study explores one element affecting purchasing behaviour, that is, the information on garment labels. Through the textual analysis and interviews with sustainable fashion brands, it finds that consumers are demanding more accurate and verified information regarding the journey of a product through the supply chain. The study finds that despite regulatory measures, label formatting is inconsistent, difficult to read, confusing, incomplete and conceivably inaccurate. If, as Fletcher and Grose [10] and Gwilt [11] suggest, one way to arrest the damage perpetrated by the fashion system is to achieve a shift in consumer behaviour, a commitment to better communication systems needs to take place. The argument in this study is that consumers require simplified yet fulsome and standardised information on garment labels not only regarding content and care but ecological impact, to inform conscious purchase and use to drive systems change. This study contributes to the growing knowledge on the need for data organisation across the textile clothing and footwear (TCF) industry and its verifiable communication to all stakeholders along the supply chain—particularly the consumer. The implications are that new tracking and tracing technologies can facilitate the improved flow of information. It argues that if the consumer is sufficiently invested in the information, the pull from customers will compel the regulation and organisation of data by fashion producers along the supply chain and thereby leverage systems change [12].

The structure of this paper begins with the literature and contextual review surrounding garment labelling practice including initiatives and trends. This is followed by the research design which outlines the textual enquiry methodology.

Current garment labelling systems are then analysed, and findings presented. The paper concludes with recommendations on the integration of best practice and next steps.

1.1 Garment Labelling Standards and Practice

Although the basic requirements of care instructions are present, they are generally merely guidelines for laundering and/or dry cleaning and while important, do not necessarily include the fibre content or information on country of origin or sustainability credentials. To be clear, the latter components are not at this time required by law—and vary across jurisdictions. Inducements to accurately tag garments are weak. Several stakeholders are affected by garment labelling including consumers, producers, brands, retailers, importers, wholesalers, distributors, exporters, garment care and laundering service providers, upstream suppliers, waste managers, marketing managers, industry groups, governmental organisations and civil groups. Brands will only suffer under the law if a garment is damaged through incorrect dry cleaning resulting from inaccurate care labelling. Garment labelling generally consists of a set of tags including the sew-in neck label bearing the brand's logo, the cloth sew-in garment care label—of innocuous design sewn into an inner seam of the garment—and the swing tag/s, one or a set of paper or plastic stock printed tags that are detachable from the garment and contain information on price, size and style as well as digital codes and other inventory management information such as stock keeping units (SKUs). Other options include removable stickers and matter printed directly onto the inner layers of the garment. Although most customers simply refer to price and size when purchasing, swing tags offer the opportunity for the brand to tell its story and/or communicate its sustainability credentials. Indeed, the swing tag is a central design element in the brand's presentation and packaging. When searching for sustainable credentials, customers lean to what Shaw et al. [13] refer to as 'imperfect cues', that is, representations that allow customers to perceive the brand as sustainable, for example, through the use of recycled paper stock and cotton cording. Although important and arguably a steppingstone in the facilitation of consumer behaviour change, swing tags are not the main focus of this investigation. Rather, the modest care labels hidden in the folds of the garment are at the heart of this study. This is because the sew-in label is the subject of regulation and can be standardised by law. It also retains more permanency as it is not discarded at the first wear of the garment. Sometimes the care label is cut off by the customer. Increasingly garment information is either printed onto or embedded in the very fibres of the fabric—offering a more permanent form of data retention. Studies have shown that customers do refer to the sew-in care label. In the study by Feltham and Martin [14], around 70% of respondents used care label information when purchasing apparel, and 80% referred to the information when caring for their clothing. Fortunately, there are several initiatives internationally that are exploring improved garment label options, including the International Standards Organisation (ISO). The European

union labelling laws are also in review [15]. The integration of new technologies such as radio frequency identifiers (RFIDs), quick response (QR) codes, blockchain and nanotech tracing [16] provide innovative solutions to more comprehensive garment labelling.

1.2 Communicating Sustainability Credentials

The Fashion Revolution initiative launched the successful ‘Who made my clothes’ campaign in 2016 to draw attention to the plight of garment workers [17]. This was one of the first moments intentionally drawing the customer’s attention to reading the information on the label. The Sustainable Apparel Coalition’s (SAC) pilot project Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) sees sizable member players Adidas, Nike and H&M rolling out the PEF label to indicate environmental impact of labelled products in selected European stores. While Swedish menswear firm Asket has produced an Oxford shirt which offers full traceability on the sew-in label, some brands like A.BCH, Honest By and Everlane find there is too much information to place on a label and refer the customer to abundant explanations on their websites regarding their sustainability measures. Asket customers are also able to follow the progress of each garment online. Asket believes its new system could become an industry standard and suggests consumers demand detailed transparency from the brands they buy from [18].

1.3 Certifications

Current practices in garment labelling that go beyond regulation labelling are generally motivated by marketing. The sustainability backstories are well received by customers, and this practice is growing in popularity according to Ciasullo et al. [19] and Baker [20]. However, as the additional information added to labels is self-regulated, few authoritative bodies audit the validity of the claims. At times sustainability story telling on labels has been deemed misleading, inaccurate or false [21] leading to allegations of ‘greenwashing’ and discrediting the idea of self-directed labelling information [22, 23]. In turn this has led to the current rise of certification organisations. These organisations act as impartial third parties that lend brands ‘authenticity’. For example, the SAC has developed the Higg Index, a standardised supply chain measurement suite of tools for industry participants. Reports from firms to the index are voluntary and self-generated. The index provides points through a rating system that measures their materials, processes and environmental impact, but there is no independent verification of the inputs [24]. The truth surrounding the production of textiles, garment manufacture and distribution is very complex. According to Greer et al. [25] ‘There needs to be failing grades’ to give accreditation schemes integrity. The ‘Green-Button’ initiative launched in Germany in 2019 is

another attempt to standardise reporting on sustainable practice. Critics say it does not go far enough, duplicates other schemes and is not global [26].

As allegations of greenwashing threaten to ruin reputations, brands are motivated to seek out authoritative organisations that can provide trustworthy credentials. Not surprisingly, organisations that provide environmental credentials in the form of certifications are booming, with currently over 50 accessed by the ratings application Good On You [27]. Membership and/or certifications from some of these organisations can command high fees, for example, \$6000 per style per year. As there are few commonly accepted regulatory standards, the brands are prepared to pay the fees as this improves the perception of the brand in the marketplace. The certification bodies are themselves not all subject to scrutiny. Viewed critically, this system may be subject to corruption and self-interest as the certification agencies are mostly privately run, sometimes by apparel consortiums. It is difficult to assess which organisations are authoritative third parties. This adds weight to the need to engage neutral, regulatory mechanisms to ensure reliable information.

1.4 New Technology for Labelling and Tagging

Numerous forms of technology can identify fibre content as well as the fabrication of the yarn, fabric and construction of the garment as well as trace the transport and logistics [28]. Nano technology is useful in tracking, tracing and giving reliable information on the garment contents through embedding miniscule particles into the fibre which remain attached to the raw material throughout the production process and in some instances beyond incineration [16]. SigNature [29] offers molecular tagging for wool, cotton, leather and recycled polyester promising to tag, test and track the product. This information can be recovered through blockchain technology which serves to improve the communication of the supply chain by documenting information in digital immutable ledgers [30, 31]. Internet platforms like Regain [32], Buycott [33] and Goodonyou [27] provide information and ratings on the sustainability credentials of clothing as well as options and rewards for recycling and/or keeping the garment or its components in circulation longer [34, 35]. This information is accessible through smart tags with QR codes.

Turning to sustainable practice and the circular economy, transparency on the materials flowing through the system is key to improving recycling rates. Recycling technologies rely on accurate materials detection and sorting to ensure well-defined material streams (either a single material or well-defined combinations of materials including blends) [36]. This study argues that although firms like Content Thread are researching RFID threads embedded in garments that contain digitised information on composition, to be effective, product identification should begin at the origin—at the farm or plant where the fibre was produced rather than once the garment has been manufactured. Several forms are already offering origin tracing capability including technology companies Applied DNA Sciences, Oritain and FibreTrace which have

created bio-based markers that can be embedded in fibres, allowing them to be tracked and identified throughout the value chain. The companies offer similar capabilities. Origin tracing also benefits the fibre commodity exporters and producers as much of the world's high-quality natural fibres are blended with lower-quality fibres downstream—but still claim to be high quality or 'organic'. But tracking and tracing and in particular blockchain technology seems to have had a lukewarm reception in the fashion industry. There are a number of barriers to adoption. One is the high cost of development and integration of the technology; another is accessibility and appropriate user interfaces. Unfortunately, there is currently no universal or open source mechanism that can be accessed by all users. Furthermore, a universal platform would also require an agreed upon global standard of information.

Besides the sophisticated nano tech and bio tracing systems, beacon technologies offer a somewhat more accessible form of digital tracking. QR readers were first introduced around 2012 with the rise of smartphones. However, their popularity waned perhaps firstly because they required a specific app, and secondly the information on the websites that the codes led to were not particularly useful to customers. By 2017, smart phone updates provided native QR code scanners. QR Codes are now dynamic rather than static and can be used to deliver augmented reality (AR) experiences. For example, in 2020, Puma launched its LQD CELL Origin AR shoes, replete with QR codes, offering augmented reality experiences. According to Juniper Research, by 2022, one billion smartphones will access QR codes [37]. Near Frequency Codes (NFCs) do not require a camera app to read. Items can be scanned at a distance and are currently used in inventory and stock management in large department stores. Similar to reading cardless payment equipment, NFCs can offer more than just a link to a website. Similarly, geofencing technology can send relevant notifications to customers when they are in the vicinity of their stores and then present virtual in store assistants offering more personalised shopping services. The customer can also select which products and campaigns to engage with.

Platforms currently offering blockchain and smart tagging solutions include tech company FibreTrace collaborating with Melbourne jeans manufacturer Nobody Denim; tech firm Labrys (Brisbane) working with textile waste recovery firm BlockTexx to create a fibre token; TrusTrace (Sweden) adding blockchain to QR codes on garment labels for the fashion brand Residus; Provenance (London) working with designer Martine Jarlgaard; LUKSO (Berlin) creating a mobile app and the 'cultural token' LYX to buy and sell fashion; IOTA an Internet of Things tech provider teaming with luxury brand Alyx to create an alternative protocol, 'Tangle' which can run various transactions simultaneously; Loomia adds an electronic smart layer textile to clothing that can be tracked and traced delivering data about the garment's use to brands; ConsenSys is working with the Lane Crawford Joyce Group to recycle luxury goods; tech firm VeChain is collaborating with Chinese fashion brand Babyghost to track garments and verify authenticity through QR codes; Faizoid is creating a blockchain for the global fashion supply chain;

Bext360 is tracing agricultural goods and can make payments directly to farmers; Evrythng (Netherlands) is working with Ralph Lauren to ensure brand authenticity [38, 39]; Textile Genesis (Hong Kong) is working with Lenzing and H&M to track and trace fibres and have also created a token (patent pending) called Fibrecoin; Perlin (Singapore) is working with Asia Pacific Rayon (APR) to verify sustainable forestry of their woodchip used in rayon production; diamond trackers Everledger is working with Alexander McQueen; as well as the Australian Wool Initiative (AWI) to trace superfine merino wool through the supply chain. These tech companies provide bespoke and costly solutions. Nonetheless, their pilot studies are important in the development and refinement of these technologies not to mention potential accessibility and affordability in the future.

What does this mean for the sustainable brand and the conscious consumer? It is currently possible to track a raw fibre to the exact location on the farm where it was grown or picked, its quality and the health of the soil it was grown in. Tracking information is updated in real time. It is feasible that the consumer will be able to see the conditions under which the fibre was grown and processed, the carbon emitted in its transport across the globe and information on appropriate waste recovery plants to send at the end of life [40]. Furthermore, through augmented reality the consumer can experience the flow of the fibre through the value chain as it undergoes processing. These are the technologies currently in development and promise to enhance tracking and tracing in the future. However, tracking and tracing is currently less accessible and in a more fractured state than one would expect for a number of reasons.

At this point it is important to consider whether consumers will actually take advantage of more comprehensive information—and thus bring about systems change for the better. Consumers do check labels and consider this important in making purchasing decisions, with almost two-thirds checking for fibre content according to surveys conducted by the Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor (CLM) [41]. Most are looking for cotton (82%), followed by care instructions (24%), then comfort and feel (11%). The CLM survey of care labelling finds consumers consider the font too small, difficult to read or contains too much information [41]. In another study, Aspers [42] suggests that customers would be happier to make decisions that directly repay the original worker.

2 Methodology

As this paper argues that consumers need simplified and standardised information on garment labels. This study takes a qualitative approach to investigate the current practices in garment labelling, both regulated and self-regulated. Regulated practice requires that written garment care information is included on the label. However, many garment producers add additional information on an ad hoc basis. This study

looks at a sample of labels currently in use and used textual analysis [43] to compare garment labelling systems in everyday use by coding the information on the label into groups. The products were chosen as their labelling is subject to regulation and legislation but also includes additional marketing information. The study was enriched with empirical data gathered from interviews with 10 small to medium textile clothing and footwear (TCF) business owners to gain a perspective on the challenges and opportunities of implementing garment labelling information—particularly in the light of new tracking and tracing technologies.

The labels investigated were attached to garments selected from brands available in the city centre of an Australian capital city (Sydney). The brands covered all market segments including high, medium and low price points. The garment style was limited to a linen, knee length, sleeveless summer dress from the brands' seasonal range. Linen is a natural fibre that is not produced in Australia in any great quantity. Photos were taken of the labels and compared for content information. The garments originated from locally as well as offshore product lines. An in-depth analysis was made of garment labelling with four specific parameters: fibre content and care instructions (current, anticipated or formerly regulated factors) as well as country of origin, and sustainability measures (self-regulated factors). For the purposes of this study only sewn-in cloth labels were taken into account. However, some images were also taken of swing tags (printed hard stock labels that are removable), if they yielded further information on the four parameters. Branding labels (logo tags) were not taken into account for this study unless they contained one of the four parameters such as country of origin. Additional information was collected from various sources including the garment brand's websites, government statements, academic literature and industry organisation reports. Although the focus of this study is the state of current garment labelling practice in Australia, data was also collected from global organisations as the textile industry reaches beyond national borders. For example, information was sought from the International Standards Organisation (ISO) and various certification organisations that are based internationally such as the Higg index and GOTS sites. A matrix was devised to extrapolate results from the data. This helped to visualise emerging patterns. Results were collated according to the original 4 parameters on 70 garments: The table indicates numerically how many times out of the sample of the parameters were presented on labels. Sustainable textile practice includes a variety of practices and choices and processes including traceability, environmentally friendly farming of fibres, recyclability, non-blending of fibres and use of second-generation fibres. For the purposes of this study, the specific types of practice have not been classified. As there is little to no information on sustainability currently on labels, and also for simplicity, sustainability measures have been encompassed in one parameter. This information on garment labelling will be named 'sustainability credentials'. However, links to specific information could be provided on labels (Table 1).

Table 1 Summary of information contained on the 70 garment care labels analysed

| Information | Written | Symbols/abbreviations | Technology |
|----------------------------|---------|----------------------------|---|
| Care instructions | 70 | 13, e.g. square and circle | 3 QR code: link to website or app with further info |
| Fibre content | 60 | 12, e.g. PE | |
| Country of origin | 50 | 14, e.g. AU | |
| Sustainability credentials | 10 | e.g. GOTS logo | 3 QR code, RFID, nano trace etc. |

3 Findings

3.1 Analysis: Garment Sew-in Labels

Labelling (whether government regulated or self-regulated) can be utilised within the branding package to encourage consumer purchase and therefore is pertinent to the study. The garments are subject to highly competitive markets where branding can determine the purchasing decisions of the consumer. The information and formatting on garment sew-in labels were the subject of analysis in this study. Literature had shown that garment labelling is confusing, difficult to read, incomprehensible and inconsistent. Also, that consumers do not understand the information and how to use it or how it affects them. Finally, little to no information is found on labels regarding sustainability credentials. The data collated in the tables above demonstrate that:

1. 100% of the samples were compliant to mandatory garment labelling standards by including written care instructions in English; however 15 (35%) were illegible because of font size and/or print quality or colour/background relationship.
2. 20% of the labels included non-mandatory information including fibre content, country of origin and/or sustainability credentials.
3. 20% of the labels had country of origin information; 20% was abbreviated.
4. 30% of labels had publicly scannable codes which led to further information on apps.
5. 30% had extra information on detachable tags and/or stickers including certifications and sustainability credentials.
6. 30% had information on end of use.

Data confirms that labels are inconsistent in information and formatting and do not all contain information on sustainable practice. Information communication technology and the use of digital identifiers can extend the amount of information available to the consumer. It can also be laid out in a more comprehensible manner, for example, through infographics. This will simplify but also require further investment and development of technologies, adoption by regulators, producers, suppliers and consumers. This represents a significant change but worth the potential positive impact.

3.2 *Analysis: Small-Scale Designers' Communication of Garment Sustainability*

The small-scale fashion enterprises interviewed for this study are constantly seeking affordable means to achieve their goals whether economic, social or environmental. Upon initiating the interviews about 'technology', most assumed they would be discussing social media e-commerce applications. All felt they should not conduct their businesses without the benefits of these customer facing and affordable applications. Turning the conversation to blockchain enabled technology, many would say—'oh I'm no good at technology' or they would 'wait and see' what the others are doing [44, 45]. This points to the business phenomenon of market-competitor advantage [46] and suggests that uptake will only accelerate once competitor firms are adopting the technology.

For example, the founder of the circular label, A.BCH recalls, 'basically, I discovered Provenance and SourceMap and I was checking out various things and finally realised they didn't have anything I didn't already have' [47]. The designer has listed the provenance of components for each garment on her website 'by hand'. That is, she has simply provided the information of where the buttons, threads and fibres, etc. have come from. This is time-consuming work but may still be more cost-effective for her business model at the moment. It also provides a level of authenticity in telling the story to the consumer.

We do have a QR code, we put that on every label, the story of how our garment was made so the code on the garment which is actually stitched into the garment would basically take me back to that product on our website where you could see the whole story of how it was produced, even if you didn't buy it yourself (and it has landed in a secondhand market). Or you bought it (second hand) in an op shop or something like that—you can look up where the fibre was grown, and you can see all that information there, its on the site even if the garment sells right down the track. Its very manual and nothing like fancy or foolproof and you know there's a lot of room for error, its not foolproof. [47]

Regarding sustainability credentials, some rely on certification agencies but have a fractured relationship here. For example, one founder complains:

I see blockchain as helping us with the weight of the accreditations. I've never had the resources to prove any claims that we've made on our supply chain and we rely on that, but if blockchain can actually help us you know, not rely on those certifications and actually proved our social impact and minimising our environmental impact we would be interested. [48]

The respondent is not convinced that the slew of certifications and sustainability awards his brand carries is any guarantee of firm success. Understandably, the effort required to adopt the technology must not only be commensurate with—but significantly outweigh its perceived disadvantages to the firm [49]. The pattern emerging here is that ease of access, affordability and significant return on investment are factors that may entice a small-scale enterprise to adopt emerging technology.

4 Discussion and Recommendations

Shifts in important export markets as well as regulatory changes afoot in key consumer markets (EU, UK, US) mean that producers of natural fibres are under pressure to demonstrate traceability. Several tracking and tracing capabilities have been developed by commercial operators, offering technology-enabled tracing of fibres. However, to enable broad uptake of traceability across the wool and cotton industries, and to prepare for integration with global schemes operating downstream in textile supply chains, the development of a data standard is fundamental. A public comprehensive natural fibres data standard is an agreed-upon data vocabulary and ontology which establishes shared definitions of traceability data from farm, to mill, to fabric, to customer. It supports the interoperability and good data governance that will ultimately enable individual growers to interact efficiently with the tracing system of their choice and/or move between platforms [50]. It will benefit commercial providers who can use the data standard to build new services or expand their existing traceability offerings. The recommendation is that labels:

1. Inform: specifically, care, fibre, country of origin and sustainability credentials including the relationship of care, use and impact on the environment.
2. Simplify: be consistent and simplified in formatting. Be globally agreed upon, accessible and comprehensible.
3. Connect: with incorporating digital technology where possible.
4. Regulate: standardise the above requirements so they can be monitored and enforced.
5. Communicate: allow for correct fibre separation for recycling.

5 Conclusion

The consumer is in a position to drive change towards positive impact by buying sustainably produced goods. One way to facilitate the uptake of sustainably produced garments is by engaging the customer through comprehensive and accessible information interfaces. The above examples demonstrate that consumers need simplified and standardised information on garment labels not only regarding content and care but ecological and ethical impact. New technologies could resolve these issues, but considerable preparation of standards and governance needs to occur for technology to be effective. The integration of blockchain technology, although offering the capacity to verify claims, will also require reliable identifiers. Individual efforts are no longer enough, suggesting government intervention is also required to promote regulation and compliance. The imperative for better consumer information can be presented to the regulators to enforce policy change. Improved garment labelling standards would coerce producers/suppliers to comply before the product reaches the consumer. Furthermore, as we move towards the circular economy, it will become essential to implement accurate fibre detection mechanisms for the

correct sorting of recycled products. Finally, as the industry crosses international boundaries, greater standardisation of global standards will be required.

How much the brand, and ultimately the consumer actually wants to know, may be dependent on product and market. Further empirical investigations could be conducted on consumers' intention and action as well as interaction with garment labels once enabled with emerging technologies. Consumer information and education initiatives may also be required for effective implementation. Technology developers will also still need to arrive at solutions that are universally accessible. Brands implementing sustainability missions may not only benefit from valuable marketing opportunities but the ability to better reach their sustainability goals. This study adds to the literature on garment labelling as a means to communicate sustainability credentials and shift consumer behaviour towards more responsible buying decisions. It serves as a preliminary examination of the parameters needed to create improved garment label standards and contributes to the literature on new communication technologies in fashion.

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Building a Prosocial Communication Model in the Fashion Sector, Based on Sustainability and Artificial Intelligence, Derived from COVID-19



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Abstract Considering communication in fashion from the perspective of sustainability and artificial intelligence allows us to resize its social focus, especially when we contextualize it in the era of COVID-19, which has stopped humanity in a loop, to rethink a new normal that accelerates processes, unthinkable in others historical moments. We see an undeniable trend, where a humanitarian sensitivity towards sustainability in fashion develops, towards the rational and real use of an intelligence in the fashion sector that is no longer artificial but advanced. This research responds to a question that belongs to the world of the social. How to communicate for a society that urgently needs to implement sustainability strategies in the fashion sector, based on artificial intelligence at the service of rescuing the human? In this sense, based on a projective documentary research and a series of in-depth interviews with fashion experts, it allowed us to initiate what aims to lay the foundations of a prosocial communication model in the fashion sector, based on the sustainability of the human being on the planet and, as a corollary, also based on artificial intelligence. The prosocial field is oriented to collaborate and help other people in a positive, productive and social way. Artificial intelligence in fashion, at the service of sustainability and communication, allows us to think with a humanistic approach to communication, where the focus is to understand the human being in a deep way, with an interrelation with artificial intelligence and the increase of sustainability in fashion in different areas of the value chain. This investigation concludes by showing that the implementation of the proposed model of this investigation is plausible.

Keywords Fashion · Communication · Artificial Intelligence · Sustainability · COVID-19 · Pro-social communication

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1 Introduction

Since the first coronavirus case in China was announced in early January 2019, life has changed significantly for hundreds of millions of people around the world, becoming a turning point. When the pandemic recedes and we take back the streets, we will face a different world. Forecasting in the midst of this whirlwind is extremely complex. There has not been a similar case in the past with a crisis of this magnitude [1].

But this situation has arrived at a time when, according to Rivera and López-López [2], Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robotics (R) are in an important boom, since, thanks to the increase of computing capacity, the cost reduction of technology and the democratization of it, deep learning applications, can be applied in various daily solutions, both into the social and business worlds. The aforementioned authors affirm that the groups of companies that use them as a strategic weapon show us that (1) most of them have a marked innovative vocation aimed at gaining competitiveness and generating value in its markets and industries; (2) robotics can act as a solution to increase jobs, since the companies that incorporate it show a markedly humanistic orientation, more pro-person than pro-machine, guiding its application; and (3) the value of AI is very broad; it can not only have a positive impact on employment but also provide a better coverage of our most human needs. It makes operations more efficient and reduces costs, and it can also create new markets and new products and services, as well as meeting current needs in a more personalized and flexible way, at more reasonable prices, improving people's quality of life.

On the other hand, the 2030 Agenda is ordering the efforts of governments and organizations to follow the roadmap towards sustainability, both in its environmental, economic and social dimensions. The challenges posed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are being progressively integrated into the agendas of public administrations, companies and the third sector.

In this context, communication has become a key function for companies and leaders in the fashion sector.

In order to build a communication model that is at the service of society, the implementation of the sustainable development goals (SDG), reflected in the aforementioned Agenda, must be re-dimensioned because they represent a real and important challenge at a global level. A comprehensive approach will minimize all kinds of socio-environmental problems and common situations to all countries. Therefore, its dissemination, information and the implementation of actions supported by the use of advances in science, technology and technoscience is vital, so that such communication and information is truthful. It is a right of the human being, to be well informed, as well as to be considered in all its integral and human dimension, where freedom, autonomy, dignity and position must be respected.

2 Literature Review

2.1 *Humanistic or Anthropological Management Model*

To create an organization, we need a group of people with a common purpose, people who are coordinated, acting together towards the achievement of results, that all of them want to achieve, though perhaps for different reasons. Thus, the essential elements of an organization are human actions, human needs and a formula or a way of coordinating actions to satisfy needs. What places the organization as an anthropological reality [3]? We consider different business models depending on the different ways in which we conceive the person [4].

- (a) The Mechanistic Model gives importance to the formal organization and to the roles and the definition of the job. The purpose of this model is efficiency, that is, the maximization of profit. This model is based on the principle that money is a universal motivator [5]. The prevailing leadership model is a transactional leadership, which is defined by a relationship of economic influences, especially supported by rewards and punishments as a way of motivating employees. The transactional leader is a good manager and tends to create continuous improvement based on greater standardization, order and repetition of well-known and well-experienced processes.
- (b) Within the Psychosocial Model, in addition to effectiveness, the objective is to achieve results and prepare the organization to face new challenges. This makes the company more attractive to workers. It appeals to intrinsic motives, basing the permanence mainly on the challenge and on learning and not only on the economic remuneration that people will receive in exchange for his work. It supposes an advance regarding the mechanistic model, but it continues to contemplate the person according to a partial reality. In these models we find transforming leaders. This leadership is defined by a relationship of professional influence. The influence of the transformational leader is deeper than that of the transactional leader, and beyond “rewards and punishments”, it offers the attraction of learning and commitment.
- (c) But the institutions of the twenty-first century, and especially since the COVID-19, raise the need for a new management model that considers the person in all their richness and their ability to contribute [6], with an Anthropological or Humanistic Model. This model starts from a more comprehensive vision of the human being and, in addition to efficiency and attractiveness, also seeks the unity or identification of employees with the company and its mission. In this model, leadership is defined by a relationship of personal influence, in which, in addition to seeking retribution and the attractiveness of the job, the employee is personally committed to the leader to carry out a common mission that is worthwhile. The leader transmits a strong sense of urgency and is a generator of leaders. This is achieved by transferring the sense of mission to his collaborators, at the level of responsibility that corresponds to each one, in a process that we have called ownership (sense of belonging) and that goes beyond the

empowerment of the transformative leader. We speak in this transcendent leadership model about “a relationship of influence in which both leaders and collaborators play a relevant role” [7]. In the anthropological model, an intrinsic value is recognized for people, by the mere fact of being a person, focusing its foundation on human dignity, which means that each human being is intrinsically valuable, and consequently, each person deserves respect and consideration [8]. The company contributes to the process of development and continuous growth of people [3].

For each management model, three different ways of the communication orientation can be differentiated. In the Mechanistic management model, the communication’s orientation will be information, and the objective will be the orientation towards the achievement of the formal objectives of the institution itself. In the Psychosocial model, the communication’s orientation will be persuasion, and the objective will be to achieve emotional adherence to the institution itself. In the Humanist model, the communication’s orientation will be the prosocial communication, and the objective will be mission orientated: the public service [6].

The last Davos Forum warned in its manifesto that the universal purpose of companies is to collaborate with all their stakeholders: employees, customers, suppliers, local communities and society and, also shareholders, with an ultimate goal, the creation of value [9]. People are the main asset of organizations; they predominate over everything else and in difficult times. When financial risk is greater, there is much more at stake [3].

2.2 Prosocial Communication

The prosocial communication model brings the idea of communication closer to the idea of service and aligns it to the fulfilment of the organization’s mission. In accordance with this model, the organization develops its communication strategy based not on what it wants to transmit, but on the interests of the recipients. This is what makes it possible to achieve competitive efficiency in the current situation of globalization. In this sense, the person must be treated in accordance with their dignity as a human, rational and free being. A knowledge of human motivations is essential for an adequate management of communication, in order to achieve the true objectives of the organization, its mission [10].

As organizations participate more in the prosocial model, they work more on their management in an effective way to achieve that the purposes foreseen in their mission are a reality. Communication is conceived as a service and is oriented to the interests of the public. It manages to establish a flow of interactions among its staff, in which everyone identifies himself with the mission and this is what makes it possible to achieve the objectives of effectiveness, efficiency and social value, dimensions, all of them necessary for the proper development of the organization [11].

Communication in fashion has a relevant paper from an anthropological point of view, as Cantista and Sádaba (2020) affirm. By living life for themselves, human beings are naturally driven to express themselves and to express their own sensibilities. This is done either by freely adopting models and examples of things they identify with (enabling the phenomenon of fashion). For this reason, we cannot separate fashion from communication [12].

2.3 *Sustainability*

Sustainability has emerged as an essential term in just a few decades, and, in the context of COVID-19, it has reduced the gap from the collective imagination to an urgent reality to address. Sustainability has been the subject of various approaches and concerns from world authorities. However, despite the efforts made, we still have a long way to go. The planet demands more actions from us, and we must be able to undertake, to achieve a balance that lasts over time and achieves the necessary equity to minimize the problems we face as human beings. The fashion sector has a key role to play in this sustainability challenge.

The issue of sustainability has been driven by important decisions such as the Paris Agreement, or the adoption by the United Nations States of the 2030 Agenda, with a large part of its Sustainable Development Goals dedicated to addressing the challenges posed by climate change [13].

By 1987, sustainable development was coined in the Brundtland commission report, in which it was specified that humanity had in its hands the development in a sustainable way in order to ensure that the needs of today are satisfied without harming future generations. At present, sustainable development is based on the resources of the environment, technology, social organization and the capacity of our planet, to minimize the consequences of human activities. If we intervene by associating artificial intelligence and social organization, we can open spaces for growth [14]. The fashion sector can serve as vehicle of the sustainable goals taking into account the polluting aspect which needs to be addressed.

Several elements are observed, related to the responsibility of its achievement, on the part of humanity: responsibility with future generations, or what has been called a “vision focused on the intergenerational” [15]; then, the recognition of the limits of the biosphere and natural resources, with respect to the impact of human activity; finally the offers of technology and social organization, as a solution to the limitations that nature offers.

Currently it is required that we move towards a growth model in sustainability. Human beings are beginning to be aware that their high levels of consumption have serious consequences when embarking on the path of sustainable development [16]. The advance of technologies towards artificial intelligence has favoured changes in the fashion creation process, changes that go towards a redirection of sustainable strategies.

2.4 Artificial Intelligence

AI technologies are transforming the fashion industry in all the stages of its value chain, such as design, manufacturing, logistics, marketing and sales.

Sébastien Thomasson and Xianyi Zeng [17] confirm how with the birth of the big data era, fashion companies face a new relationship between consumers, suppliers and competitors. Fashion companies have to manage a large amount of data with many complex correlations and dependencies and uncertainties related to human factors. Companies need to master data flows to optimize decision-making. Artificial intelligence techniques are particularly efficient to support design, for fashion recommendation systems through sensory evaluation with intelligent monitoring systems, with textile quality control, for fashion forecasts, for decision-making in supply chain management or social media and for fashion e-marketing.

Leanne Luce [18] confirms how artificial intelligence is applied in the purchasing process, through data, through virtual purchasing assistants, in sales processes with big data, in analytics of prediction with data visualization, in the design process with artificial creativity, in data mining and purchase predictions, in purchase predictions through deep learning, in robotics and the production chain and simplifying the barriers to entry into markets.

Kim, C. E. and Lee, J. H [19] analyse recent trends in fashion retail promoted by the fourth industrial revolution and the convergence trends of big data and artificial intelligence. These authors conclude that:

First, companies such as “Edited” and “Stylumia” offer solutions that support the strategic decisions of fashion brands and fashion retailers by analysing big data using artificial intelligence.

Second, the convergence of big data and artificial intelligence scales up with personalized service on the web in examples like “Coded Couture”, “StitchFix” and “Thread”.

Third, information gleaned from artificial intelligence and big data help to create new fashion retail platforms like “Botshop” and “Lyst”.

Fourth, artificial intelligence and big data help with design. “Ivyrevel” designs digital fashion, assisted by a macroscopic perspective on fashion, market and consumer trends through big data analysis.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution brings changes in all industries, and the fashion industry is also undergoing many changes with the advancements of scientific technology. The convergence of big data and artificial intelligence will play a key role in the future of an industry, as dynamic as fashion, where the fickle tastes of consumers are the main drivers.

Some of the practical applications of Artificial Intelligence to highlight, according to Rom Schmelzer [20] in “The Fashion Industry Is Getting More Intelligent With AI”, are:

Increasingly, fashion brands are using artificial intelligence and machine learning to maximize users’ shopping experience, improve the efficiency of sales systems

through intelligent automation and improve sales processes through predictive analytics and guided sales processes.

Fashion brands are also starting to take advantage of conversation assistants through chatbots and voice assistant devices like Amazon Alexa, Apple Siri, Google Home and Microsoft Cortana.

Through conversational interfaces, fashion brands can collect data by asking customers questions, understanding customers' desires and trends, digging deeper into their buying patterns and suggesting related and complementary items.

AI is making its way into e-commerce and mobile apps. Customers can now take photos of the clothes they like or styles they want to imitate, and intelligent image recognition systems can match the photos with real-life items available for sale.

Additionally, AI-enabled shopping apps allow customers to take screenshots of the clothes they see online, identify clothes and accessories that can be bought in that photo, and then find the same outfit and shop for similar styles.

Grace Byers [21] explains how Artificial Intelligence is restyling the Fashion Industry. We are now seeing that AI technologies can add value in every part of the fashion industry, from the design process and manufacturing processes to sales and marketing of finished products. The future of fashion is smart. The author states that the fashion industry continues to be one of the biggest polluters in the world.

The fashion industry is responsible for 10% of global carbon dioxide emissions, 20% of the world's industrial wastewater and 25% of all insecticides used in industry. However, artificial intelligence can be used in many stages of production reducing inventory levels by 20–50% and improving working conditions in the fashion industry. The use of artificial intelligence in conjunction with machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, visual recognition and data analysis can be used to reduce errors in trend predictions and forecast trends more accurately, reducing the amount of clothing produced and then not used.

The author states, how in 2017, an Amazon team in San Francisco created an unnamed AI "fashion designer". They developed an algorithm that analysed images and duplicated the style, creating new elements in similar styles. We are not yet at haute couture levels, but these new technologies portend future possibilities.

The author also talks about H&M, created in Sweden by Erling Persson in 1947, where they have chosen to use advanced analytics and artificial intelligence to improve their business in general. H&M is improving the way they detect trends and plan logistics and reduce the number of discounted sales and the masses of unsold stock, by using artificial intelligence technologies. They are also using it to examine supply and demand and allocate a sufficient quantity of products to each store, once again reducing the amount of wasted clothing. At the H&M group, they are combining both analytics and artificial intelligence with human intelligence to use what is known as "amplified intelligence".

3 Methodology

In this research we used a projective documentary study methodology that was complemented with in-depth interviews to Lucas Delattre, expert in Communication, professor at the French Fashion Institute in Paris [22] and experts in the area as well as data from the interviews conducted at the OECD Forum on Due Diligence in the Garment and Footwear Sector conference, Feb. 3–4, 2021 [23]. This conference brought together over 600 representatives from government, business, trade unions and civil society to address emerging risks and to share learnings on implementing labour, human rights, environmental and integrity due diligence in the sector across geographies. The topic of building a more resilient and sustainable sector post- and during the current COVID context was the key thread of the conference. The conference looked at the importance of sectoral dialogue in prioritizing collaborative action during the crisis, and lessons from that, to build a more resilient sector, as well as the recent mandatory due diligence policy developments with consideration of their role in enhancing and enabling company due diligence practice in the Garment and Footwear sector, as well as the potential pitfalls to avoid.

The observation of the facts is carried out taking into account how they occur and how they are presented in their real context at a certain time, to analyse them. That is, in this design, a specific situation is not built, but rather those that exist are observed. At the same time, it is a design with a descriptive analysis level consisting of describing, recording, analysing and interpreting the phenomena related to prosocial communication with special emphasis on sustainable development and artificial intelligence in the present [24].

The analysis of the data obtained was carried out through the acquisition of external and internal information relevant to our study. A data collection instrument was constructed, that is, an interview script, which was elaborated based and structured in eighteen questions derived from the operationalization of the variables and indicators that, as researchers, we consider the most appropriate.

The indicators that formed the basis for the study and the prosocial communication model in the fashion sector are links between fashion's communication and sustainable development, leadership style in prosocial communication and sustainability and AI in the fashion sector, actions for prosocial communication and communication of discourses and actions. Besides, the CSR related to the SDGs include artificial intelligence transforming communication and the values of sustainability in the fashion sector.

The instrument was validated by the judgement of three experts in the field. Internal reliability was obtained through the review and comparison of the results with the foundations of the state of the art.

4 Findings

According to the indicator's links between communication and sustainable development, we observe that good communication tries to understand the human being in a deep way, with the help of machines. There is a big difference between what you say and how people react. The basis of communication is trust. There is no communication without trust managed through information and emotions. According to Lucas Delattre the only way you can really communicate is with confidence [22].

Bettina Heller [23], Programme Officer coordinating the work on sustainability and circularity in the textile value chain, at UNEP United Nations Environment Programme's Consumption and Production Unit, is looking very much at the sustainable consumption production agenda around SDG 12. In her opinion it is quite an interesting lens to look at, the move towards more sustainability in a textile value chain. As she says it's not particularly on private finance but we need new business models, we need them to also have economic sustainability and to be viable and we need consumers to buy into them. She says there is a need to look at biodiversity and to the communication to consumers. Certain brands, for instance, are trying to collect good for the biodiversity, and they also engage with this with the people. This is something that is becoming more important. There are certainly opportunities to tell stories on the back of biodiversity and mobilize both customers and employees through that whole process.

Marijke Schöttmer [23], Manager Environmental Protection, Tchibo GmbH, when asked about Tchibo's communication during the COVID period in comparison to other brands in Germany, she stated that Tchibo was quite open, when it comes to communicating what is not working well. That is Tchibo's philosophy also within their sustainability communication. They believe that if they share what is not working, the business will also do some good and share learnings and help others to move into the right directions and will not repeat mistakes or approaches that might not work. They had an intense communication on their programmes, and they would also like to, in a stronger way, exchange learnings with supply chain partners and also competitors, to tackle this issue on a wider scale.

On the other hand, regarding the leadership style indicator that a prosocial communication model requires to connect with sustainability and AI, it was evidenced that the leader's information must be prosocial. Information is the basis of everything. Giving a lot of information helps people understand. We are talking about sincerity, information, education and real knowledge. The problem is that a brand can have a lot of secrecy. The balance between secrecy and knowledge is very difficult to manage; brands must improve access for customers to have more information and more knowledge about what they buy [22].

David Williams [22], Project Manager, ILO (International Labour Organization), when asked why is knowledge sharing important, he states that we need to all recognize the intrinsic value of knowledge to advance professionally and personally to unlock opportunities, to solve problems, to innovate and to generally improve our

lives and improve the lives of others. However, what we think makes knowledge good is also sometimes the reason why we don't share it readily or willingly. In a globalized era, when it comes to the global garment industry, the fashion industry has been typically understood as an industry that is hyper competitive, rather than collaborative, rather than an industry that shares. This has not been something that traditionally the industry has done well.

When asked why the industry should share when it comes to the sustainability, he states that although it's difficult to quantify, there is a cost to spending time, seeking the right kind of knowledge, the right kind of information or knowledge that already exists. So, in that sense, knowledge sharing can reduce the cost associated with this, with regard to duplication, repetition and trying things that are suboptimal or don't work.

At the same time, if you look at the industry at large, the government sector faces huge challenges, many of which cannot be tackled by a single actor alone. The climate challenge cannot be tackled or solved by one actor or even a few actors alone. In essence knowledge sharing can open opportunities for collaboration that can accelerate progress across the board in the industry, as well as elevate collective voices tackle issues that go way beyond a single enterprise or a single country.

In his opinion a key question, in institutions like ILO as knowledge actors, is how they can work with partners to remove some of bottlenecks to influence the incentives, and indeed do their best in producing relevant knowledge and modelling, good knowledge sharing practices that can save outcomes in the sector.

Regarding the indicator actions that can be developed to achieve prosocial communication, Lucas Delattre speaks about how humility is needed in the luxury brands. He also stated how regarding sustainability we cannot achieve everything, this generation begins to listen when you act; they want to know how things are done. Generosity, in his opinion, and the way you share information is what sets effective new brands apart. Delattre [22] speaks about how this at times needs to be done with small brands that have nothing to lose.

Agatha Smeets [23], GAP's Director of Sustainability, when asked why the brands are concerned about losing their business, if they disclose their supplier names, she argued this was definitely the argument that they faced at GAP with some of their executives, when they were going to disclose the names of their suppliers. In her opinion it's becoming more important how you work with your suppliers than who you work with. The strength of the relationship, the strategic nature of the brand's relationship with its supplier is really more important than who it is that you work with. The competitive advantage is shifting there.

When GAP disclosed their supply chain, nothing happened; actually only positives happened. GAP got recognition and praise even though they weren't one of the leaders in disclosing this information. They got a lot of positive praise. They were able to showcase that as part of their transparency effort and actually they did not see any of the negatives. There is kind of hesitation to overcome, but in GAP's experience, it has only been positive.

Regarding the indicator communication of speeches and CSR actions related to the SDGs, brands and more institutions are transformed into acts of the common

good. Lucas Delattre spoke about how communication is good, but stakeholders don't always follow it and the reality is that at the end of the day money is the boss. Delattre also stated how luxury brands are often silent, for example, the LVMH brand is quieter than Kering Group (Gucci, YSL, Balenciaga) that talks a lot. Kering's CEO is François-Henri Pinault, and Bernard Arnault is the CEO from LVMH. According to Delattre these are the two kings of luxury, and Kering talks and talks and suddenly we learn that Kering does not always pay his taxes. LVMH talks less, maybe he also does less, but Delattre [22] thinks that sometimes you have to be quiet. Chanel does things and they don't say them. In Delattre's opinion, it is complicated because they do not want to be taken into account for everything.

Regarding the indicator Artificial Intelligence transforming communication and sustainability, when collecting the answers, we could observe that AI through blockchain is a way of tracking. Lucas Delattre [22] speaks about traceability that is in the middle of digital technology when identifying all the information of the product you buy. In his opinion, brands will be able to do things in a better way, and blockchain is something that is developing rapidly in the world of luxury to save information, protect the product and give confidence to the consumer. It is about trust. Trust the product because you know everything.

Regarding the role of COVID-19 in the implementation of AI in fashion, according to Delattre [22], online shopping in France in one year has progressed more than in the previous 4/5 years, from 15 to 23-5, e-commerce. In his opinion it is purely logical that the brands that will be successful after the COVID-19 will be those that put the money in that field. Amazon is a great topic, also in fashion in the way it succeeds, and the hypothesis is that it will also be a big player in fashion in Europe as well. At the moment, they are big but not as big as in the USA in clothes. AI, as Amazon understands it, means that the machine understands what you want to wear and shows it, even if you don't ask. In the USA they succeed, and they are the first in retail sales, but in Europe, they need something more; it is not just marketing. Delattre stated how Europe needs more creation; it is more about aesthetics; machines cannot solve everything. However, he spoke about how the model is very interesting because they have 70 brands and the machine takes care of your outfit. He thinks that in Europe people want to take care of themselves, and not rely on a machine. Despite this, everyone on the street looks at Amazon.

In Delattre's [22] opinion, the competitive advantage of French fashion will never be AI. AI will be a competitive advantage in fashion for America and China. Delattre speaks about how in Europe we talk about crafts, creation and culture, we do not focus on functionality, it is an old debate and a philosophical question, but America is built on functionality and marketing. In his opinion Europe has been built on creation as the opposite of mass consumption, even when we are part of it. Delattre stated that if AI helps to develop a customized demand for products but with a large creative part, which cannot be done with machines, this will be the way in which Europe will adapt to the new world. This is the culture of Europe. Europe's culture is not based on marketing, we use it, we are part of the western world, but the deep aspect of the culture is that Europe is different. Delattre also speaks about how if you want to create something different for each person, machines can help this but cannot

do it all. Amazon, on the one hand, fits in the old more personalized way, but the creation part is important. Function and aesthetics are the European and American debate. In Delattre's opinion, this reality has its foundations in religion: America is a Protestant continent, and you see this clearly when you look at Europe, the Protestant countries and the catholic countries. As he states, protestants, particularly Germany, have placed more emphasis on functionality than on aesthetics. In France, in Italy and also in Spain aesthetics are in the foreground. Aesthetics first and second functionality. This is very deep, very anthropological in his opinion.

Bettina Heller, Programme Officer at UNEP, when asked what opportunities exist in the industry to become greener after COVID, she stated that there are really major opportunities such as investing in more resource efficiency along the value chain, as well as to also reconsider what customers want from the products and designing and selling in much more circular ways.

In Heller's [23] opinion in a way, this almost means editing out impacts currently in place from production consumption phases. This is an opportunity for the sector to come back better. The actions that are taken for greener recovery are addressing the most important impacts because there are so many different issues that would need addressing that it is quite important to prioritize actions.

As Heller stated, the UNEP's Sustainability and Circularity in the Textile Value Chain's report [25] basically looked at how can we build sustainability and circularity in a value chain and map the key environmental and socio-economic impacts along the value chain in order to identify priorities and then also look at which existing initiatives are tackling these priorities already.

UNEP's now currently working on a follow-on project where they are trying to again coordinate stakeholders and export experts and consultations and draw together, the existing knowledge and goals that exist around circularity and specifically for textiles. They are trying to convene the stakeholders and create a clear vision and a roadmap for a sustainable and circular textile value chain at a global level. They are looking at actions that include the design stage of textiles, but also materials and business models, as well as the customer phase.

They also need consumers to endorse new business models for them to work, and they are specifically looking at the role that businesses policymakers, finance community and civil society can play on taking that forward. Each of us in its different roles in the textile value can change things with the other actors that are part of the system.

Bettina Heller [23] stated that there are a few opportunities to move towards a certain sustainable system in light of the past COVID-19, for example, smart product design, which then has the potential to eliminate the majority of production waste and pollution. In the processing phase, and the more circular business models, there are fashion rentals re-commerce repair and refurbishment. All of these could actually help the industry to cut around 140.3 million tonnes of GHG emissions by 2030, which is quite a considerable impact, that can be achieved by switching towards more circular business models. Even if we look at the time before COVID-19 outbreak, there were only around 60% of garments that were sold at full price. So, there were billions of dollars of lost revenues and margins. So, addressing such

inefficiencies, such as overstock or poor energy efficiency, the industry can then recover much faster from the financial effects of COVID.

In B. Heller's opinion it is important to focus on the potential trade-offs when moving towards more circular models. Countries such as Bangladesh that were hit really hard by crisis need to think about especially how the textile industry and the workers in that industry suffered because of the order cancellations. They need to consider some approaches to circularity and assess them, for instance, offshoring of production can also have an impact on the production markets. It's also important to take a whole value chain perspective to look at and then tackle one impact area.

Again B. Heller stated that another aspect is how to drive circularity whilst minimizing such trade-offs. Due diligence processes have never been more valuable already outlined quite clearly as the risk-based approaches. They really look at this holistic assessment helping to identify potential trade-offs and to take a risk-based strategy in situations where they might not have all the data because it's not realistic for every player along the textile value chain to do always a full lifecycle-based assessment of all the impacts.

In her opinion, due diligence will really continue to play a crucial role in a company's strategy around the circular and sustainable recovery in the future.

For the scientific community there is a triple planetary crisis; there's a crisis on climate change, on natural laws and on pollution and waste. Biodiversity affects the other crisis [23].

Marijke Schöttmer [23], Manager Environmental Protection at Tchibo GmbH, stated that as an environmental aspect the strategic focus was on water protection, including water stewardship, but also water pollution for their supply chains. The countries, where textile production takes place, are much highly affected than the higher income countries. The Asia textile industry has been hit very hard by the COVID-19 pandemic. International demand for textile products collapsed. This has been particularly dramatic in countries where the textile sector accounts for a large share. The sales cut directly resulted in lower wages for factory workers. Tchibo received feedback from their own supply chain, but also there has been a recent study from the International Labour Organization (ILO) [26] that has researched the impact of the pandemic on the major textile producing nations in Asia. According to this study, exports of the major buying regions that is, the US, Europe and Japan fell by up to 70% in the first six months in 2020. For the textile industry this means less work, less income. In Bangladesh the median income for textile workers almost halved between April and May from the equivalent of 130 US dollars to just 65 US dollars.

Marijke Schöttmer stated that there are well-known problems in the textile industry that existed, even before the COVID-19 pandemic, but actually they have become worse. At the same time, supply chain projects and programmes cannot be carried out as before.

In Tchibo's case, COVID-19 had a huge impact on the implementation of their sustainability programmes production facilities that have been temporarily closed last year. There has been and there are still travel bans' meeting restrictions. They

cannot meet their supply chain partners in person. And this all resulted in difficulties, for example, in arranging wastewater testing in our facilities or getting on site.

Training workshops had to be cancelled, and there are many underground supply chain activities needed to be postponed in 2020.

When Marijke Schöttmer was asked what they actually did in 2020 to face these challenges, she answered that first of all, they assured that no orders were cancelled. They kept a stable business relation with their suppliers to ensure that workers in their supply chain were protected from the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the second pillar, Tchibo adapted their programmes and found solutions to work together, virtually with their supply chain partners, local projects and programmes that were redesigned accordingly, developing online support wherever possible. And last but not the least Tchibo, served the staff, they supported short-term projects that have initiated to provide immediate support to suppliers. At Tchibo, they signed the COVID-19 commitment letter, and they also joined a programme on sustainable textile water initiative with an NGO. The objective of this project is to ensure health, safety and rights for the workers in the textile garment industry during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in Bangladesh. Through this initiative, workers will learn about social distancing, hand-washing and other measures to basically reduce the risk of spreading or contracting the virus. Tchibo has just recently put on board 16 of their biggest suppliers in Bangladesh to join the programme free of cost. In total they are reaching out to 65,000 people on this project.

When Marijke Schöttmer was asked to look into the future, she said that they need to factor in that countries will have to do with the COVID-19 pandemic for a much longer than average; it will take a longer time for people in developing countries to be vaccinated. This will affect factories and workers even beyond 2020. Tchibo, as a brand, has adapted their sustainability work in the long run. Sha said that remembering the sentence “never waste a crisis”, they are aiming to see this also as an opportunity to build a more sustainable fashion industry after the COVID-19 pandemic. Tchibo sees it as a wake-up call; the pandemic is trying to stand as an opportunity to also change.

According to Delattre [22], the indicator values of sustainability and artificial intelligence in the fashion sector are smarter and always positive. More intelligence can never be erased, and the main mystery in today’s world is that we are in a VUCA environment. At the same time, we have never had so many tools to improve our intelligence, at the same time. For me it is one of the great contradictions in the world today.

Agatha Smeets [23], GAP-Director of Sustainability, stated that in GAP they get data from various sources. In the environmental space they have CDC data, and their own internal data systems. GAP has cleansed their data from the very minute data formatting issues, such as having supplier names in different databases. In her opinion it is very important to have qualitative data that is available in the supply chain. In GAP they have a big exercise to gather this type of data for their supply chain. Qualitative data is highly important, and they have to be extremely careful to make sure that that data does not go static. There’s a whole rich array of

environmental performance data for the data foundation that is being built, but at GAP they need the foundation first before going into this next frontier.

5 Discussion

Among the most relevant findings of this research, we consider mentioning the role that COVID-19 has played in accelerating the need to implement artificial intelligence in the world of fashion. In this sense, the most successful brands after COVID-19 will be those that invested in reinforcing their competitive advantage with the increase in online purchases and the use of big data. The competitive advantage of European fashion is in its creative and artisanal fabric, not in mass consumption. In the USA and China, AI is the differentiating factor because it is based on more production and mass consumption.

The pandemic has given the opportunity to invest in greater efficiency in resources throughout the value chain and also to reconsider what customers want from the products, to be designed and sold in much more circular ways. A rebirth of the sector is expected with actions for a greener and more sustainable recovery that maps the key environmental and socio-economic impacts along the value chain to identify priorities and then also look at which existing initiatives are already addressing these priorities.

Among the post-COVID actions that can be taken into account are the smarter product's designs, eliminating production waste and pollution, repairing and renovating the fashion trade and helping the industry reduce CO₂ emissions by 2030, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals. This would be achieved by shifting towards more circular business models with a prosocial approach.

By way of conclusion we can say that the prosocial communication model in the fashion sector that is derived from this research is based on artificial intelligence and the sustainability of the fashion industry framed in the COVID-19 crisis. This is based on understanding the human being in a deep, comprehensive way and applying values oriented to transparency and reliability in its actions as the central axis of circularity and green. Communication is based on trust that is managed through information and emotions, which allows progress towards greater sustainability in fashion, achieving the commitment of the company with people, exchanging knowledge with partners in the supply chain and also with competitors, to address it on a broader scale. Sincerity, education and real knowledge in fashion must exist in balance between what is communicated and what is not. In this regard, fashion brands must improve access for customers to have more information and more knowledge about what they buy and its contribution to sustainability.

On the other hand, in this model of prosocial communication, the role of the leader must also be prosocial and transcendent. Besides, the communication that he transmits and his way of acting, directing his teams, needs to go beyond the purpose of the fashion brand. In a globalized era, the fashion industry has been understood as an industry framed in the hyper-competitiveness, and not in the prosocial principles,

such as collaboration and participation in all its dimensions. The exchange of knowledge can open opportunities for collaboration that can accelerate progress in all areas of the industry. The model of good knowledge sharing practices can have positive industry outcomes.

Among some actions that must be undertaken, to achieve prosocial communication, are working with transparency, humility, reliability, technological traceability and generosity, understood as the way in which the information is shared and transmitted. In the end, this distinguishes brands that are effective in sustainability and with the rational use of AI, understanding the meaning of what the consumer wants, that is, letting the customer know even if he does not ask. Reliability and transparency lie not only in the design of textiles but also in materials, business models and at the customer stage. Also, consumers must support the new business models for them to work, and the role of all stakeholders is paramount especially for business policy makers, the financial community and civil society that can play a key role moving forward in that regard. Everyone in their different roles of textile value can change things, with the other actors that are part of the system. Communicating to consumers about how certain brands are trying to collect goods for biodiversity promotes engagement with people.

Finally, with the information obtained as of the day when this research is written, we consider it plausible to implement this prosocial model of communication in the fashion sector. However, as possible limitations of this research we can highlight the recent incorporation into the fashion area of artificial intelligence, whose technological tools are some still in the process of development. Besides, the implementation of social responsibility directly related to sustainability may take longer to implement fully, due to the fact that sustainability policies' implementation in the fashion sector needs to be applied in all the value chain of the business model as well as the supply chain. Finally, we also need to take into account the problems being generated now in the sector, due to the still unfinished crisis caused by COVID-19.

Appendix 1

Questions for Lucas Delattre, expert in Communication, professor at the French Fashion Institute in Paris (Sorbonne University)

Research Questions

1. How do you think a prosocial communication model based on sustainability and artificial intelligence should be structured?
2. What elements could a prosocial communication model involve? What communication strategies should be implemented to carry out this transformation?

3. Do you consider that there are links between communication and sustainable development? Which?
4. What leadership style does a prosocial communication model require in order to connect with sustainability and AI?
5. What actions can be developed to achieve prosocial communication?
6. How could discourses (own channels, advertising campaigns), CSR actions related to the SDGs, be communicated?
7. How is AI transforming communication and sustainability?
8. What knowledge do people need to transform artificial intelligence into augmented intelligence?
9. How can a “sustainable fashion” be achieved with the SDG objectives?
10. Which of the SDG goals are directly related to fashion?
11. How can CSR be communicated so that a commitment to meeting the SDGs is evident?
12. Can you give us concrete examples where the application of artificial intelligence is transforming the brand’s business model?
13. Do you think that after the COVID-19 pandemic the companies that have been able to integrate sustainability and artificial intelligence will have continuity? And those who have not done so, will they find more problems in a digital and green society?
14. Do you think that COVID-19 has further streamlined digitization and the implementation of artificial intelligence in the fashion sector?
15. Do you think that the application of artificial intelligence will mean an essential revolution in the structures and business model of the fashion sector?
16. Do you think that the application of artificial intelligence will have negative impacts on the Human Resources of fashion companies?
17. Do you think that artificial intelligence will lead to a reduction in the workforce in the fashion sector? Do you think there will be new types of jobs in the fashion sector related to digitization and the application of artificial intelligence?
18. After the last Paris Haute Couture fashion week in digital, do you think that after the COVID-19 pandemic some of these new digital formats will be implemented in the fashion weeks?
19. In your opinion, what are the added values from the social point of view of sustainability and artificial intelligence in the fashion sector?

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Dressed in Words: Crafting Slow and Fast Fashion Hashtags



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Abstract How can hashtags be used to promote the long-term value of garments within Instagram’s fast-paced and consumption-orientated platform? While the network’s data is usually quantified, this analysis uses Cantoni and Tardini’s approach of semiospheres and Kozinet’s netnography framework to generate a qualitative and value-orientated analysis of Instagram hashtag use. Hashtag practice, strategies, and affordances of ten international digital fashion designers and museum fashion curators are reviewed. Half work on the fast end of the fashion spectrum, with downloadable CLO3D designs. The other half are museum fashion curators who prioritize the preservation and transmission of long-term value of garments. The case study contextualizes the two semiospheres within the acceleration of digitalization during the COVID-19 pandemic, critical fashion studies, as well as communication theory. Results reveal both challenges and an untapped potential of hashtags to create digital communities of value, enabling a recontextualization of fashion.

Keywords Instagram · Digital fashion · Hashtags · Slow fashion · Fashion media literacy · CLO3D

1 Introduction

How could hashtags best promote “slow” fashion values among Instagram’s one billion monthly users? This research question is addressed through a qualitative review of Instagram hashtag use by practitioners in two distinct fashion semiospheres: digital fashion design and fashion heritage.

Hashtags are a combination of letters, numbers, and/or emoji preceded by the # symbol. The indexing system has been used online since 2007, functioning as a

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linking “hypertext” and rhetorical tool. It allows content to be discovered by others. It is usually employed to provide context to the content but also to connect users—a recent example of its potential for community activation is #blacklivesmatter. Instagram encourages users to “follow” hashtags and as of March 2018 allows them to be featured in user profiles. Following provides a more personalized content feed, which in turn allows Instagram to better target advertising. Up to 30 hashtags can be used within a user’s posts/comments (and up to ten can be used on Instagram Stories). They can be searched within Instagram and are displayed in two categories: TOP and RECENT. “Top” measures engagement, though Instagram does not share the selection criteria (e.g., if it is personalized for each user). When inappropriate content becomes associated with a hashtag, Instagram may ban that hashtag, which reduces the visibility of posts using it. Hashtags can also be searched across platforms, such as Google.

Instagram gives some instructions on hashtag indexing [1], though it increasingly emphasizes that visibility is increased in Reels, Stories, and IGTV content (some of which can also be tagged). All approaches require a significant investment of time, including search and interaction in the platform [2], thereby increasing daily active user engagement (“DAU”). Instagram’s community guidelines discourage “posting repetitive comments or content”; several social media analysts explain that these result in content being “penalized by the algorithm” [3]. Hashtag variety, research, and interaction are rewarded with higher visibility [4].

As Gray and Gerlitz point out [5], the network steers measurements of success toward quantification, as these numbers justify advertising/promotion fees. In spite of the platforms’ emphasis on instant gratification and high consumption, Porter [6] and boyd and Ellison [7] have indicated that platform users seek meaningful connections. Social media networks can also be used for noncommercial purposes. While the dissemination of values through social media has especially attracted attention in the field of politics, how can hashtags promote sustainable fashion values?

Purely digital fashion designs, such as those created by Slooten [8] and described by Särämäkari [9] and Cary [10], have become a new paradigm for sustainable fashion design, production, and consumption. Digital designs are largely “worn” on Instagram and downloaded and discarded with a tap on a screen: faster than fast fashion, without the carbon footprint of shipping and material waste. They allow designers both the freedom of designing with materials unbound by gravity and the potential of instant worldwide distribution. While offering new career options for many young designers, digital designs come with their own challenges. The digital design carbon footprint includes electricity used for production, authentication, purchase, and display. Digital items require storage and tending, too, as addressed by “digital care labels” created by Murray [11]. It should be noted that the digital format also entails that designers’ time and the technical skills required are being largely undervalued.

Garments can last. Landi and Hall describe dating the world’s oldest woven garment to late fourth-millennium BC [12]. The ephemeral concept of “fashion” has largely been attributed to developments in Europe in the fourteenth century and

shifts in manufacturing and distribution of the industrial revolution. This pace of consumption has culminated in the current “fast fashion” practices, described by Crewe [13]; its environmental and social consequences are documented by the United Nations [14]. The most sustainable fashion practice is to tend, mend, and keep clothes. An effective way to communicate their long-term value is to give value to those who treat “out of fashion” clothes with reverence and care: their fashion museum caretakers.

Based on Cantoni and Tardini’s analysis of semiospheres of online communities [15], Instagram hashtags function as “keys that open the doors of the community” [16], defining the belonging, identity, and interest of semiotic subgroups. The initial netnographic challenge was the identification of highly distinctive semiospheres of communities of value. The hashtag “slowfashion” has been used of 9.2 million times, indicating the rapid appropriation of “slow” sustainability vocabularies by the fast fashion category. This trend, also observed in websites by Candeloro [17], was especially noticeable during the 2019–2020 peak of the so-called “cottagecore” trend. Therefore, daily Instagram observation during 2019 and 2020 identified two semiospheres in the digital fashion communication field which are located at opposite ends of the fast and slow fashion spectrum and employ highly specialized and differentiated vocabularies:

- (a) Fashion designers creating garments with CLO3D tools, whose designs can be transmitted digitally.
- (b) Fashion curators embedded in the context of museums, who transmit fashion knowledge in historical contexts.

This research analyses the hashtag practices and strategies and affordances of both groups. Based on the differences and alignments, conclusions are drawn on the challenges and potential of dissemination of “slow” digital fashion communication.

2 Methodology

Preliminary observations of Instagram behavior and networks of digital fashion designers and fashion curators began in August 2018 and were finalized in February 2021. Following a literature review, Kozinets’s framework [18] of netnographic research was employed first, focusing on metrics such as quantities, frequency of posts, and categories of hashtags used. It also reviewed the range of vocabularies, their affordances, as well as the correlations between text and still and moving images. Research was framed by the review of hashtags functions and affordances of Cantoni [15] and Karamalak et al. [19]. Vocabulary research was based on the work of Daley [20], Sikarskie [21], and Sand [22]. The netnographic research identified ten Swiss and international digital fashion creators and museum professionals. All their hashtags used from January 1, 2020, to February 15, 2021, were analyzed and categorized. In addition, samples were taken from hashtags from their first post on Instagram. All profiles were reviewed overall to observe development of

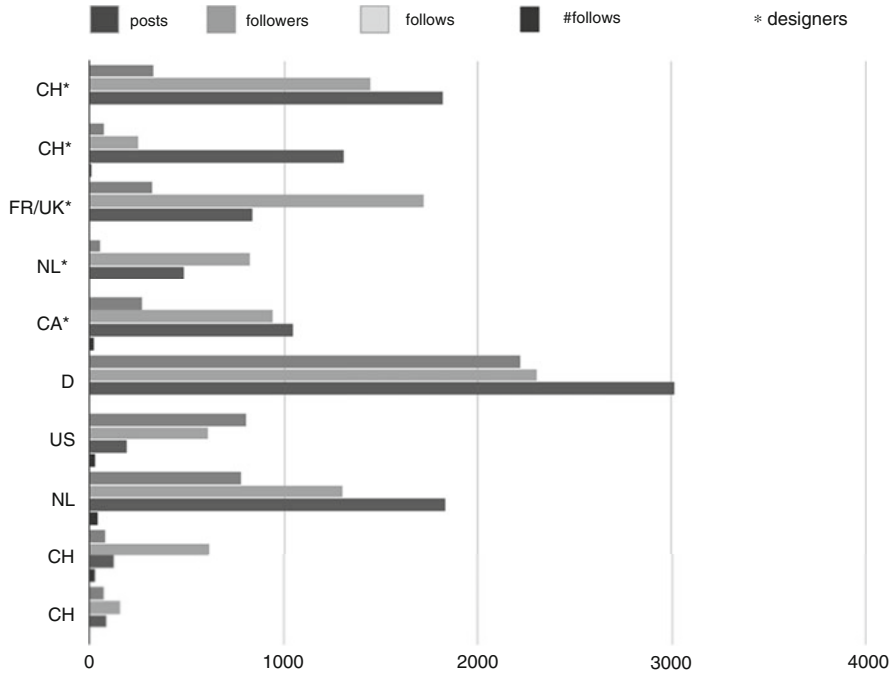


Fig. 1 Netnography analysis

strategies. Research was completed with their in-depth qualitative interviews in January and February 2021.

Netnography further identified unique strategies (Fig. 1). All posts on their accounts were reviewed, and vocabularies were classified in categories according to indexing functionalities. As direct messaging exchanges activity remains known only to platform administrators and users, meaningful connections mostly remain unobservable by observational netnography. In-depth qualitative interviews were therefore used to explore their strategies and affordances and whether meaningful connections were made through Instagram.

Qualitative interviews ranged from 60 to 90 min and were held on Zoom. Half of the interview participants were Swiss, and half were international. Each participant was selected on the basis of their unique communication practices. The interviews included both a prearranged set of questions regarding hashtag use, creation, practices, and strategies, as well as open-ended questions, and each was adapted to the conversational flow. Interviews were held in English, French, and German; they were recorded, transcribed, when necessary translated into English, and anonymized. Major themes were extracted and interpreted on the basis of previous research and literature review.

3 Context

Handis has described how indexing practices [23] are key in how societies understand and transmit knowledge and values, while Cantoni and Tardini [15, 16] have provided a framework for interaction in online communities. How such narratives can shape our future has been explored by both Pecorari [24] and Shepherd [25]. However, the creation of sustainable meaning within platform structures by fashion hashtags has still been largely unexplored.

A qualitative evaluation is especially relevant in the context of increasing computer vision-based metadata tagging of online and archival fashion images. Computer vision tagging of both Facebook and Instagram content has been actively deployed since 2016. As described by Devine [26], it is also used by Microsoft; Daley describes its use for GLAMs [19]. While a shift toward metadata computer vision tagging is a time-saving device which allows for an increased searchability of visuals [27], Cameron points out it may also tilt algorithmic selections [28]. Furthermore, Guinan-Wiley draws attention toward the possibility of bias in such descriptions [29]. Automatic descriptive tagging may also obscure the importance of intent and the necessary reflection inherent in the creation of archives: the evolving redefinition of meaning and values.

Meaningfulness and personal impact of exchanges can best be measured through qualitative interviews. These further an understanding of media literacy and of value systems. The questioning of historical narratives by the Black Lives Matter movement was a recent reminder that archives are never just (arte)facts but the interpretation thereof.

Media literacy skills can transform the creation, selection, and research use of hashtags in several impactful ways. Firstly, their indexing creates collective searchable archives. Secondly, hashtags also infer meaning on tagged content. This participatory creation of meaning can allow for reinterpretation and dialogues which traditional museum frameworks lacked or limited to elite participants. The hashtags used, searched, clicked, and followed also partake in the algorithmic cocktail of content the platform serves to each individual feed.

The in-depth netnographic review identified fashion professionals with different approaches to gain insight on both commonalities and divergent media content strategies. Beyond the literal use of slow and fast fashion hashtags, it focused on their meaningful experience of content, an approach not quantifiable by numbers. How we design, share, communicate, and archive fashion thereby reaches far beyond individual style or designs. While clothing is a powerful tool of self-expression, garments also function as a symbolic communication between individuals and societies, defining our common values, experiences, and exchanges. These include creativity versus conformism, liberty versus repression, and conspicuous consumption versus care.

4 Vocabulary

Hashtag literacy is not a given in the fashion field, a domain traditionally orientated toward visual perception and haptic experience. While fashion curators working in professional museum contexts are highly skilled with text as a form of expression in a formal environment, fashion vocabularies also present many challenges [30, 31]. Several curators expressed being less at ease with the use of text in a social media environment. Conversely, many fashion design professionals tend to be more familiar with social media networks, but they are less at ease with formal texts. Three categories of hashtags were found across both semiospheres (see Fig. 2). The first describes the object/content displayed. The second situates its date, origins, where it can be found, and context. The third connects it to people and networks, whether professional or personal. In these semiospheres, English predominates, though some French fashion references are used (mainly by French speakers, using “mode” and techniques in French).

Apart from the overarching use of “fashion,” both groups commonly employ the object terms “dress,” “garment,” “shoe,” and “bag.” “Fashionphotography,” “digitalvintage,” and “couture” and “fashionfutures” were occasionally used by both. There are some minimal alignments in functionality (“sportswear”) and dates (“1980s/1990s”) and references to location (“Paris”). Brands which are mentioned by both are “Dior” and “Nike.”

Self-branding hashtags are employed by both, sometimes in a highly personal manner (food, family, pets, vacation). Both use some conversational and creative tags, demonstrating self-actualization and creativity, as described by Erz et al. [32]. Both use hashtags to credit collaborators. Interestingly, both semiospheres use hashtags to situate fashion in political context and current events, including

Hashtag Vocabularies / Specifics

| 1. Object (Descriptive) | 2. Context (Situating) | 3. Network (Audience) |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|
| Object category #dress | Location/Origin #paris | Designers/Brands #dior |
| Technique/Style #embroidery | Museum/Exhibition: #savagebeauty | Selfbranding/Activity #fashioncurator |
| Material/Motif/Color #silk | Date #1980s | Celebrities/Wearers #karliekloss |
| Function/Activities/Season #eveninggown | Political #blacklivesmatter | Institutions/Colleagues Press/Photographers: #vogue |

Fig. 2 Vocabulary analysis

the Black Lives Matter Movement, LGBTQ+, and Women's rights. Both referenced the wearing of masks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet the vocabulary used for each category differed in many ways. While both semiospheres place heavy emphasis on techniques and refer to "patterns" and "pattern making," other techniques are highly specific. As documented by Kirkland [30], Van Steen [31], Sikarskie [20] and Sand [22], keyword searchability and classifications are an ongoing and complex challenge within fashion heritage collections. This terminology is highly specific (e.g., "flocking," "frogs," "Napoleon peaked lapel"). In addition, terminologies also change across time and are often highly country or region specific (e.g., a "gigot sleeve" is also called "mutton lamb sleeve") [30].

Curators will often refer to "costume." General keywords combined with fashion (and costume) are "textile," "exhibition," "collection," "conservation," "scenography," "archive," "books," "heritage," and "history." Curators use a succinct vocabulary for both types of dresses and silhouette details (closure, neckline, collar, sleeve type). Credit is given to donors. Activity-related words are curation and curator. Museum name and location are prominently used.

Designers use general keywords such as "digital," "virtual," "cyber," and "3d." Particularly specialized vocabulary used is "opensource," "blockchain," and "metaverse" "AI." Designers rarely tag locations, as the designs are available online. Materials and textiles and colors are rarely mentioned. Activity-related hashtags include #fashionstudent, #youngdesigner, #newdesigner, and #nextgeneration but also #fashionshow, #printresearch, #fashionportfolio, and #fashioneditorials. In the category of functionality, the vocabulary focused on sportswear, streetwear streetstyle, and party clothes, terminologies rarely employed by curators. Digital designers give extensive credit to tools (which are surprisingly absent from most of the curator's discourse). Specifically CLO3D software dominates this discourse. Interviews revealed that the company will regularly feature artists on their platform, which increases their visibility.

5 Hashtag Strategies

Strategies differed widely across both semiospheres, cultural backgrounds, and career stages. Their development is autodidactic, and significantly, all interviews expressed a lack of confidence in their own skills. Both groups expressed concern and attention to "etiquette" within their semiosphere. All expressed confusion regarding the algorithmic process and the desire to learn. One curator expressed uncertainty whether brands would agree with being tagged, and many were not aware of functionalities offered by the platform.

Regardless of semiosphere, the numbers of hashtags employed varied from 0 to 30, and their selection varied from targeted niche to scattered "mass appeal" tags. One designer spends hours crafting each of the 30 possible hashtags, with different strategies for each. One designer avoided all "mainstream" tags, emphasizing

semiotic playfulness. Another uses them as forms of speech. Some are more risk averse to posting content that is not deemed as high quality. One curator draws upon keeping spreadsheets, uses no tags for personal pictures, and repeats signature tags on all posts. Several barely post rather than posting “wrongly.” Most have edited their feed. Four out of five designers have erased older work as they felt self-conscious about the quality. However, many kept personal images as they represented personal memories. The impact of COVID’s focus on digital exchanges partly resulted in an increasing professionalization of content: less cat, holiday, and party pictures. Others became quiet.

Both groups meticulously use hashtags to give credit. One curator referred to this as being part of the “code of honor” of curators. Curators often give credit to donors (thus encouraging further donations) and collaborators. Digital designers give very detailed credit to collaborators, as well as tools. Both categories emphasize sharing: opensource is a value highly prized in both heritage and online communities. The sharing of an Alexander McQueen pattern by his foundation was highly prized by online creators. Current events were often referenced by both groups. “Signature” hashtags were developed by both groups. Practitioners from both groups who exchanged with others and experimented with creative hashtag creations achieved best results. These often place hashtags in their profile.

It should be noted that most had pruned their account content as they gained and addressed larger audiences in order to professionalize them. However, all had kept some personal images on their account, as they were personally meaningful to them.

6 Affordances

Across both semiospheres, hashtags are principally used for visibility in and the construction of professional networks and communities—which also involves sharing knowledge and values. Visibility among potential clients is a priority for designers, while museum curators indicated their aim to attract paying visitors. Beyond economical goals, both groups also benefit from the promotional and validation value of press coverage, increasing both their creative confidence and career opportunities. Visibility among their peers has in several cases led to collaborations—including, for example, a major European and US museum exhibition partnership. Both professional fashion semiospheres face the challenge to not only produce original work but to assure its communication. Within the framework of Instagram, engaging content is rewarded with increased visibility, resulting in increases in quantifiable number of followers and likes. Maintaining a network is an ongoing process, which requires an understanding of shared group codes. In addition to posting, it also requires interaction: researching and exchanging (“loving,” commenting, as well as reacting to comments with “loving,” emojis or texts, reposting, tagging). Adapting to new network tools and options becomes essential, since the platform offers higher visibility to actors who engage actively. This promotes increased time investment in producing new content forms (e.g., “Reels” or

“Stories” content), as well as for engaging with new content forms of others. Both semiosphere communities indicated their intent of communicating sustainability values.

Across the board, the analysis shows a lack of alignment between individual affordances and platform affordances, especially in terms of understanding of platform search. These criteria of platform affordances which Instagram communicates are relevance (content/image match), authority (expertise), and engagement (audience enthusiasm).

7 Challenges

Though the research confirms a difference in hashtag vocabularies, the hashtag strategies and affordances between the communities of digital fashion designers and fashion professionals exploring fashion history are similar, as are their challenges. These can be summarized in time, personal boundaries, media literacy, and differentiation.

In both subgroups, an increase in time invested resulted in skills which allowed both for more meaningful exchanges and professional advantages. In the research results, the threshold for such benefits lies at an estimated 2 h of platform use per day. There remains a lack of recognition of time invested in social media skills (including content production, research, networking, and exchanges). While the production of content is relegated to communication departments in some environments, a personal account remains a key networking tool but is not validated as such in terms of time and skills invested. Just as in Rocamora’s analysis of the labor of fashion bloggers [33], the distinction between work and leisure becomes increasingly blurred—a factor exacerbated through the COVID-induced “working from home” practices in 2020–2021.

Much like the construction of a garment or computer code, digital communication increasingly includes self-branding [34] and the obligation of creating a digital public persona. Whereas previously professional communication was more formal, the social media platform provides the added challenges and benefits of “authenticity” [33]. In the case of curators, this entails showing “behind the scenes”/“doing exhibitions,” rather than only completed exhibition content; this renders the curators themselves far more visible. Furthermore, since posting private images creates more meaningful connections, the balance of public and private persona is a delicate one. One curator praises the informality of exchanges, which facilitates collegial entente and friendly work relationships. She concurred that the informal networking was especially meaningful during the COVID-imposed restrictions on in-person exchanges (such as informal exchanges during events or conferences). Most importantly, she pointed to the intermix of private and professional as key to authentic communication, creating more sincere exchanges.

A key challenge across both groups is an understanding of the needs and semiosphere of their target audiences: what content do they seek find appealing

and interesting? While sharing findings and professional information highly increases visibility, professional reputations, and opportunities, as accounts become more useful to fellow practitioners, a balance between competition and cooperation also needs to be maintained. Another challenge is media literacy: understanding not only the functionalities needs but also the priorities of the platform itself. Improving an understanding of platforms could not only empower users but also revive the noncommercial purpose at the origins of online communities by Timothy Brenners Lee. As Cantoni and Tardini [16] point out, hashtags can also entail high differentiation, which bears important risks and consequences:

The gathering of people around a common topic of interest has also negative aspects: since virtual communities emerge from the free and spontaneous aggregation of persons with unanimous views, they risk to be very homogeneous and self-referential, to have little internal dynamics, and tend to behave like closed groups, where differences are excluded and only similarities are dealt with.

Further exchanges could benefit both semiospheres. Designers can benefit from archival creative knowledge, as well as from the transmission of the value given to past design. A prime example is the dress pattern shared by the Alexander McQueen Foundation. The research of Pitman [35] and Kupresanin and Chen [36] also show promising benefits of these exchanges. While first forays into cross-pollination between the digital and historical fashion semiospheres are being made, the hashtags used by each semiosphere highly differentiate these communities: they remain largely unaware of each other's activities and social media strategies. The discourse is also largely focused on the Global North.

Shepherd has pointed out that “enduring legacies of coloniality persist in the collection, classification and curation of objects (and their histories) in South African museums, including that of dress and fashion” [25]. They also appear present in online indexing. Only one curator made the distinction of #westernfashion and #eastfashion; none follow nonwestern fashion hashtags. As references to Black Lives Matter were eloquent and prevalent, this indicates a willingness to exchange yet an inability to reach beyond semiosphere boundaries.

8 Conclusion

Many parallels appear between the use of hashtags and getting dressed: some perceive it as a purely functional process, some as a risk-laden and time-draining imposition on their time. Netnography and qualitative research show that those who have benefitted the most have honed their hashtag skills by investing a minimum of 2 h daily, enjoy its communicative value, and perceive the process as continuous playful learning. This analysis combining netnography and qualitative interviews indicates that the highest amount of visibility is offered to practitioners whose hashtags indicate alignment with the platform's search logic: “engage, educate, excite.”

Though far from the reliability of public archives, and always at risk of being edited and/or deleted retroactively, or evaporating when accounts are deactivated or rendered private, the research confirms that hashtags remain a highly relevant communication tactic. As social platforms and their content are continually renegotiated both by its makers and its users, the hashtag is a powerful form of participation in both dissemination of content and in shaping the algorithmic flow of information users receive. They are one of few ways platform users can actively steer their algorithmic content feed. In spite of competing with fast-paced visuals, skillful hashtag strategies are a relatively low-tech and highly effective for community building tool for value transmission in the sense of Williams [37] and Tardini and Cantoni [16]. Especially in highly specialized communities, there is a high risk of self-referential differentiation, especially without adequate media literacy.

All interviewees expressed feeling inadequate in their usage of the platform. While this affirms Jenkins' call for media literacy [38, 39], the additional difficulty of having to tinker with words and experimenting and learning could also point to an intentional gamification strategy by the platform to keep users engaged. While Instagram has little commercial interest of promoting hashtag skills geared toward nonconsumption, this element of gamified challenge may also promote values that are noncommercial. As predicted by Porter [6], activity increased when meaningful connections were made. This affordance requires the platform to enable meaningful connections not linked to purchasing activity.

Awareness of hashtag strategies across global semiospheres could promote slow fashion values through cross-pollination of historical and digital fashion communities. Hashtags can connect practitioners worldwide in real time, as well as animate existing archives. Furthermore, the informality and accessible language could allow an increased participation of marginalized and underrepresented voices, redefining future fashion discourse and altering the affordances of (museum) fashion archives themselves, rendering them participative, fluid, and inclusive.

Understanding of the value of exquisite know-how and vision rather than chasing the latest trend is a prerequisite for sustainable consumption and its enjoyment. Museums are primary communicators of the longevity of garments yet depend on reaching the general public. Archives could benefit from new preservation paradigms, the digital preservation of fragile items, as well as the virtual display of collections in storage. Digital fashion creators could significantly improve their design techniques in the process of such collaborations. This indicates the rising importance of media literacy for the fashion industry. Understanding fashion today implies "understanding media 'logic'" [6], which benefits from qualitative research. The communication of slow values requires navigating across fashion semiospheres. In order to be effective, hashtags require a robust media literacy and a considerable and continuous investment of time. Increasing media and platform literacy of both historical fashion knowledge carriers and fashion design innovators could allow for exchanges which could significantly further sustainable practices in the fashion domain.

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100 Years of Fashion Activism: From the Women's Suffrage Movement to the US 2020 Elections



Gabriela Ambás and Teresa Sádaba

Abstract The following investigation presents a theoretical framework regarding the concept of fashion activism, a historical overview of its presence during the social and political movements of the past 100 years, and an analysis of corporate activism in the fashion industry. The cases studied in this article were originated mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom, though all of them acquired global character. Social media has become a key element for the transformation of fashion activism throughout the past century, magnifying the visibility of the movements and increasing the participation of public figures like brands and designers. The paper concludes with the fundamental role of fashion in the public opinion and leaves with unanswered questions regarding its true impact and commitment for social issues.

Keywords Fashion activism · Corporate activism · Social media · Social change · Political movements · Brands · Fashion designers

1 Introduction

The collective worldview condemned fashion for many years as a symbol of frivolity and alienation of reality. “The term ‘fashion’ comprised an institutional, spectacular and consumerist aspect related to high fashion, and the runway and top-model myth,” according to Patrizia Calefato [1]. It was seen as utterly superficial and belonging to a small elite.

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Nevertheless, throughout the twentieth century, the perception of fashion began gaining presence in sociological, psychological, and philosophical fields. It started to be understood under a new light of social narrative, identity dynamics, and imitation channels. According to Georg Simmel [2] as early as 1905, fashion should be studied from its significance and not only by its content, meanwhile Lipovetsky [3] held that fashion acts as a mirror of the cultural condition of society.

Fashion is an intrinsic feature of our social reality and can be found in arts, entertainment, business, literature, politics, etc. [4]. Nowadays, it's practically impossible to view any area of our contemporary lives that does not contemplate any level of fashion.

Garments have stopped being merely utilitarian—for protection or status purposes—and have gained an important role in our social relations. According to Ruth Rubinstein [5], in the relationship of clothing and society, wearers may have different motives when choosing their clothing: “to validate personal identity, to protect the personal self, to portray a wished-for identity, or to proclaim one’s personal values.” And it is precisely this last motive that constitutes the core of this paper.

Fashion speaks of who we are and where we stand in the world. And designers and fashion firms have caught up with this.

2 Theoretical Framework on Fashion Activism

Up to this point, it has been stated that fashion should be understood within its cultural and social context. As explained by Susan Kaiser [6], fashion symbolizes the meaning of an object in relation to its societal presence.

And given its symbolic load and power of correlation, it is fundamental to revise how fashion can actually impact and be used to transform society. Designers and firms, through fashion activism, are understanding how their power to communicate can take their garments from simple objects to symbolically charged vessels of change.

There is still scarce academic bibliography regarding fashion activism, but the term is frequently used in online media. Up until now, academic publications have mentioned design activism as a way to use creativity for disrupting the current status quo and framing better alternatives for reality.

Ann Thorpe [7] states that “in addition to disrupting, activism always reveals, unveils, or frames an issue. In a classic sense, activism often reveals an injustice or wrongdoing, but it may also frame a better alternative—it may be generative.” The author goes on by pointing out four basic criteria to define design as activism: (1) it publicly reveals a problem or issue, (2) it makes an outspoken claim for change, (3) it works on behalf of a disadvantaged group, and (4) it disrupts routine practices or systems of authority.

Design activism takes imagination and skills and applies them to create a counternarrative that seeks to generate a positive social, political, or environmental

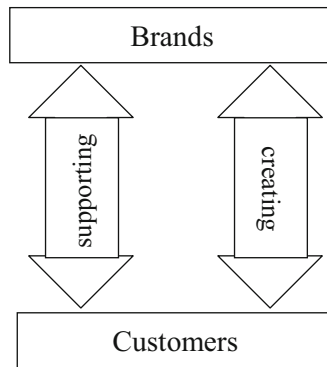
change [8]. Bearing this in mind, it is visible how fashion has applied this type of activism—now called “fashion activism”—during the last decades in order to drive social change.

Fashion activism’s capacity to speak out and gain visibility derives from fashion’s tangible nature. Since garments and accessories are used to publicly express our identity and values, they also possess the capacity to communicate messages. Alison Lurie, in *The Language of Clothes* [9], states that clothing is a language of signs, a nonverbal system of communication, with a vocabulary and grammar of its own.

Therefore, designers and wearers have discovered in fashion a way to communicate messages and state their minds and opinions regarding social, political, economical, and environmental issues. Fashion firms and designers use their influence and exposure in traditional media and social media to take part of public opinion and rely on their costumers to engage with their messages.

The range of action in design and fashion activism is very wide. Designers and brands can act as facilitators by supporting ongoing initiatives, but they can also trigger new social conversations [10]. Meanwhile, wearers can decide what to wear and which initiatives to support by selecting certain brands, trends, or garments.

The following graph shows the relationship between brands and consumers in fashion activism:



Fashion activism, as any other social movement organization, uses its means of expression in order to try and shape public opinion, putting pressure on those in positions of authority [7]. Fashion and public opinion are inevitably intertwined, according to Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann [11].

3 Historical Review of Fashion Activism

As previously stated, fashion has found the way to participate in public opinion by using its influence and communication power, making fashion activism an important mechanism for speaking on behalf of unrepresented groups and urge social change.

This section of the paper aims to demonstrate how, in the last century, fashion has become a means of protest and a channel for supporting social and political movements. The following historic review studies the involvement of fashion in specific moments of social and political relevance, beginning with the women's suffrage movement in the early twentieth century and finishing with the US 2020 elections.

3.1 Women's Suffrage Movement

This is one of the most relevant moments in history when fashion served as a political statement. In the early 1900s, women were working to gain ground in politics by fighting for their right to vote. The suffrage movement gained power in the United States and the United Kingdom with marches and parades.

During those first decades of the century, the movement got recognized by three identifying colors that women wore to the events: white for purity, purple for loyalty and dignity, and gold for hope. In the United Kingdom, the golden yellow was replaced by green and thus became the official colors of the Women's Social and Political Union in London (WSPU). From then on, those colors were used by women around the world that supported the suffrage movement, wearing them on their garments and accessories such as sashes, ribbons, and hat bands [12].

In order to keep the center of attention on their cause and message, women decided to maintain the dress codes of the early twentieth century and keep the floor-length dresses with corset and jacket but adding a distinctive element: head-to-toe white. And, from then on, wearing white became an accessible way for women of any race or economic status to join the movement.

According to a *CR Fashion Book* article [13], with white as their symbolic color, the suffragettes stood out not only in the streets but also in the media coverage of their marches. With black-and-white photography filling the print media of the time, the mass of all-white dresses caught immediately the attention of the public in the front pages. Therefore, white remained through time as the primary symbol of the women's suffrage movement.

Since then, the suffragette white has been present in other historic moments of social movements. On March 1913, one day before Woodrow Wilson's presidential inauguration, thousands of women dressed in white marched through Washington, DC, in the Women's Suffrage Parade organized by the National American Woman Suffrage Association to fight for their right to vote [14]. Decades later, in 1978, the March for the Equal Rights Amendment held the largest march for women's rights in the history of the United States, where thousands of supporters dressed in white and

marched for an extension of the deadline for ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment [15].

Nowadays, political figures keep using the color of the suffrage movement in order to continue advocating for women's rights and representation. In 2016, Hillary Clinton used a white pantsuit during her first speech as the Democratic presidential nominee and the first woman to make it past the primary election; Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez wore a white suit in 2019 as she became the youngest member of Congress in history; while Nancy Pelosi, speaker of the White House, wore an all-white ensemble during the State of the Union address in 2020 [16].

3.2 Zoot Suit

The zoot suit is an example of fashion representing ethnic minorities. During the early 1940s, before the United States entered the Second World War, it became a symbolic style of the Mexican–American community that felt excluded from the American society.

Long jackets with padded shoulders, high-waisted ballooned trousers, shiny shoes, and borsalino hats conformed the zoot suit. This extravagant style was born in the African American community, especially among jazz musicians, in the 1930s. Later on, it was adopted by ethnic minorities like Mexican Americans, Asians, and Italians. By 1943, the zoot suit was well established among young men born in the United States but with Mexican descent—most of them belonging to first and second generations—that lived in Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York [17]. They found in fashion a means of unity and identity in times when they were excluded by nationalist Americans. According to Kathy Peiss [18], “the spread of the zootsuit shows how rapidly and successfully a style could take hold when it seemed to embody the sense of generational identity and affiliation sharpened by the war and its aftermath.”

In June 1943, after a series of altercations between a group of Mexican–Americans and American nationalists, riots erupted in various cities, especially in Los Angeles. This escalated the racial tension with the Mexican community that had been latent for years.

The zoot suit became a fashion and political statement of the *pachucos*, as members of the Mexican–American community called themselves, and used it as a form of cultural expression and resistance. Eventually, the riots calmed down, but the empowerment and identity of the zoot suiters remained. They became a key element of the Chicano movement during the Civil Rights era and kept fighting for participation and visibility in education and fair pay. The style of the zoot suiters became a symbol of the struggles faced by the Latino community in the United States, and raised awareness of the cultural oppression that they were withstanding [19].

3.3 *Black Panthers and Civil Rights Movement*

During the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, the Black Panther Party became a key player of Black Nationalism, along with its fashion statement. As stated on a recent *Vogue* article [20], “the Black Panthers used clothing both to seize power and to resist it, adopting a uniform of leather jackets and berets to signify their deputization as a counter–police force.”

While the Black Panthers’ uniform became one of the emblematic symbols of the Civil Rights movement, other expressions of African heritage also emerged during those years. Since the foundation of the whole movement was a feeling of “black pride coupled with a strong sense of urgency for equality” [21], different types of accessories, garments, and hairstyles were used by activists and supporters to show the pride they held for their African identity.

The colorful Kente cloth, used in both clothing and accessories, gained popularity through the 1960s. Its bright colors made the wearer impossible to miss and sent out a clear message of the African heritage among the American community. It was publicly worn by Muhammad Ali during a trip to Africa in 1964 and has been incorporated into African American festivities such as Martin Luther King Day, Kwanzaa, and Black History Month [21].

Nevertheless, radical factions of the movement, such as the Black Panthers, found the Kente cloth to be too popular, commodified, and alienated from its original purpose. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, founders of the Black Panther Party, composed the official uniform for the Black Panther members in 1966, which “included a black leather jacket, powder blue shirt, black pants and shoes, and a black beret” [22]. The beret, as a symbol of paramilitary action, communicated the revolutionary intentions and empowerment of the Black Panthers, separating them from other nonviolent factions of the movement. The Black Panthers, as the rest of the Civil Rights movement, claimed for housing, education, justice, and peace [23]. Their black head-to-toe style showed their unshakable position to take on their own hands the change that the government was failing to give them.

The afro hairstyle also became a fashion statement of the Civil Rights movement and helped to amplify the “Black is Beautiful” campaign [24], where African Americans decided to embrace their natural curly hair, liberating themselves from the Eurocentric standards of beauty.

The styles that emerged from these movements gained a lot of recognition and were adopted by young people and college students throughout the United States that supported the fight for African American equality. The advertisement and film industries also took on these elements—headed by the beret and the afro—that began as political statements and turned into fashion icons.

Though adopted by the popular culture, the Black Panthers’ style maintained its revolutionary spirit throughout time. Beyoncé’s performance in the 2016 Super Bowl became widely talked about as she sang along a group of all-black dancers wearing afros, black leather bodysuits, and berets. In 2020, model Adwoa Aboah appeared next to soccer player, Marcus Rashford, on the cover of British *Vogue*’s

September issue wearing a leather skirt, black turtleneck sweater, and beret. Both appearances took place during the Black Lives Matter protests of the recent years.

3.4 *Student Protests*

1968 was an iconic year for the youth around the world. From the riots in France against economic and social conservative values to the protests in the United States demanding to stop the Vietnam War, the student movement in Mexico City that finished in a brutal repression, and the Prague Spring, that year was defined by the urge to disrupt the social order that was established until then. And part of the social order was fashion.

Classical shapes and colors were disregarded in favor of more vibrant colors, synthetic fabrics, and fitted silhouettes. Fashion firms like Givenchy, Saint Laurent, and Pierre Cardin bloomed as they caught up with the new ideals, while traditional fashion firms like Coco Chanel were seen as old school [25].

While there was not a unique piece of garment that solely represented these tumultuous times, the fashion choices made by the youth of 1968 symbolized their rebellious intentions. As part of the sexual revolution and female empowerment, women wore baker boy hats and dressed in miniskirts—made popular a couple of years before by designer Mary Quant—and jeans to assert their individual identity and challenge the roles that had been imposed to them. “The miniskirt was an extraordinary phenomenon and had a big impact because it was part of the emerging youth culture of the 1960s and it was very much an expression of that youth culture and also of the beginnings of the sexual liberation movement due to the invention of the birth control pill. So it was kind of a historic moment,” stated Valerie Steele, director of the Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, in a *BBC* article in 2014 [26].

1968s impact in society, culture, and fashion marked its generation so deeply that 50 years after the riots, many fashion designers channeled the style of the protesters. During Paris Fashion Week 2018, fashion firms like Gucci, Etam, Dior, Sonia Rykiel, and Camaïeu presented garments, accessories, and staged performances that reminded of those rebellious times [27].

Sonia Rykiel presented a new handbag named *Le pavé parisien* (Parisian cobblestone) as a tribute to the French protests held five decades earlier. In a similar sense, Gucci released the advertising campaign for its Pre-Fall 2018 collection with a short film called *Gucci Dans Les Rues* featuring “young rebels occupying a university campus in a gesture of optimism, idealism and passion” [28], where the participants wore Gucci from head to toe. Furthermore, the Autumn/Winter 2018 Dior collection was inspired by the imagery of the 1968 protests and featured the Musée Rodin—the show’s venue—with signs that read “protest” and “women’s rights are human rights,” while models wore patchwork jackets, kilts, biker boots, and baker boy hats [29].

3.5 *Punk Movement*

Punk, which originated as a youth subculture in England's mid-1970s, culminated as a worldwide iconic fashion trend that displayed a counternarrative and disruptive ideology.

London's depressed economy and social decline of the 1970s were the boiling point of a youthful reaction of discontent against the established system. Punk became an expression of anger and frustration against Britain's failure to create a modern economy and became a "visual and social revolution that used fashion, graphics and behavior as a strategy to challenge dominant ideology and capitalism" [30].

The distinctive punk style included ripped jeans and tank tops, accessories with studs and spikes, graffiti T-shirts with provocative images, safety pins, fetish and bondage gear, leather pants, extreme hairstyles like dyed mohawks, and multiple piercings and tattoos [31]. The visual defiance of these elements not only expressed the internal unrest of the wearers but also reflected "social ugliness back to people" [30].

Vivienne Westwood is widely recognized as punk's creator for the visibility she gave to the recently emerged street style while working with early punk bands. Westwood opened the SEX clothing shop with her boyfriend, Malcolm McLaren, which in 1976 "became the center of the punk fashion scene and many young punks hung out, worked, or bought clothes" [32]. Meanwhile, McLaren, alongside with Westwood, managed the famous band The Sex Pistols and created a symbiotic relationship between music and fashion that became key for the punk movement.

In an interview for an article of *The Guardian* [33], Vivienne Westwood stated that "punk was a protest. [The clothes] said, 'We don't accept your taboos, we don't accept your hypocritical life.' I've always been a rebel." And her rebellious attitude took punk—alongside other designers like Zandra Rhodes—from street style to a trend that appeared in fashion shows and catwalks.

Another iconic element of the punk style was its do-it-yourself character. The look is associated with clothing that has been destroyed and then put back together, with an unfinished and deteriorating quality that reminds of a postmodern nature. This type of deconstructionist fashion continues to be present with contemporary fashion designers like Rei Kawakubo and Martin Margiela [32].

Punk was a way to give misfits a place, to deconstruct fashion itself, and to question the established ideas of quality. In this manner, "fashion items were given a new autonomy that they previously did not have, which was to have an intentionality and a signifying value that was declamatory, if not brash and abrasive" [30].

3.6 *The Slogan T-Shirt*

As a blank canvas, the simplicity of the T-shirt has proven ideal for communicating messages that are impossible to miss.

Since the 1950s, American college sports teams, small businesses, and the entertainment industry used the T-shirt to promote and identify themselves. With the consolidation of the popular culture in the following years, band logos—like the tongue and lips of the Rolling Stones—were printed on tees for fans to visibly display their musical interests. It became a way of identification between groups, to distinguish themselves from others and to cross paths with those with similar interests.

The T-shirt also became a way to protest against political issues like the Vietnam War [34], thus consolidating itself as an authentic form of expression. As stated in a *Vogue* [35] article, “the garment became a blank slate for messages, whether political, advertorial, graphic or humorous.”

During the rise of the punk movement, Vivienne Westwood and Malcolm McLaren used the graphic tee as a key element for stating the punk ideology. Moreover, designer Katharine Hamnett made fashion activism history by wearing a T-shirt with an antinuclear message that read “58% Don't Want Pershing” while meeting Margaret Thatcher in 1984 [34].

Protest T-shirts are a specific form of “discursive activism” [36] that work as a means of contestation, exchange, and starter of conversations. In a *Bloomsbury* [37] interview with Stephanie Talbot, author of *Slogan T-shirts: Cult and Culture*, she stated that “slogan T-shirts reflect the values of their wearer. There is something compelling about wearing words across your chest, because in effect you are broadcasting your personal thoughts, opinions, lifestyle choices. . . .”

Therefore, the slogan T-shirt hasn't gone out of fashion and keeps appearing whenever social and political statements have to be made and seen. Designer Maria Grazia Chiuri presented a slogan tee that read “We Should All Be Feminists” in the Spring/Summer 2017 collection for Dior, and Hamnett turned once again to this way of protest by launching a “Cancel Brexit” T-shirt in 2017.

“The T-shirt remains a great vehicle for making a point. Though, as Katharine Hamnett says, you can wear the T-shirt but you need to take action as well,” said Dennis Nothdruff [29], curator of the *T-shirt: Cult, Culture, Subversion* exhibition at London's Fashion and Textile Museum that took place on 2018.

3.7 *Black Lives Matter*

Black Lives Matter stands as one of the first social movements where designers, brands, and celebrities used fashion and their platforms to speak up against racism.

The movement began in 2013 after the manslaughter of black teenager Trayvon Martin by the hands of police officer George Zimmerman [38]. The movement

started brewing on social media with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter, which now accompanies the communication regarding protests and activist pledges to end racism. The Black Lives Matter slogan—turned hashtag—has served to spark discussions about race and equality around the world and to generate a networked movement [39].

The protests and calls for action have reactivated during several incidents of police brutality against black citizens on the second half of the last decade. Nevertheless, it was in 2018 and 2020 with the deaths of Stephon Clark, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd that the movement deeply impacted the fashion industry.

Decades after the founding of the Black Panther Party, the urgency for justice and equality for black people has regained force and is being imprinted on slogan T-shirts, the “unofficial uniform of today’s activists” [40]. In 2020, celebrities and athletes supported the movement by wearing T-shirts with powerful statements such as “I Can’t Breathe” worn by basketball player LeBron James, “BLM” sported by actor Sterling K. Brown, and “Arrest The Cops Who Killed Breonna Taylor” used by racing driver Lewis Hamilton.

While the protests for George Floyd’s killing flooded the streets of Minneapolis, designers and brands were quick to express their support across their platforms. Reebok posted on its Instagram account: “Without the black community, Reebok would not exist. America would not exist. We are not asking you to buy our shoes. We are asking you to stand in someone else’s.” And Nike released a commercial that urged its consumers to stop racist attitudes with the phrase: “For Once, Don’t Do It.” The general online response for this commercial was positive, due to Nike’s coherent history of supporting social and racial justice [41].

Many other brands took to social media to show their support for Black Lives Matter, like Rihanna’s lingerie brand Savage x Fenty, Target, Uniqlo, the Kering group, Loewe, Gucci, Stella McCartney, Marc Jacobs, Prabal Gurung, and Warby Parker, among others. Many of the latter also made generous contributions to foundations related to the movement [42].

According to Fernando Orejuela [39], “the Black Lives Matter movement is not the civil rights movement. It is something else. It is a motivating, dynamic movement still developing in the second millennium, mobilizing similar programs, organizations, and interested allies protesting racial injustice today to work together.” Thus, fashion brands and designers have found in their platforms a channel to assert themselves as allies of the movement.

3.8 #MeToo

Although used previously for sexual abuse cases, the #MeToo slogan turned into a movement with mediatic impact in 2017 when the *New York Times* published an investigation for years of sexual violence allegations against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein [43].

The story disseminated quickly among the film industry, and many victims of sexual abuse entered the conversation. On October 2017, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted: “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” Hundreds of women responded automatically with the #MeToo hashtag and, by the following year, over 19 million people—mostly women—had shared their experiences of sexual harassment [44]. The #MeToo hashtag across social media became a “connective tissue” [44] and platform where millions of victims could be heard and seen.

Then, during the 2018 Golden Globe Awards, the red carpet turned black as a symbol of female solidarity. The stars that attended the event used their clothes to send a message about gender parity. “The goal was to replace the red carpet fashion conversation with one about gender equity and workplace safety” [45], thus turning the question of the carpet to “Why are you wearing black?” [46] instead of “Who are you wearing?”

Black became the color of the night, leaving behind the usual conversation about designers and becoming a symbol of solidarity. Activists were invited to walk the red carpet with the head-to-toe dressed in black actresses involved with the Time’s Up initiative, which worked alongside the #MeToo movement in the fashion industry. Meryl Streep was accompanied by Ai-Jen Poo, from the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and Michelle Williams was seen next to Tarana Burke, one of the founders of the #MeToo social movement [45]. Natalie Portman, Debra Messing, Elisabeth Moss, Penélope Cruz, Salma Hayek, and Angelina Jolie, among other actresses, also took the black uniform to show solidarity during the event.

Since then, the conversation has slowly faded, but the core of the initiative permeated in many industries—mainly in fashion and film—to provide safer work conditions and equal payment for women. “The context has changed, and in fashion, context is all. Engagement with the world is what makes fashion more than simply clothes. It is, quite literally, what makes it fashion” [47].

3.9 US 2020 Elections

The fashion industry sided with democracy and sent a clear message during the 2020 elections in the United States: vote. Therefore, in the months prior to November 3, designers and fashion firms launched “vote” merchandise as the latest trend.

Brands found in the elections an excellent opportunity to connect with consumers. According to data presented in a *Business of Fashion* article [48], “60 percent of Americans agreed they would like to see brands, including fashion brands, ‘encourage people to vote,’ and 65 percent showed support for brands participating in the political process.”

A new generation of young fashion consumers look for brands that share their values and expect them to get involved with social problems and make ethical statements. In past years, brands tended to avoid taking part in political issues, but now there is no possibility of staying quiet. When political action aligns with a

brand's core values and past actions, it strengthens its relationship with customers and boosts its engagement. According to an interview to fashion business consultant Robert Burke in a *Vogue* article [49], "the shift in attitude is being driven by social media and the direct communications it drives between brands and consumers."

Michael Kors sold a cashmere sweater with the word "vote" stitched into it, and 100% of its sales benefited the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. Levi's launched a Vote About It campaign with model Hailey Bieber in order to engage first-time voters from Gen Z to participate in the elections [48]. Patagonia stitched the words "Vote the assholes out" into the labels of its shorts. Saks Fifth Avenue registered voters at its New York flagship. Warby Parker and Tory Burch paid their employees to volunteer at the polls, while Ralph Lauren declared Election Day as a company holiday [49].

Many other brands and designers publicly sided with candidate Joe Biden by participating in the Believe in Better merchandise collection. Brother Vellies, Proenza Schouler, Edie Parker, Gabriela Hearst, Thom Browne, Joseph Altuzarra, Tory Burch, Jonathan Cohen, Carly Cushnie, Kathryn and Lizzie Fortunato, Victor Glemaud, Prabal Gurung, Thakoon Panichgul, Monique Péan, Joe Perez, Vera Wang, and Jason Wu conformed the list of top designers that endorsed the Democratic presidential nominee [50].

Fashion Our Future 2020 was launched on September of the same year as an initiative focused on encouraging voter registration. Its objective was to "unite voices from the fashion community in a coordinated effort to galvanize the youth vote" [51]. FoF2020 joined forces with New York Fashion Week, Voto Latino and designers and brands such as Virgil Abloh, Brandon Maxwell, Proenza Schouler, Rachel Comey, Lemlem, and Good American, among others.

As for political figures, Michelle Obama wore a "V-O-T-E" gold necklace during her speech at the digital Democratic National Convention, and Jill Biden sported black boots with the word "VOTE" spelled in silver letters when she accompanied her husband, Joe Biden, to the ballot box in Delaware.

During the 2021 Presidential Inauguration Ceremony, what America's leaders wore was almost as important as what they said. Vice President Kamala Harris wore a purple ensemble by emerging designer Christopher John Rogers that channeled the suffragette movement of the 1900s, and her pearl necklace honored a tradition of her college sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha, the oldest all-black sorority of the United States. Jill Biden chose a blue tweed coat by emerging designer, Alexandra O'Neill of the American label Markarian, while later in the evening for the inauguration concert, she wore a white dress and coat that also honored the suffragettes. Finally, President Biden sported a suit by American designer Ralph Lauren who was born in the Bronx and represents the American dream [52].

4 When Corporate Activism Meets Fashion and Social Media

Companies, especially from the fashion industry, have increased their involvement in social, political, and environmental issues in the past years. The times when brands stayed quiet and avoided taking stands in public issues are long gone, and now their consumers demand them to speak up and share their values.

Although there is still scarce academic bibliography regarding the role of companies in social change through activism, Meike Eilert and Abigail Nappier Cherup define corporate activism as “a company’s willingness to take a stand on social, political, economic, and environmental issues to create societal change by influencing the attitudes and behaviors of actors in its institutional environment” [53].

It is usually taken that companies develop political strategies to increase their market position and strengthen their consumer engagement, but recent studies—like the one held in 2021 by Cory Maks-Solomon and Josiah Mark Drewry [54]—have also shown that internal employee organizations have an important role to pressure management to take public stands advocating for certain policies. They also suggest that “in the interest of maintaining positive relationships with their local community and with their employees who are a subset of that community, companies may seek to align their political activities on cultural issues with the community’s established preferences.” Finally, another reason for companies engaging in corporate activism is to stay in sync with other brands within their field and not to be seen out of line and detached from their peers.

Whether they sell merchandise, make generous donations to affiliated organizations, or post an institutional statement on their social media, companies are compelled to participate and use their visibility to support social causes within the public sphere. In the case of slogan T-shirts or themed merchandise, “design for a valued person-product relationship requires a deeper understanding of the drivers and personal reasons for purchases by consumers” [55].

In the 2021 State of Fashion report [56], it is noted that “consumers are demanding more from brands in their engagement with socio-political values.” Gen Z, which conformed more than 40% of global consumers in 2020, are the most “politically active age group on social platforms” [56] and have a strong tendency to take online action and use hashtags regarding social issues. The impact on social media from this new generation added to the rising spending power of millennials—who also expect the brands they love to share their own values—is at the core of the growth of corporate activism.

The fashion industry does not only sell shoes, dresses, and handbags, but the aspiration of becoming a better version of ourselves. Therefore, values and feelings are easily translatable into campaigns and communication strategies. And in an era when consumers are losing their trust in government institutions, they are turning to brands to represent the causes that they believe in, whether it’s race, gender equality, human rights, or democracy [57].

Hence, corporate silence is not an option anymore. Brands, designers, and companies that might be doubtful about speaking out are pressured by consumers and their own peers to take a stand, “sitting on the sidelines looks less like prudence and more like cowardice” [57]. Following the Spiral of Silence Theory [58], companies are afraid of social isolation—a reputational crisis or simply being left behind—and take on issues that are generally approved by the public sphere. Uplifting and positive messages that envision a better world—like racial equality or a cleaner planet—are part of the social conversation that brands are almost required to take. In order to stay on the positive side of the public opinion, brands and designers take public stands that support these initiatives. And as long as their messages seem authentic and aligned with their past actions, consumers reaffirm their loyalty toward them.

In the social media era, fashion has a responsibility to take and a voice to raise. A viewpoint is now being demanded from the actors of the fashion industry—from designers and brands to models and photographers. They are being called to use their public visibility for a greater purpose, and consumers are siding with the brands that represent their values not just by wearing the clothes but by using their spending power. As stated in a *Vogue* article, “designers aren’t just making clothes—alongside activists and organizers, they’re making change. And that’s a selling point” [20].

Nevertheless, for brands and companies, authenticity and transparency are key when advocating for social and political issues in their public agenda. Whenever statements or initiatives feel false—or out of line with past corporate actions—companies can fall into a reputational crisis with backlash from their consumers. For example, in June 2020 during the Black Lives Matter protests, Urban Outfitters posted on its social media a message of support but was quickly called out as “hypocritical” for instances of internal racism within the company. Similar cases occurred with other brands like Everlane, Away, or Reformation when they were accused of not being honest with their support to BLM due to “toxic work environments.” Social media empowers users and consumers to speak out and tell their own story regarding brands and companies. Many times uncomfortable truths come out, but sometimes false accusations can also harm the reputation of a brand. Therefore, transparency and consistency are key for brands and companies to play on a safe field when their involvement in fashion activism is a must.

Corporate activism in the era of social media has an enormous range of action and possibilities for making a change, but a careful strategy is crucial when millions of eyes are observing their every move and consumers are asking brands for accountability.

5 Conclusion

The historical review of fashion activism, as well as the theoretical framework presented throughout this paper, demonstrated the possibilities of the fashion industry to actively participate in the public opinion regarding social and political issues.

And so, when protesters go home from marching, brands keep the momentum of the conversation with the immense reach of their social media.

It is important to signal the key role that social media has played in the flourishing of fashion activism. Brands and designers have found in their mediatic visibility a powerful platform to send supporting messages and communicate their concrete actions regarding social issues.

As the use of hashtags and posts on social media has become socially approved—and even required—when taking a stand on current situations, companies are being pressured by their consumers, peers, and own employees to speak up and publicly demonstrate their stand. For this reason, the question that arises is: Are designers and brands supporting these causes because of a moral duty and social commitment, or are they just doing it for peer pressure to join the conversation?

Looking deeply into the historical review of this paper, could it be that fashion activism used to be more authentic before social media made it socially acceptable to fight for a cause? And if so, what is preferable? A less mediatic movement but driven by pure conviction? Or an extremely visible movement in media outlets and social media that is driven only by a marketing strategy or peer pressure?

Are companies and brands doing enough? Are we, as consumers, doing enough? Is using hashtags and posting on social media enough? There is yet much research to be done regarding the true impact of fashion activism in the new digital era. What is true, though, is that the strongest aspect of fashion emerges when it speaks loudly and boldly. And that speaking up and raising awareness of social issues is when fashion takes on its true power to influence the public opinion.

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Rallying Hashtags as a Tool for Societal Change in Fashion



Olga Karamalak  and Lorenzo Cantoni 

Abstract The influencing power of hashtags cannot be overestimated since they can be used as facilitators of some societal change calling for collective action. Following the influential social identity model of collective action (SIMCA) presented by Van Zomeren, Postmes, and Spears (*Psychological Bulletin* 134(4): 504–35, 2008), social identity together with collective efficacy beliefs and perceived injustice leads to collective action. Perceived injustice in the fashion domain is usually associated with sustainable fashion which in this paper has a broad concept of being both environmentally and socially friendly. It presumes a call for fighting against environmental pollution including overconsumption and raising awareness of ethical issues such as racism, sexism, ageism, poor working conditions, and low wages in the fashion industry. This paper discusses hashtags' linguistic and digital characteristics, which could enhance influence on Internet users. The focus is on the rallying affordances of hashtags in the fashion domain, which help raise awareness of environmental and ethical issues. Top-down hashtags promoted by the Fashion Revolution group such as #FashionRevolution, #WhoMadeMyClothes, #sustainablefashion, #slowfashion, #ethicalfashion, #haulternative, and #LovedClothesLast are under investigation. The analysis proves hashtags' influencing power and discusses achieved changes due to social hashtagged campaigns.

Keywords Fashion · Hashtags · Collective action · Online activism · Sustainability · Ethical issues

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1 Introduction

ICT allows for multimedia content publication and high interactivity, offering endless opportunities to explore, vote, buy, customize, connect, share, exchange, copy, ask for, and provide advice [1]. ICT also allows for online collective action or protest. Nowadays digital or online activism is becoming more widespread and is used to raise awareness, rally, set activist agendas, debate, and criticize. Greijdanus et al. [2] argue that in most cases online activism is related to offline protests because posts on the Internet trigger the mobilization of the group offline.

Doerr [3] states that fashion itself can be used as a vehicle to protest. Fashion activists widely use digital social media (DSM) to involve Internet users in a social grouping to influence and further spread values and beliefs concerning sustainable and/or ethical fashion. DSM are computer-based tools (such as websites and apps) that people use to create and share content with other people and organize collectively [4].

DSM is easily organized and navigated nowadays by hashtags which help users find and retrieve information and become part of the community. Hashtags possess great influencing power due to their digital affordances and verbal attractiveness. They can be used as facilitators of societal change calling for collective action. According to Zappavigna [5], a hashtag is metadata embedded in social media contexts or social metadata. Metadata is data about data, which “says” what the post is about [6]. This metadata creates “conversational tagging” [7] and makes a post “searchable” [5] and retrievable. The social aspect of it is in the ability to create communities [8].

Xiong et al. [9] sum up that an emerging line of research centers around “hashtag activism” [10–15], which has been defined as the “act of fighting for or supporting a cause with the use of hashtags as the primary channel to raise awareness of an issue and encourage debate via social media” [16]. Hashtags help people act collectively: distribute the information about social injustice, make the problem visible, involve more people, make similar posts, group them together, and, thus, raise awareness of the issue online or even create offline campaigns. While there is a lot of literature on hashtag activism, in general there is a lack of information on hashtag activism in the fashion domain. This paper sheds light on this particular problem.

Social fashion campaigns can mostly be divided into two metacommunicative frameworks of hashtags advanced by Daer, Hoffman, and Goodman [17]: critiquing and rallying. Expressing negative judgment on a particular case by common users or influencers can be a trigger for a social movement against some injustice, while rallying hashtags are originated by professionals to bring awareness to fashion injustice or gather support for a campaign.

This research discusses the sociopsychological conditions for collective action in the fashion industry together with hashtags’ linguistic and digital conditions, which enhance the influence on the online users and analyze some most frequently encountered top-down rallying hashtags in the fashion domain.

2 Methodology

First, the following three main conditions for hashtags' influencing effect and collective action emergence are discussed: sociopsychological [18], digital, and linguistic.

Second, based on Instagram, Twitter, and the Fashion Revolution website, seven popular rallying hashtags are analyzed. Taking into account two taxonomies, top-down and bottom-up [19], the focus is on top-down hashtags initiated by the Fashion Revolution group who are considered to be opinion leaders and include the following hashtags: #FashionRevolution, #WhoMadeMyClothes, #sustainablefashion, #slowfashion, #ethicalfashion, #haulternative, and #LovedClothesLast.

3 Conditions for Digital Collective Action in the Fashion Domain

According to SIMCA, any collective action requires three main prerequisites: (1) social identity, (2) beliefs in collective efficacy, and (3) perceived injustice [18]. Later the authors specified that collective efficacy can be replaced by "participatory efficacy." While collective efficacy refers to the belief that "we as a group can reach our goals," participative efficacy refers to the belief that one's own actions will contribute to achieving group goals [20]. Undoubtedly, both collective and participatory types of efficacy refer to the achievement of group goals; however, participatory efficacy addresses the incremental contribution of one's own action to the group goal. According to Wright, Taylor, and Moghaddam, "a group member engages in collective action any time that she or he is acting as a representative of the group and the action is directed at improving conditions of the entire group" [21]. Nowadays digital or online activism is becoming more widespread and is used for emancipatory actions to raise awareness, rally, set activist agendas, debate, or criticize something.

Social identity is the part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his/her knowledge of his/her membership of a social group or groups and from the value and emotional significance attached to that membership [22]. Social identity can be explained as the awareness of self via belonging to some social group [23]. Users of different social platforms organize communities where they are able to share common interests, values, and beliefs. A hashtag presents a clickable hyperlink or metadata that can help to express one's identity and provides the opportunity of establishing and increasing the circulation in the community.

In order to induce collective action, the sender of a fashion-related hashtagged message makes the promoted values popular and appealing to the reader, for example, social and environmental sustainability, so that the perceivers of the message consider themselves to be associated and identified with this idea and

Table 1 Social marketing effectiveness framework^a

| Levels of effectiveness | Changes | Result | Method of measurement |
|-------------------------|---|--|---|
| Awareness | Increase in awareness of issue | Individual changes in awareness | Audience surveys |
| Engagement | Change of attitude, contemplation of behavior change | Behavior responses to the intervention, individual changes | Audience surveys, behavior at data |
| Behavior | Individual behavior change | Individual changes in behavior | Audience surveys, behavioral data |
| Social norm | Diffusion of the desired behavior change, sustainability, political environment (legislation) | Normative changes in attitude and behavior | Media, political tracking, observation |
| Well-being | Improvement in quality of life for both individuals and society | Change in social and environmental outcomes | Social report, environmental and epidemiological data |

From Luca and Suggs [25]

^aAdapted from Varcoe [26]

campaign, and then a belief in “participatory efficacy” is embedded either implicitly or explicitly, for example: “There are many ways you can be a Fashion Revolutionary. Use your voice and your power to make positive change” [24]. Consequently, they promote the idea that everyone can make a considerable change by participating in this stream. What is the most important for any collective action to appear is a revealed injustice.

While it is very difficult to measure and evaluate such digital campaigns, it is important to understand that they might have very different—even if related—goals. According to Luca and Suggs [25], who moved from a proposal by Varcoe [26], there are five different levels of effectiveness of a social marketing campaign, as depicted in Table 1.

Hashtags can help in reaching all goals but are particularly relevant to raise awareness of an issue, eventually promoting engagement (e.g., liking, reposting, adopting) and individual behavioral changes (e.g., different and more sustainable consumption practices). Society at large might be touched, on the medium to long run, through changes in social norms and impact on well-being.

Hashtags agitating for collective action in the field of fashion are directed to the issue of sustainable fashion. The concept of “sustainability” has been circulating among academics, fashion practitioners, ordinary people, and activists for years and is still hotly debated. A recent manifest on research in fashion communication has indicated it as a topic deserving further research [27].

According to Chabowski, Mena, and Gonzales-Padron [28], sustainability refers to a business goal that seeks to make a positive environmental, social, and economic impact. Sustainable fashion is an umbrella term that includes two main aspects: environmental and social. As Jestratijevic and Rudd [29] claim, some fashion brands promote sustainable commitments only through pro-environmental improvements forgetting about pro-social issues which undermine the true meaning of the term

“sustainable.” Consequently, sustainable fashion should include both eco fashion and ethical fashion which encourages a respectful attitude to people. Sustainability is an issue that expands on a product’s whole life cycle, starting from its design and production, moving on to its maintenance and disposal. Mora, Rocamora, and Volonté argue that sustainability “should be at the heart of the production of immaterial contents; questions must be addressed regarding the pervasive endurance of the many homogenizing and stereotyping visions of beauty, health and success that are typical of mainstream models of western fashion” [30].

A sustainable imagery should combine principles of equality, fairness, and humanity. According to Candeloro [31], sustainability is becoming one of the main trends within our society, and online communication is crucial to influence customers and to deliver sustainable purchase behavior. The word “sustainable” presumes environmentally friendly, adequately consumed, socially fair, and transparent fashion industry aimed at quality rather than quantity.

Fashion activists raise concerns over environmental pollution, overconsumption mainly due to fast fashion, and social injustice toward those who make clothes (poor working conditions, long working hours, low wages, child labor, etc.). Other types of injustice can be associated with the result of intangible contents promoted by fashion, cultural or racial discriminations, sexism, imposed beauty standards, ageism, etc.

While in several cases such issues might be due to fast fashion, which could encourage a consumeristic approach to clothing and might push competition on price too far, so to impact workers’ salaries and product quality, also high-end fashion and even haute couture are not exempt from such criticisms, as it has been documented, for instance, in “Inside Italy’s Shadow Economy” by the *New York Times* [32]. Moreover, it is important to avoid an elitist and naïve approach to the issue, which in the end blames people who cannot afford costly items, as if they are the main cause of lack of sustainability in the sector [33].

4 Digital Affordances of Hashtags to Establish Collective Action

To foster online social revolutions, hashtags are used intensively due to their digital affordances or opportunities. Information spreads faster online than offline. Different social platforms have their own affordances and constraints. While Instagram is more marketing oriented with a visual turn, Twitter is more for reading news and sharing information. While a tweet is limited to 280 characters, an Instagram caption can contain up to 2200 characters and 30 hashtags. On Instagram, users usually post hashtags after the post (text or a picture), while on Twitter hashtags are usually intertwined in the context of the post. Furthermore, both platforms appeal to different user needs. Twitter is mainly used for sharing and following information and news and participating in conversations [34, 35], Twitter hashtags can mark the ebb and

flow of public discussions and events [36]. Instagram, on the other hand, is oriented toward self-expression, entertainment [34, 37], and marketing. Posts on Twitter and Instagram are generally contextually similar but not identical with the consistent use of hashtags.

Two types of tagging are used (# and @). Posts usually contain hashtags which either follow them or are intertwined within the post and serve as highlighters. Hashtags can be used as a tool to start, accelerate, expand, and maintain online social movements due to their basic affordances such as (1) becoming visible and searchable/retrievable for orientation and navigation, marking a topic for categorization [5, 6, 38, 39], (2) referencing to itself or other posts (metadata) [5, 40], (3) linking people and communities together [5, 41, 42], and (4) maintaining social conformity being compliant with social practices. These affordances make hashtags one of the best facilitators of social movements.

Specific affordances marked by Daer, Hoffman, and Goodman [17] such as critiquing and rallying contribute to establishing, expanding, and maintaining online social activism. Supplying a post with some critiquing hashtags makes it easier to make a judgement about the content or rally about some cases of injustice. Judging and critiquing hashtags are used by online users or customers as a feedback on some injustice and are not used by fashion brand officials since, undoubtedly, their main goal is to promote fashion items rather than to reveal any injustice associated with the product.

5 Linguistic Characteristics of Fashion-Related Hashtags to Encourage Collective Action

To become popular and be successfully spread further, hashtags need to be concise but informative, memorable, recognizable, and consistent (a campaign should use one and the same hashtag continuously throughout many posts). Below are some linguistic solutions used in the hashtags to trigger collective action.

Fashion Revolution started its campaign for sustainable fashion with #whomademyclothes, which has the syntactic structure of a question. It appears to be interactive and personal since it implies interaction between a customer and a producer where a customer is not someone out there, an unknown stranger but every one of us: my clothes—the indication to self-reference with the help of the personal pronoun. It activates participatory efficacy so crucial for collective action: if I ask a brand who made my clothes, I become part of a global sustainable fashion community and fight for safe and fair social and environmental conditions. Additionally, “who” in the hashtag helps to shift focus from an industrial/mechanical perspective—clothes are done by machines—toward a better understanding that extensive human labor is involved, hence social equity/sustainability is required. In fact, those faceless and voiceless “who” might be empowered (also) through the campaign, so that they can answer themselves and take action.

Most other hashtags, linguistically speaking, consist of a phrase: a premodifier in the form of an adjective and a noun such as #sustainablefashion, #slowfashion, #ethicalfashion, and #FashionRevolution (adjectival noun + noun). The adjectives collocate with “fashion” emphasize the main ideas of the social campaigns.

The hashtag #haulalternative is a blending of haul and alternative aimed at promoting less consumerism and giving a second life to a garment by refreshing it or buying second hand, swapping with a friend, etc. It refers to a haul, which is a video posted on the Internet in which a person discusses items that they recently purchased, sometimes going into detail about their experiences during the purchase and the cost of the items they bought. Hauls have been a growing trend during 2007–2016. The second part of the blended hashtag directs to an alternative: changing it and using it as something else one or more available possibilities. This linguistic form seems to make the hashtag more attractive and remarkable for online users, inviting them to generate associations and interpretations connected with this blending.

The same meaning introduces #LovedClothesLast with the attributive or adjective phrase, a noun, and a verb. This extended phrase has a repetition of the consonant “l” framing the word “clothes” making it more recognizable and easy to remember. Besides, it informs about the main sense of reusing the clothes and, thus, highlights sustainability.

6 Top-Down Rallying Hashtags

Top-down rallying hashtags calling for collective action are initiated and posted by opinion leaders in the fashion field, in particular, the Fashion Revolution group. In this paper, seven often used and discussed hashtags are outlined with the description of the perceived injustice and possible collective action to be triggered.

#fashionrevolution corresponds to the name of the website and the main global community for sustainable fashion that can be considered as a leader and the main influencer in this sphere. It is Fashion Revolution that has launched different campaigns aimed at sustainable fashion including #WhoMadeMyClothes. Their goal is to change the fashion industry making it environmentally and socially friendly. Fashion revolution creates social identity by describing who they are and attracting people to the community by highlighting the sense of togetherness. The participatory efficacy is revealed in calling for actions and emphasizing that everybody’s action can bring about a positive change. The Fashion Revolution team embraces different kinds of people involved in fashion from designers, retailers, business leaders, to writers and scholars. They want to reveal fashion-related injustices, starting from the disaster of Rana Plaza Dhaka, in Bangladesh, where, on April 24, 2013, a building collapsed, which housed five garment factories, and killed at least 1110 people and injured more than 2500 [43]. Fashion Revolution founders believe that no one should die for fashion, and they promote sustainable fashion demanding a fair and safe fashion industry. They bring awareness to poor working conditions, discrimination, overconsumption, etc. They implement

different campaigns for sustainable fashion and use hashtags as the brand name for their social campaigns to make them recognizable. Fashion revolution's goal is to trigger the following actions [24]: (1) ask brands #whomademyclothes? You can download and print these posters to use with your selfie, when asking brands/retailers #whomademyclothes? Download a [spreadsheet](#) with the Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram names of all the major brands; (2) send email to a brand; (3) use your voice on Twitter; (4) post on Instagram; (5) take the #haulalternative challenge; (6) write a postcard to a policymaker; (6) share your fashion love story; (7) write an email to a brand and ask #WhatsInMyClothes?; (8) fill in their name, sign yours, and share on social media, tagging the brand and @fash_rev; (9) spread educational resources; (10) host a digital event—Fashion Revolution Week; etc.

#WhoMadeMyClothes deserves attention because this campaign is famous not only among fashion experts but also among fashion followers and fashion lovers. The perceived injustice as mentioned above is the poor working conditions of people involved in fashion that caused the dramatic accident in Rana Plaza. The dramatic events in Rana Plaza served as a starting point for the campaign hashtagged with #whomademyclothes to reveal the origins of clothes. Orsola de Castro, an opinion leader, and fashion designer Carry Somers launched this global campaign with participation in over 100 countries in 2013 [44]. To fight for sustainable fashion in terms of fairer and better working conditions and the more transparent production of clothes, Fashion Revolution proposes the following ICT actions: to make a selfie with the premade poster free to download asking a brand or retailer #whomademyclothes and to post it on Instagram, Twitter, or Facebook and to email a brand, to express gratitude on Twitter to those who make clothes, and to ask a brand the same question. Many brands have been responding, and the campaign has been growing.

This movement has been widely present in online social media in the form of blogs, journal columns, and videos. The impact is substantial and can be witnessed in the following offline events: (1) the reinforcement of the UK Modern Slavery Act of 2015 [45]; (2) the enormous scope of Fashion Revolution Week of 2017 (Two million people were engaged with Fashion Revolution in April 2017 through events, posting on social media, viewing videos, or downloading resources from their website [46]; (3) the release of the campaign video for #whomademyclothes in 2018 and its worldwide popularity [47]; (4) the establishment of the Transparency Index in 2018. It caused about 172 brands across 68 countries to reveal more information on the clothes production (in response to the hashtag, #whomademyclothes, more than 3838 global brands also took to social media to respond with information about their suppliers and workers) [47]; and (5) the release of *Fixing Fashion* in February 2019, a report highlighting evidence from global fashion retailers, supply chain experts, and environmental leaders on what the sustainability climate of the UK fashion industry looked like [48].

#haulalternative [49] and *#LovedClothesLast* [50] are two hashtag campaigns advanced by Fashion Revolution. They encourage people to take part in the challenge of promoting fashion sustainability during fashion revolution week which has taken place annually in April since 2013 by demonstrating a video with the refreshed

clothes from your wardrobe instead of buying new ones. There are nine examples and topics of the second life of clothes according to which people should create their own videos: Love story, Broken but beautiful, Fashion fix, 2hand, Swap, DIY, Vintage, Hire, and Slow [49].

The general trend of sustainability in the fashion domain can be highlighted with the corresponding general hashtags *#sustainablefashion*, *#slowfashion*, and *#ethicalfashion* embracing the ideas of environmental protection, designing, and creating clothes which are qualitative, long-lasting, and socially friendly and promote equality. These general hashtags do not belong to any particular event where injustice can be strongly perceived like in *#fashionrevolution* and *#whomadeyourclothes*. They are directed at the main ideas which should be implemented to change the situation for the better in the fashion domain.

7 Discussion

The overview of top-down rallying hashtags posted by Fashion Revolution showed that they are all posted as a response to perceived injustice in the fashion domain. The Fashion Revolution group is focused on social injustice of people involved in fashion, mainly poor and even deadly working conditions, low salaries, and the environmental problems connected with overconsumerism. Some analyzed hashtags are general—they point to and promote what the campaign is fighting for *#fashionrevolution*, *#sustainablefashion*, *#slowfashion*, and *#ethicalfashion*, and others are more focused and aimed, for example, at asking the brand *#whomademyclothes* and raising awareness of the unbearable working conditions of those who make clothes. It makes people understand what might hide behind a garment.

The influencing power of most of the discussed hashtags can be witnessed by real collective action both online and offline which brought about different positive changes in the fashion domain and gained wide public outreach.

8 Conclusion

Behind a rallying hashtag, there should be a story which reveals a perceived injustice. A hashtag never goes alone; it is a part and parcel of the whole message which can be verbal and/or visual. A hashtag aimed at some societal change should be attractive, involving, recognizable, concise, easily remembered, and easily shared and referred to. A hashtag used in the context of social campaigns can be compared with a fashion brand name since its goal is to attract attention, become memorable and spread the idea, involve more people in it, and, finally, encourage some actions, for example, to spread the information further by sharing the post or commenting on it, to create one's own post with the same hashtag, to put likes showing approval and

personal involvement in the issue, to email a brand, to tell the story, or even to go protesting offline.

The overview of rallying hashtags in the fashion domain from sociopsychological, digital, and linguistic perspective can be helpful for those who study digital fashion communication and crisis communication, as well as for fashion activists, who are launching or maintaining some collective action. It generally contributes to the research on hashtags, digital collective action, and digital communication in fashion.

Further research can be directed to bottom-up hashtags which are triggered by Internet users as a response to injustice, for example, #boycottmoncler, #boycottHandM (#boycotthm), #boycottedolce, #boycottegucci, (#gucciblackface), #boycottprada, #boycottkatyperry, and #boycottburberry. Obviously all these hashtags are responses to some particular acts of injustice, which can be in the garment itself or in the immaterial content associated with a fashion house. Behind each boycott hashtag, there is a story of a cultural mistake that evoked injustice and launched a critiquing campaign against a brand calling for actions such as joining the campaign, raising awareness of an act of injustice, blaming the fashion house for such a communication mistake, and demanding punishment such as withdrawal of the garment from sales and apologies.

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Intercultural Crisis Communication on Social Media: A Case from Fashion



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Abstract The paper aims to address the issue of social media communication crises due to intercultural communication misunderstandings, presenting a relevant case study that involved the fashion industry. The case of Donata Meirelles, *Vogue Brazil* former director, who resigned after being accused over a “slavery party,” has been analyzed. The woman had in fact, to resign from her work after posting on Instagram photos of her 50th birthday party, sitting on an ornate throne surrounded by Afro-Brazilian women wearing white dresses. Criticism arose from many social media and Internet users, who interpreted the birthday party’s choices as a racist allusion to the colonial era, when Brazil heavily relied on slave labor, originating a debate, which led to an unexpected crisis. Through an in-depth analysis of the relevant posts on Instagram, the present study seeks to understand this type of intercultural communication crises by considering the importance of cultural localization, when it comes to communicate to different audiences also on digital platforms. A mixed research methodology, which includes the application of the attribution theory model to the results of a content analysis on Instagram (IG) and an analysis of the position of the Afro-Brazilian workers involved in the debate, has been chosen to perform the study.

Keywords Crisis communication · Digital fashion · Fashion communication · Intercultural communication · Localization · Social media

1 Introduction

Donata Meirelles’ case and her resignation from *Vogue Brazil*, in February 2019, after her 50th birthday party, is considered one of the clearest cases of intercultural communication crises generated by the use of social media within the fashion

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Fig. 1 Two images from the party. Donata Meirelles (<https://news.sky.com/story/vogue-brazil-executive-donata-meirelles-quits-over-slavery-party-picture-11638197>) (post deleted); Maria Lucia Hohan, Donata Meirelles' guest (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Btq3Gi6I9Y9>)

environment. Donata Meirelles, former *Vogue Brazil* style director, organized from February 8 until February 10, 2019, 3 days of party in Salvador the Bahia to celebrate her 50th birthday with guests from all over the world [1]. In occasion of the party, the woman also created a specific hashtag #doshow50 [2], which people could use on their social media, in particular, on Instagram, to share the images of the celebrations. Among the pictures that appeared on Instagram, through the ad hoc hashtag, were the lady and her guests sitting during the party on an ornate chair and surrounded by Afro-Brazilian workers dressed in white [3, 4] (Fig. 1).

These images have not gone unnoticed, and some Internet users triggered a reaction on the Web by starting to reutilize the hashtag #doshow50 to share their opinions on the posts of the party [5–7]. Users reacted in different ways to such images. Some of them found Donata Meirelles' idea to celebrate her birthday party in Bahia a tribute to the Afro-Brazilian culture and to its black community [8]; others, instead, reacted to it by accusing the lady of having organized a party, whose style reminded the colonialist times and whose symbols offended the *Candomblé* religion [9–11].

Many Internet users considered the chair used to take some of the pictures similar to the *cadeira de sinhá*, an ornate chair for slave masters. They found the presence of Afro-Brazilian workers dressed in white disrespectful, since, according to their opinions, the clothes that the Afro-Brazilian ladies were wearing were comparable to the white uniforms worn by house slaves [7, 9]. Despite on February 9, 2019, Donata Meirelles shared a message of apologies on Instagram (Fig. 2), in which she explained that the chairs were an artifact from the Afro-Brazilian folk religion *Candomblé* and that the attire of the Bahian workers were not slave uniforms but traditional clothes [12], the *Vogue Brazil* director after a few days had to resign from



Fig. 2 Donata Meirelles’ apologies (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Btq5iMBh9Xb>)

her position. Moreover, many Internet users did not accept the apologies and also accused the lady of not respecting *Candomblé* religion by using such chairs and other religious symbols for the party [9, 13].

Also, *Vogue Brazil* posted on its Instagram account a message of apologies (Fig. 3) by explaining its next actions put in place to fight racism and to increase empathy.

For the purposes of the present research, the reactions on social media at Donata Meirelles’ event raise different open questions for fashion stakeholders concerning the management of crisis communication. Social media have in fact amplified the media presence of people and have exposed private and public profiles to criticism or appreciation from other Internet users, in particular, when it comes to publish contents that can touch people’s cultural sensitiveness [14]. The study aims, therefore, to four main goals: (a) to reflect on the value of a properly designed communication strategy also when it comes to the use of personal digital profiles; (b) to focus the attention on a fashion case, where a cultural misunderstanding acquired considerable importance on the Web and, therefore, led to an unexpected crisis; (c) to determine, through a content analysis of Instagram posts, selected through the hashtag #doshow50, who has been identified by the social media users as the main responsible person of such crisis; and (d) to consider the point of view of the ABAM association, which employs Afro-Brazilian workers and was in charge to welcome the guests during the party.

Nota de esclarecimento



Fig. 3 Vogue apologies (<https://www.instagram.com/p/BtwzL97ISE6>)

2 Literature Review

The definition of fashion over the centuries has changed: the term moved from the Latin expression *factio* from *facere* (do, realize) to the Old French word *façon* and to the worldwide spread Middle English expression *fashion*, which means shape and appearance [15]. The word fashion and its related concept are also intertwining with the concepts of communication and culture [16].

Fashion is (also) a matter of communication, since the way people dress is something that goes beyond the only functional needs of clothing. Wearing clothes allows people to communicate who they are and/or who they would like to be; thanks to fashion and the way individuals dress, it is possible to enter in relation with other human beings, and it is possible to share (or not) particular meanings of each culture [15, 16].

Fashion is also closely connected with culture. The very term culture derives from the Latin verb *colere* (to care, to look after), which could be referred to (i) cultivating the environment—*agriculture*; (ii) to look after oneself and the others—*culture*; and to relate with God—*cult* [17]. Considering such layers within fashion, one can observe that (i) in order to produce clothes and cosmetics, people use natural materials or create new artificial ones; (ii) individuals dress themselves according to their own style, which is deeply influenced by their cultural context; and (iii) communities utilize specific clothes and cosmetics to communicate who they are during major happenings of human life—weddings, religious ceremonies, holidays, etc. [16].

In such a complex environment, where fashion cannot be considered independent from the concepts of culture and communication, and where digitalization has emphasized and accelerated the internationalization of processes and the spread of contents across the world, reducing the time needed to exchange data and information and facilitating operations, scholars and practitioners have been called to define and promote new strategies and processes in order to navigate and to further connect all the considered dimensions [14, 18]. Among such strategies, there is localization, which according to LISA can be defined as “the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets” (p. 13) [19]. Localization is emerging as an instrument to overcome spatial, temporal, and digital barriers and as a useful tool to face new communication challenges [20, 21]. Despite the importance recognized to localization activities by marketing and communication stakeholders, within the fashion domain not all the knots have been untied. Within the digital fashion domain, in fact, the mere application of technical localization strategies, such as the adaptation of elements like sizes, currencies, pictures, or calendars, cannot always help to avoid cultural crises [15].

2.1 Crisis Communication on Social Media

According to Guo-Ming [14], if from one side new media, in particular, social media, have led societies and communities to a highly interconnected dimension, on the other side, they have challenged the existence of intercultural communication in its traditional meaning. Therefore, three main fields of studies are emerging to further investigate the issue: (i) studies that consider the effects of national/ethnic culture on the advancement and creation of new media; (ii) studies that research on the effects of new media on cultural identity; and (iii) studies that reflect on the impact of new media (in particular social media) on aspects related to intercultural communication, such as intercultural relation, conflict, crisis, and adaptation.

As for the latter area, where the present paper positions itself, it must be noted that, according to cross-cultural psychology, culture impacts on everything, from individual attitudes to motivations and needs, as well as, on people’s responses toward social media [22, 23]. This impact of culture on the surrounding environment, together with the mediatization role of social media, which filter communication, can lead to cultural misunderstandings and unexpected short circuits giving birth to possible crises [22–24]. A crisis, according to Dubrowski [25], can be defined as a momentaneous, unsought, negative, and critical situation, which could be derived both from endogenous and exogenous circumstances and which can put in danger the survival and the progress of the organization itself. Within the fashion environment, considering, for example, exogenous crises, the current COVID-19 situation has deeply impacted not only on people’s life but also on companies’ and organizations’ existence, due to the continuous closures and lockdowns imposed by governments, which have deeply impacted also on the communication and social media strategies of fashion companies [26]. Concerning instead, endogenous

intercultural crises within fashion, for example, apart from the case considered here, one can mention Dolce & Gabbana's Chopsticks Backlash, the Gucci Sikh Turbans, and H&M's "coolest monkey" sweater [27]. All the abovementioned intercultural related cases, together with corporate crises such as The Rana Plaza tragedy and the Bravo Tekstil factory crisis, have underlined that this sector is not exempt at all from crises, which can impact on the organizations at all levels as well as on individuals' lives [27, 28]. As for Donata Meirelles, both she and *Vogue Brazil* had to face this crisis by preparing ad hoc social media strategies and interventions, in order to reduce the reputation threat and a possible loss of credibility.

3 Research Design

To develop the present research, it has been chosen, (i) first, to study through a content analysis the main topics discussed on social media posts generated by the party, and (ii) second, to investigate who has been considered as the responsible of such crisis, by applying the attribution theory model to the results of the content analysis. For the two abovementioned goals, Instagram has been identified as the preferred platform to be studied, since it has been the platform most widely used during the event by Donata Meirelles and her guests. On this platform, it has been possible to collect the highest number of comments on the party through the hashtag #doshow50. (iii) Third, it has been chosen to analyze in further detail the reaction of ABAM, the National Association of the Bahianas of Acarajé, which has been directly involved in the debate, since its Afro-Brazilian workers were the ones engaged by Donata Meirelles to welcome her guests at the party and are the ones represented in the pictures wearing white clothes, which according to some Instagram users opinions could be compared to the white uniforms worn by house slaves and who were represented standing close to the guests of the party sitting on the chair, which was compared to the *cadeira de sinhá*, an ornate chair for slave masters. To do so, an article by the journalist João Pedro Pitombo has been considered, which presented preoccupations and reactions of ABAM ladies [29]. Moreover, ABAM association has been contacted, in order to directly get their views on the crisis. The following three main research questions have been defined:

1. Which are the main themes of discussion that emerged on Instagram from the hashtag #doshow50?
2. According to the Instagram users' reactions through the hashtag #doshow50, who is/are the responsible for Donata Meirelles' crisis?
3. What is ABAM Association's position in relation to Donata Meirelles' party and on the subsequent crisis?

Three different research methods have been chosen to perform the analysis of the case, since combined they can provide a quite complete overview of the events. The content analysis has been useful to understand which have been the main topics

discussed with the #doshow50 hashtag. The attribution theory provided the basis to determine the perceived causes of such crises, focusing on causes from a sociological, cultural, and environmental point of view. The analysis of ABAM ladies' position offers, finally, a more insightful and detailed perspective of the event, focusing on people present at the party as workers.

4 Methodology

The content analysis of the Instagram posts has been conducted from December 20, 2020, to January 12, 2021, and it collects all the posts available on the platform from February 08, 2019, to February 14, 2019, hashtagged #doshow50. In total, 431 posts have been considered (Table 1).

To determine the main topics discussed in the posts, it has been chosen to use the English language; therefore, posts written in Portuguese have been translated into English.

As indicated in Table 1, Donata Meirelles' celebrations generated different reactions on Instagram. A total of 210 posts have been dedicated to the party itself, 146 have been produced by Instagram users to arise critical argumentations related to the celebrations, 38 share contents related to the style of the guests, 8 posts share the tribute that people made to Donata Meirelles, and 1 post shared a content related to the charity activities connected with the party. Finally, 28 posts referred to "off topic" contents.

Consequently, in order to determine the possible responsible of the crisis, within the category "Critical issues", two main subcategories have been identified: the category "Comment on what happened" (66) and the category "Crisis causes" (80). The first one refers to general comments, either positive or negative, on the party, its location, organization, invitation, participating people, and everything

Table 1 Main topics covered by posts hashtagged #doshow50

| Code | Description | # |
|--------------------------|--|-----|
| Party | Information and contents related to the progress of the party | 210 |
| Critical issues | Contents that refer to critical issues, directly or indirectly referring to D. Meirelles' celebrations | 146 |
| Fashion style | Contents related to the style and the clothing of the participants to the party | 38 |
| Off topic | Contents that exploit the #doshow50 hashtag, despite not being connected with the event, in order to advertise or gain more visibility | 28 |
| Tribute to D. Meirelles | Messages of gratitude for her birthday | 8 |
| Party charity activities | Messages that share the charity activities realized thanks to the party | 1 |
| Total | | 431 |

Table 2 Causes of the crisis

| Crisis Causes | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|---|----|
| Against the party | Responsible | Description | # |
| | D. Meirelles | Bad faith, insensitiveness, ignorance of historical and cultural background, lack of empathy, racism | 14 |
| | People | Lack of knowledge of historical and cultural background, “pass the cloth” attitude, racism, religious intolerance, sense of superiority of “whites” | 46 |
| | Vogue | Intrinsic racism, racist practices | 6 |
| In favor of the party | Responsible | Description | # |
| | D. Meirelles | Apologies | 1 |
| | People | Badness, jealousy, lack of knowledge of historical and cultural background, misinterpretation, politically correct mindset, prejudice | 13 |
| Total | | | 80 |

around it; the second one includes all those posts in which users expressed their opinion on what could have caused the communication crisis.

In order to identify all the possible responsible of Donata Meirelles’ crisis, to this subcategory has been applied the attribution theory model, which brought to the following classification (Table 2).

Although in some posts more than one responsible could be found, it has been decided to consider for each post the responsible, who seemed to have much of the blame, according to the Instagram users.

Once determined the responsible of Donata Meirelles crisis according to Instagram e-word of mouth, it appeared very important to include in the analysis the position of ABAM ladies, the workers who were frequently portrayed in the pictures and mentioned in the posts because of their attire or of their standing beside the contested chairs. Even if they were at the center of the debate, it seemed that such debate developed more “using” them than listening to them or trying to understand their very views or the impact such debate might have had on them.

According to an article published by the journalist João Pedro Pitombo [29], on February 12, on the *Folha de S.Paulo*, six of the ten women from ABAM association who took part to the event went to the police of Salvador to file a complaint for crimes committed on the Internet. The women were insulted and called “omissas” and “vendidas” by Internet users, and because of the negative repercussions generated by the crisis, the Association also lost contracts due to clients’ fears that the choice of having Bahaiian women at the reception of their events would generate similar controversies. To further understand what happened, a statement from Rita Maria Ventura dos Santos, President of ABAM, has been requested by the researchers. The association replied on January 12, 2021, via WhatsApp chat.

5 Results and Discussion

Hereafter, results are presented and discussed according to the three research questions.

5.1 Which Are the Main Topics of Discussion that Emerged on Instagram from the Hashtag #doshow50?

According to Table 1, Donata Meirelles' celebrations generated mainly six different reaction types on Instagram: (i) "Party" (210), which includes posts dedicated to the party itself, to show contents provided by D. Meirelles, by her guests and by all the people that worked for and around it; (ii) "Critical issues" (146), which includes posts produced by Instagram users to arise critical issues related to the party: accuses or defenses, reflections, apologies, and thoughts on the days of celebrations; (iii) "Fashion style" (38), which includes posts, whose contents are related to the style and the clothing of the participants at the event; (iv) "Tribute to D. Meirelles" (8), which includes posts written by users to share their tribute and their love for the birthday lady; (v) "Party charity activities" (1), which includes a post related to the charity activities connected with the party; and, finally, (vi) "Off topic" (28), which includes posts referred to contents not related to the party such as advertisement that exploited the hashtag #doshow50 to gain more visibility on social media.

5.2 According to the Instagram Users' Reactions Through the Hashtag #doshow50, Who Is the Responsible of Donata Meirelles' Crisis?

According to the analyzed sample, users divided into two main categories, those who were against the choices made for the party and those who were in favor. Among the posts against the party, Instagram users have identified three main responsible subjects for the crisis.

- (i) Donata Meirelles herself (14), who has been accused of bad faith, insensitivity, ignorance concerning the history and culture of Brazil, lack of empathy, or racism.
- (ii) People in general (46) have also been considered responsible for the crisis due to their lack of knowledge concerning the history and the culture of Brazil and Afro-Brazilians and due to their "pass the cloth" attitude, which means their convenience toward racist practices. People have also been considered responsible due to racist attitudes, religious intolerance, or due to the sense of superiority that white people might have against the black population.



Fig. 4 Example of a post attributing the crisis' responsibility to *Vogue* (against) (https://www.instagram.com/p/BtyF84_leQ3)

- (iii) The last responsible identified by users who expressed themselves against the party is the magazine, *Vogue* (6), which has been accused to be intrinsically racist and to adopt racist practices (see, e.g., Fig. 4).

Among the posts in favor of the party, Instagram users have identified instead two main responsible for the crisis: (i) D. Meirelles (1), whose main fault, according to an Instagram user, has been to apologize after the party explaining that there was no intention to be racist and justifying that the chairs were not *cadeira de sinhá* but *Candomblé chairs* and that the clothes worn by the hostesses were not meant to resemble slave uniforms but to celebrate Bahaian culture, which usually expects that people dress on white on Friday. Apologies were not necessary, according to the same user, since the intent of the party was clear, and they have brought further polemics from the critics. Finally, once again, (ii) people in general (13) have been depicted as responsible of the crisis due to their badness, jealousy, lack of knowledge concerning Brazilian history and culture, misinterpretation of the event, and due to the too “politically correct” attitude, which is becoming a sort of *status* or for people’s prejudices toward Donata Meirelles and her husband.

Once determined the causes of the crisis according to Instagram users, the research continued in order to unveil the position of ABAM ladies, whose voice was not considered in the online debate.

5.3 *What Is the Position of ABAM Association About Donata Meirelles' Party and the Subsequent Crisis?*

In the article written by the journalist João Pedro Pitombo [29] on February 12 on *Folha de S.Paulo*, it has been explained that six of the ten Bahianas, who worked for the party, decided to go to the police of Salvador to file a complaint for crimes committed on the Internet. The women after having taken part to the party were insulted and called “omissas” and “vendidas” by Internet users, who did not appreciate their choices to work for the event.

With a statement sent to the researchers, ABAM Association confirmed what has been published by the journalist. The ladies have been hired by an agency to work as reception hostesses for the 3 days of party, from February 8 to February 10, 2019. The theme of the event was “Cultural Diversity,” and, according to it, ten Bahianas from different ethnicities and backgrounds were called to take part to the party in order to make a tribute to cultural diversity. The association explained that “this is one of the reasons we had such a mix of baianas—white, Black, evangelical, *candomblé*—to show diversity”. ABAM also added that the workers were the ones that chose their clothes and brought them to the party in agreement with the agency, which only provided them earrings and necklaces for the party.

Through the statement, the association claimed that “What happened on social media is not the real story and no one asked us what happened before, spreading false claims on social media [. . .]. On Friday, we arrived at 3 pm to get ready, which was in a different part of the palace where the reception would take place. All ten of us got our make-up done. At 7 pm, we went to the reception area, where there was a veranda-type room and stairs and white flowers. They had placed four chairs in each corner for us to take turns sitting in, while we welcomed guests. We were a surprise for Donata, she didn't know we would be there. She was the first to arrive. The last guest arrived at 10:30, which was when we were free to go. The next day, social media had posted something different. . .”. According to the statement, Donata Meirelles did not even know about the presence of the hostesses at the event until she arrived, and the ladies present at the party did not feel offended by the location, since, when they arrived at the party at 7.00 pm, after having their makeup done and their dresses worn, they were showed the place where the reception of the guests would have taken place. The chairs which have been misinterpreted by Internet users were installed in the reception room with the aim of letting the ABAM ladies sit down while waiting for the guests. Finally, as mentioned in the article, the association explained that some of its workers filled an official complaint to the police station for the offenses suffered.

6 Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Works

While acknowledging that nowadays society cannot be imagined outside its intertwining with (social) media [24, 30, 31], the present research shows how the same event might be covered through different and even opposed perspectives, giving birth to communication crises. According to the attribution theory, it is clear that users perceived differently the choices made for the party organization, both in terms of appreciation or not and by attributing the responsibility of its failure to different stakeholders: Donata Meirelles, general people, or *Vogue* magazine.

Moreover, the present research has sought to provide a rounder perspective, considering also the perspective of ABAM ladies, whose point of view was not considered (important) in the online debate, suggesting that accusations of racism might not have been rooted in a sincere interest in protecting the Bahian ladies.

In general, the paper shows the limits and the challenges that users of social media still need to face when it comes to intercultural communication issues. Messages are not perceived by people in the same ways, and this might depend not only on the fact that social media mediate messages and act as filters that can or cannot convey to the audience the intent of the content producer [24, 31, 32], but it can also depend on people's cultural backgrounds, past experiences, ideas, and (pre)judices [33, 34]. It appears therefore crucial to combine mediatization studies with studies related to cultural localization. Localization can, in fact, if properly managed, help to reflect more in depth on how to share contents that can be considered sensible from a certain audience, reducing the risk of intercultural communication crises and providing to those who have stumbled into such crises the right instruments to reduce the risk of reputational damage.

The present paper has also some limitations: at first instance the posts retrieved for the content analysis have been selected only from one social media: Instagram. Therefore, more extensive researches could involve also Twitter and other media through which the crisis has spread. Moreover, the present study considers only posts, which have used the hashtag #doshow50; therefore, more posts that explained the causes of such crisis might be found by widening the sample. Moreover, an ad hoc analysis could be devoted to the images themselves, while the current study has focused on the textual component of studied posts.

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Intangible Heritage: The Change of Significance of Hungarian Embroidery over Time



Anett Lőrincz 

Abstract Hungarian embroidery is already well known and represented all around the world; however, its history and origin are unknown to most non-Hungarian people. The culture and heritage of Hungary are very colorful ones among the European countries with a wide range of traditions, dances, and elements of clothing.

The two main types of Hungarian embroidery, Matyó and Kalocsai, travelled through time until they reached their current form. The research will give a historical introduction of these types and how their significance and meaning are resented in the twenty-first century compared to the meanings and uses in the past.

To obtain such change, several different factors played a significant role, and their influence on Hungarian embroidery will be explained. These include cultural appropriation, othering in tourism, and homogenization.

Keywords Fashion communication · Historical transformation · Folk embroidery · Intercultural communication · Cultural heritage

1 Introduction

The following research focuses on the analysis of how an article of a specific clothing element has changed and travelled to different places over time and how this has altered its meaning. The topic which will be introduced is part of traditional Hungarian folk culture. Conventionally, folk culture describes the products and practices of relatively homogeneous and isolated small-scale social groups living in rural settings [1]. Thus, folk culture is frequently correlated with tradition, historical continuity, sense of place, and belonging. Folk culture has many elements, including dances, literature, and clothing. Even to clothing, there are many aspects to discover, and one research paper would not be enough to introduce all of that, since it

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is so diverse and colorful. This study will focus on the history of Hungarian embroidery and the change of its significance throughout the years.

Hungary is located in Central Europe, in the Carpathian Basin with the capital being Budapest. It has a population of approximately nine million people. It is one of those cultures that are less known across Europe or the world. When it comes to Hungarian embroidery, it is essential to distinguish between the clothing items and the embroidery itself. There are several ways in which it may appear ranging from clothing items to wall cloths; however, this research takes embroidery as its focus. The embroidery is fascinating since it goes way back in history, and it still manages to reappear in various places and scenarios in the twenty-first century in different forms.

The purpose of the research is to investigate cultural appropriation, othering in tourism, and heterogenization. Cultural appropriation is the action of taking or applying elements from a culture that is not one's own, especially without showing understanding of or respect to this culture [2]. Othering in tourism represents cultural and social pressure in different tourism industry, which are generally the result of the clash between tourists' imaginaries, tourism industry objectives, and local people's activities [3]. Heterogenization represents a practice which leads to a more inwardly appearing world due to the increase of flows across cultures [4].

The main objective of this research is to investigate the effects of these phenomena and their influence on Hungarian embroidery with the following research question.

Q1: To what extent can cultural appropriation, othering in tourism, and heterogenization influence the change of Hungarian embroidery's significance over time?

The research focuses on three research hypotheses, which are shown below.

H1: Cultural appropriation significantly harms Hungarian folk heritage, including embroidery.

H2: Othering in tourism causes more negative consequences for the Hungarian locals than positive ones.

H3: Cultural heterogenization has a significant influence on the change of Hungarian embroidery's significance over time.

The methodology of the research is based on secondary data collection regarding Hungarian culture, folk, and embroidery. Extant studies can be found on the phenomenon of the research, and in the following chapters, these concepts will be applied in the perspective of Hungarian embroidery. A few concepts of Hungarian folklore have been the subject of academic studies; however, no previous research has focused on these aspects and the impact of tourism and globalization on Hungarian embroidery to such extent.

2 About Hungarian Folk and Embroidery

The largest number of folk art elements survived from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries [5]. In designating this period, the “Golden Age” of Hungarian folk art, ethnographers also considered numerous sociohistorical factors. Numerous elements of Hungarian folk art originate from Transdanubia, such as the richly embroidered long frieze coat—*cifraszűr*—which appeared in the western counties during the early part of the nineteenth century [5]. In the following paragraph, it will be explained how Hungarian embroidery is used in traditional clothing as an element of Hungarian folklore.

The same way Hungarian folklore and embroidery enable people to show different sides of theirs, including specific messages and emotions, it also gives the sense of belonging. To include such historical elements as this one is also a negotiation of meaning and constrained by power structures. There are several rules, when incorporating such elements. The balance between reusing the old embroidery and combining it with new patterns must be in balance with respecting its history and the culture itself. It is up to every individual to decide and the fact that they have different expectations and perceptions on what extent this combination and modernization is acceptable.

The representation of this embroidery has changed over time. Its original meaning and symbolism have not disappeared; however, new meanings and uses have emerged as the world is developing, and globalization is changing our lifestyle, ways of living, and fashion. It is stretching social, cultural, political, and economic activities across borders. With the help of globalization, Hungarian folk art can spread across space and time and reach wider audiences than ever before. The Internet, social media, fashion shows, and other media are giving a platform for such fashion as the Hungarian one to be discovered by people, who have no previous relationships with Hungarian culture and folk art.

Based on the essential discussions about culture, it is an active process of making and negotiating meaning, and there can be many possible meanings and significances of folk art. This style of embroidery is fluid in the sense that it has both a traditional meaning associated with Hungarian style and traditions. It can be associated with a new modern use with new meanings. The new use is an incorporation of folk art and traditional clothing into fashion and style of the twenty-first century. Recent efforts have been made to safeguard the survival of cultural diversity in a globalized world [6] It have led to efforts to preserve, revitalize, and continue craft traditions in marginal societies, including the Hungarian folk with both parts going through survival and revival phases [6].

The patterns and embroidery are used by different nations and groups; however, the use can become a communication and question of identity. The modernization and use of these elements can spread Hungarian culture and raise awareness of the protection of folk art; however, the misuse can damage its original meaning. For people, who do not identify as Hungarian and have no Hungarian origins, it can be vital to be aware of the history and the use and to be educated on the topic to preserve

its original value and message. To protect the heritage, living traditions of embroidery, dresses, and folklore have been accepted as part of the intangible cultural heritage of Hungary, which is proving its importance and relevance in the twenty-first century, which will safeguard its existence and protection in the future. The significance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather the treasure of knowledge and skills that is conveyed across generations. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is pertinent for minorities and for mainstream social groups within a state and is as essential for developing states as for developed ones [7].

3 Description of Hungarian Embroidery and Its Types

The following section will describe the nature of Hungarian embroidery, including descriptions of its history and types. The Hungarian embroidery shares elements with other European ones. The history of embroidery in the country can be traced back to the year of 1031 [8]. In this year, the oldest Hungarian embroidery was made, which was used by the Hungarian monarchs at their coronation; specifically it was the garment of King Stephen I, also called St. Stephen of Hungary [8]. There can be at least 18 different Hungarian embroidery patterns differentiated; however, the research will focus on the two, which seem to be the most influential ones internationally. To unexperienced eyes, these two might look identical; however, they differ in terms of their historical development, geographical location, and significance.

3.1 *Kalocsai*

The Kalocsa region is an area of Hungary, which has played a significant role in the life of the country due to its historical role, characteristic dialect, and its famous folk art [9]. Its history dates back to 150 years, when the first embroideries were completely white, mainly being used on sheets and tablecloths. In 1936, the House of Folk Art was set up in Kalocsa and later converted into the center of folk art goods production. The latest style of Kalocsa embroidery was created under external influences known throughout the country and soon after in Europe [10].

This style of embroidery gained even wider recognition after the end of the Second World War, and it is present till to our days [10]. In the beginning of the twentieth century, durable colors on cloth were invented, and since then Kalocsai embroideries are made using colorful thread. They may consist of colors such as claret and red, pink of two shades, yellow and orange, dark blue and light blue, violet of two shades, and green of two shades, commonly displaying flowers [10]. The patterns are displayed on various clothing items, but it is more common to decorate tablecloths, pillows, and wall hangers with the same items (Fig.1).

Fig. 1 Kalocsai embroidery
[11]



Fig. 2 Matyó embroidery
[12]



3.2 *Matyó*

The two types of embroidery are fairly similar in appearance; however, Matyó has a longer history. Its gorgeous decorative art grows into being world renowned and is often considered the typical Hungarian folk art. Matyó is an ethnic group of Hungarians, from the ethnographic territory of Northern Hungary, called “Matyó Land” [13]. They have preserved their rich and distinctive traditions, customs, and embroidery. Until the 1860s, the elements and colors of Matyó remained simple and reserved with only using red and blue [5]. From the seventies on, clothes have several shades of colors and included even items such as heavily embroidered long sleeves T-shirts edged with lace.

Due to the high level of craftsmanship and expenses involved in producing the *cifraszűr*, these clothing items were among the most prized possessions of the peasant population [14]. Matyó embroidery is a decorative element of the traditional dresses of the region, worn by local inhabitants during traditional events and celebrations and for folk dancing and singing. The colors may include black (symbolizes soil), red (joy), and yellow (the Sun). Green emerged after WWI, and it is the symbol of mourning (Fig. 2).

4 The Presence of Kalocsai and Matyó Embroidery in the Twenty-First Century

The following part of the research will be divided into three main parts, them being the folk tourism, traditional Hungarians, and representation by celebrities introduced through the concepts of othering in tourism, cultural appropriation, and heterogenization.

4.1 *Traditional Hungarians: Cultural Appropriation*

In the following paragraphs, the type of people will be introduced who still follow the traditional ways of dressing and who are members of the Hungarian folk. The concept of cultural appropriation will be connected to the topic, and it will also be discussed to what extent it is relevant from the point of view of traditional Hungarians and from the perspective of the culture itself.

In the country, the deterioration of traditional peasant culture and its heritage has prompted urban revivals, which has led to the acceptance of traditional Hungarian folklore [15]. The case is similar in terms of dressing as the folk clothing became part of the Hungarian heritage for the heritage practitioners and locals. Several types of people can be distinguished, who might be in connection with the current use of the embroidery. From a geographical perspective, the main city in Hungary is Budapest, while there are some medium-sized cities with 100,000 and 200,000 inhabitants, while most towns and villages are smaller in size. Rural transformation has developed since the fall of socialism, and these small rural municipalities in Hungary are facing severe financial struggles, an ageing population, and high unemployment [16]. These towns have the most important role in terms of Hungarian folklore, and a huge percentage of these follow the original Hungarian traditions to some extent; however, there are only a few places and communities where the traditional folk, including the embroidery, dances, and traditions, is still practiced. There have not been studies conducted on this trend in this area, which may prove that currently there are only few villages that follow such traditions to a greater extent. It is likely that individuals and small communities follow them and have extensive knowledge on embroidery; however, to measure whether it is practiced by individuals is nearly impossible, since the practitioners of embroidery tend to be members of older generations and live in small, scattered villages with little to no communication with the outside world. The use of embroidery is usually a choice of the individual, and it is mostly practiced by folk dancers and by individuals with special interest in folk.

The concept of cultural appropriation is particularly controversial, given that individuals from influential and wealthy cultures often appropriate from disadvantaged indigenous and minority cultures [17]. Based on the views of O. Young, cultural appropriation is seen as inherently bound up with the oppression of minority culture and is often questionable on both aesthetic and moral grounds [17]. His

statement is disputable, and it is a question whether it is defensible as a form of oppression on moral grounds. There can be four categories distinguished in terms of cultural appropriation, them being exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation, and each of these categories can be understood and examined in the relevant situation or context [2].

As the next step, it will be examined whether the use of embroidery in the twenty-first century can be considered case of cultural appropriation. This appropriation can be examined from different perspectives, the first one being the concept of appropriation viewed by locals and members of the Hungarian folklore and the second one from the perspective of the culture and the awareness toward the Hungarian folklore. In order to support the statements above, the research titled “Essays on Cultural Appropriation” have been examined by Bruce Ziff. Based on his old ideas, appropriation is about stealing the culture and traditions of other people in order to generate profit [18]. However, his ideas have changed, and he expresses that in reality appropriation is always related to colonialism and the display of authority [18]. In this case, the Western culture can be considered the dominant culture; however, it cannot be considered a display of authority. Inclusion of clothing items cannot be considered as exploitation or oppression in the case of Hungarian embroidery and Western cultures. It might involve a lack of understanding in some cases; however, it does not show signs of taking advantage of the elements or showing disrespect toward the culture. In none of the cases can cultural denigration be seen but cultural appreciation and respect.

Based on the sources presented in this paragraph, the use of Hungarian embroidery in Western cultures and its combination with different styles cannot be considered cultural appropriation. The motivation of its inclusion seems to be aesthetical and does not intend to be degrading. It is not deliberately trying to insult. Most of the time it is produced by Hungarian artists and designers, who are aware of the culture. It borrows elements of Hungarian folk, however, in a respectable way by not making fun of the original culture. The different uses are pieces of artworks, and they are accepted widely by both the international and Hungarian public.

4.2 Folk Tourism: Othering in Tourism

Hungary has a very rich repository of folk traditions; whose heritage is worth exploring, including intellectual heritage, tourist attractions, festivals, and embroidery, which attract tourists from all over the world. The civilizatory mission of tourism, through a Westernized lens, comprises in promoting cultural geographies of otherness, known as minor cultures, through media support that creates markers of sight colonizing, yet the tourist’s gaze [3].

Regardless of how beneficial tourism is, it affects the Hungarian culture and traditions. Villages and cities must face tourist gaze, where local populations are visited, and they may be required to act and dress in a certain way. The phenomenon is a worldwide issue, and many cultures and traditions are affected by it. Othering in

tourism involves the tourist gaze, which is a set of expectations that tourists put on local inhabitants that are then manifested by them to benefit financially. Tourists would not like to see how people live, but they seek traditions, which existed in the past. They expect constructed environment, which reinforces their beliefs and stereotypes about a specific culture, in this case the Hungarian one. There are not many people in Hungary, who would traditionally wear these attires and embroidery; however, this is what they are expected to wear. It is a phenomenon all over Europe, that with capitalism and modernism, people stopped wearing folk and unique clothing and are more likely to purchase homogenized clothes, standard T-shirts, and cardigans folded in a local Benetton store [19]. For most of human history, people's main form of knowledge has been adapted to the local environment and based on experience and empirical testing [20]. This type of knowledge has been labeled as folk or traditional knowledge [21–25]. The disappearance of folk knowledge represents the irreversible loss of humanity's heritage and diversity [25, 26]. The disappearance of the Hungarian embroidery would mean a loss of heritage for Hungarians and a loss of diversity for the heritage of humanity.

On the other hand, folklore-driven slow tourism has positive effects on local relations and community. Based on the research of Jamieson (1993), small towns are facing major challenges such as economic decline owing to aging societies, depopulation, depleting tax base, businesses moving away, low community spirit, and decreasing agricultural activities [27]. At the same time, he points toward cultural tourism as the tool that could reverse the decline of these communities. Several other researchers have supported this idea, including Caffyn (2012) who suggests that the ratio of distance travelled and the time spent at the destination is a more meaningful and realistic measurement and promotes slow tourism to a wider range of travelers [28]. Research by Pecsek presents the most crucial findings which support the positive contributions of tourism to Hungarian small towns. Her findings are supported by a questionnaire filled out by tourists visiting Matyó. She highlights that many small cities are ailing around the world and are undergoing impediments in recapturing their energies in our modern globalized, urbanized world, including Matyó [29]. The results of the survey show that, among people who have visited Matyó, more people selected cultural reasons than health or other reasons, providing a strong basis for folklore-driven slow tourism [29]. Moreover, people who usually wear the traditional outfits and embroidery are performers, actors, or traditional dancers who do it as a profession or as a hobby. In this way, locals cannot be exploited, while tourists can experience the Hungarian culture through the shows and performances more deeply. In this specific case, it does not widen further economic inequalities, and it cannot be an expression of cultural power. It is both an advantage for the towns and local performers as means of income and serve as an opportunity for knowledge exchange and cultural diversity for tourists.

Local people are not harmed by the gaze; however, there is a limited possibility for tourists to get to know the real local culture. They are more interested in the traditional culture since it is more different from the other European ones. In this way, they might miss out to see how locals live. While tourism should serve as a bridge to connect people and cultures, the tourist gaze may limit the communication

between Hungarian locals and tourists. Othering in tourism may limit the communication; however, it serves as the main income for many villages, performers, and actors. Based on the research on othering in tourism, tourism has several advantages for small- and medium-sized towns in Hungary. It does not directly harm locals and Hungarian folk; therefore, Hypothesis 2 can be declined.

4.3 Representation by Celebrities and Fashion Shows: Heterogenization

The following section will introduce the representation of Hungarian embroidery by celebrities and its presence in Hungarian Fashion shows, including the Budapest Central European Fashion show, and the relationship between these representations, and then heterogenization and homogenization will be discussed. The following examples are part of the folklorism phenomenon, which can be described as the preexisting peasant folklore being rescued and then becoming public by the representatives of the science [30]. Through this mediation, the element enters the mass culture and there becomes widely known in various social strata [30].

When we are talking about the journey of Matyó and Kalocsai, time and space have been separated; it is not connected anymore to a geographical location. As well as other cultural elements, this pattern got detached from the local context as well, and it is more distant from its original region than it ever was. The pattern is freely used by any individual who likes the pattern, and they do not have to be necessarily connected to the culture itself. Many Hungarian and international brands have incorporated these patterns in their collections, and many smaller designers use them as well. The wide range of representation by celebrities and on fashion shows support this idea. Starting with fashion shows, the Budapest Central European Fashion show took place in October 2020 organized by the Hungarian Fashion and Design Agency. The show was unique since it is the first one done completely digitally with no ticket purchase requirement. Since the show takes place in Hungary, many designers include Hungarian motifs in their collections, which are usually combined with distinct patterns and modern styles (Fig. 3).

The first example is the collection of Virág Kerenyi—Hungarian fashion designer—working for Peugeot and for movie production companies in Hollywood. Her “Rachel” bag is a perfect combination of traditional and modern patterns, which both represent the Hungarian heritage and its development. The design shows that the embroidery can keep its original value and message while also promoting the style and modernism of 2020. The second example is the “Czukormadár” collection of Sugarbird—Hungarian multi-brand business—which is present both in Hungary and in several other nations of Europe. The main aim of the collection is to emphasize the traditional patterns but in the most modern and fashionable way. The collection includes a wide scale of products, including dresses, bodies, and

Fig. 3 Collection of Kerenyi Virag [31]



shirts. In these examples, the original motifs are used with the original colors, while Virág Kerenyi has altered the colors to some extent but kept the original shape.

Several celebrities have been spotted by fans and paparazzi wearing elements of Hungarian folk including Nicole Kidman with her daughter dressed in clothing with Kalocsai embroidery, designed by a Hungarian designer, Judith Lukacs. The daughters of Beyonce and Kate Holmes (Blue Ivy and Suri Cruise) were seen wearing Kalocsai clothing items. The most recent case of a celebrity wearing Kalocsai embroidery was Kesha, who has a closer connection to the culture, since her grandparents emigrated to the United States in the twentieth century; therefore, it is likely that she is aware of the meanings and patterns of Hungarian embroidery.

To understand the effects of homogenization, heterogenization needs to be examined as well. Heterogenization cannot be considered only a negative effect on one's culture; to understand it, both positive and negative effects need to be examined. The processes of modernization, industrialization, urbanization, and globalization have led to the transformation of local cultural communities [32]. To counterbalance the resulting cultural loss and homogenization, heritagization in general and safeguarding practices are called into action [33–35]. In case of Hungarian embroidery, we may talk about cultural homogenization, which is representative of the structural level and heterogenization, which is representative of the symbolic level [36]. The homogenization perspective seems to positively answer these questions as the increased interconnection between nations and cultures plays a

role in creating a more homogenous world adopting the Western Euro-American model of social organization and lifestyle [37]. In this view, impediments that prevent flows that would contribute to transforming cultures into similar ones are weak, while global flows are strong. In its severe form, homogenization could mean that local cultures can be shaped by other more powerful cultures or by a global culture; however, the case cannot be considered severe in the case of Hungary [37]. Based on this, it increases the learning opportunities for international people, and it may bring closer the Hungarian and Eastern European cultures to people who are not familiar with these customs. By including various elements in styles and clothing, the general broadmindedness and awareness of people can be increased, while it can enhance cultural diversity. The various uses of embroidery have the potential to positively contribute to the spread of the culture and awareness. It can increase the curiosity of international people resulting in them visiting the country or purchasing local products. As stated in the previous chapters, tourism from such countries increases the revenue of small- and medium-sized towns and promotes local artists and performers. Based on the previously discussed examples, the embroidery is usually produced by artists and companies who are aware of the use of the patterns, and there were no examples found, which could result in the misuse of these elements or cultural appropriation.

To conclude the section, cultural heterogenization has a significant influence on the change of significance of Hungarian embroidery over time, since it has contributed to the increasing awareness of the Hungarian culture and the spread of Hungarian embroidery. Based on the aforementioned examples, cultural homogenization might harm the original culture and message but contributes to its survival and popularity in the twenty-first century.

5 Conclusion

This research focused on the history of Hungarian embroidery and its change of significance over time while exploring its relations to concepts such as cultural appropriation, othering in tourism, and cultural heterogenization. Within the frames of the research, three hypotheses were examined.

Culture is polysemic; therefore, it may have different possible meanings for different people, just as people from various communities and background have different interpretation and use of Hungarian embroidery. As a response to the research question, it can be concluded that globalization and heterogenization played major roles in the significance of Hungarian embroidery over time, and it is more widespread than ever before with an international awareness; however, othering in tourism and cultural appropriation did contribute significantly to changes of meaning or awareness.

Answering the research question of “To what extent can cultural appropriation, othering in tourism, and heterogenization influence the change of Hungarian embroidery’s significance over time?”, it can be concluded that these phenomena

have played a major role in the change of Hungarian embroidery and their effects on it cannot be considered negative. There were no or little harmful signs of the tourist gaze; overall, it does not have a negative consequence on the Hungarian embroidery, rather on the relationships with tourists. Folk tourism and the spread of Hungarian embroidery are positively contributing to the survival of smaller towns with income and employment opportunities for artists and performers. The research has included three hypotheses, which were accepted and declined in the following manner. The first hypothesis is declined, since cultural appropriation may have negative effects on Hungarian folk heritage and embroidery; however, it does not cause significant harm. The second hypothesis is declined as othering in tourism affects the local's lives in different ways; however, in case of Hungarian embroidery, the positive effects outweigh the negative consequences. The third hypothesis is accepted, since there is a relationship between cultural heterogenization and the change of Hungarian embroidery's significance over time.

There are some aspects on which the research may be improved in terms of its scope and quality. With the help of additional primary data gathered, a survey, and interviews, the accuracy of the answers to the hypothesis could be improved. The comparison of the answers of both Hungarian and international participants could present data on awareness of people, general knowledge, and cultural background. In this way, it could be compared how Hungarian and non-Hungarian people perceive embroidery. Interviews could be conducted with independent researchers to see from an academic perspective how Hungarian embroidery changed over time, the effects of these change, and what should be expected in the future in terms of current trends and globalization.

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Part IV
Fashion Storytelling

Grunig's Two-Way Model in the Fashion Films of Chanel N° 5: *The Film and the One that I Want*



Ana Sánchez de la Nieta 

Abstract Consolidation of the digital media means that institutions and brands must make a considerable effort to lead the communication drive with their target audiences. The symmetrical two-way model proposed by Grunig, which is considered to be the most appropriate model in terms of maintaining effective public relations, requires authority and leadership so that identity can be communicated without the distortions resulting from excessive symmetry.

In recent decades, many brands and institutions have resorted to storytelling in order to maintain this leadership and establish a more persuasive relationship with their target audiences.

In the case of fashion brands, many have produced fashion films, a hybrid genre that falls somewhere between traditional advertising and cinema, which has enabled these brands to use film narrative in order to communicate their intangible values. Specifically, here we shall analyze the case of two fashion films made by a brand that has pioneered the use of film narrative: Chanel.

The two fashion films analyzed, *The Film* and *The One That I Want*, star Chanel N° 5 as the main feature and were made by the Australian director, Baz Luhrmann: the first in 2004, starring Nicole Kidman, and the other a decade later, in 2014, starring the model, Gisele Bündchen.

Keywords Fashion · Storytelling · Public relations · Chanel · Fashion films

Methodology

For this article, the academic literature on public relations and its relationship with storytelling were reviewed, and the methodology followed was a case study analyzing two fashion films of a renowned fashion brand: Chanel.

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1 Introduction and Theoretical Framework

In spite of the fact that almost four decades has passed since the publication of the handbook *Managing Public Relations* by Grunig and Hunt [1], the four public relations models proposed by the authors are still valid today.

Grunig highlighted four possible ways in which organizations, institutions, and brands could relate to their target audiences. The first, and the oldest in time, consists of the press agency model, being characterized by the figure of the press agent, a professional who is aware of the growing importance of newspapers and seeks to appear in them. The first press agents worked in the world of show business and then moved to the railway sector, a burgeoning industry in the early twentieth century, which is when this public relations model was popularized [2].

The second public relations model is known as the public information model. The main pioneer of this model was Ivy Lee, a journalist from New York who was contracted in 1906 by the Pennsylvania Railroad following a derailing incident. The manner in which Lee handled relations with the media, furnishing them with all the necessary information regarding the accident, led organizations to begin to develop a different relationship with their target audiences [3]. Since that time, this public information model has existed and tends to be the one adopted by government bodies and, in general, all public bodies, especially in moments of crisis or a need for greater contact with their target public [4].

Whatever the case may be, this model, which is extremely hierarchical (the communication relies solely on the issuing party), demanded a greater degree of participation on the part of the communication's target groups in order to evolve. This development arrived with the development of two-way models. The asymmetrical two-way model, as promoted by Edward Bernays, is characterized by the fact that research is carried out in order to discover the target groups' interests and establish a dialogue between organizations and their audiences. This model is asymmetrical because of the leading role played by the issuing party, although a certain relationship is established that did not exist in the previous model. Furthermore, this model not only seeks to inform the public but also persuade it, which is why it is essential to get to know the public in question, which necessitates the use of different research tools, such as surveys.

The fourth model proposed by Grunig is, in certain sense, a development of the third. The symmetrical two-way model not only researches the target audience but also seeks to maintain a dialogue with the target. The idea is for this dialogue between the organization and its target audiences to be beneficial. You could say that, in this model, persuasion is replaced by understanding. The goal is for the organization to understand the needs, desires, and interests of its target audiences and the target audiences to understand the organization's motivation.

This is a model that Grunig traces back to the 1960s [1] and which, unlike the rest of the models, which were theorized long after they were put into practice, was actually theorized before being applied in practice. The benefits of two-way communication are obvious, but communication theorists soon realized that the

asymmetrical tendency of this two-way model could be corrected by establishing more reciprocal relations.

It was Cutlip who produced the first serious theoretical framework for this model. In fact, in his handbook, he defines public relations by introducing the idea of reciprocity between the organization and its stakeholders [2]. Subsequently, Grunig would develop the theory behind this fourth model more extensively while also pointing out that this is the most appropriate model in terms of ethical public relations practice.

Following Grunig's development, and in spite of certain criticisms (Heath, L'Etang, Murphy), the majority of theorists have stated that the symmetrical two-way model is the most perfect public relations approach, given that it is based on a dialogue between the organization and its target audiences, one that can be beneficial to both sides.

The advent of the Internet marked a veritable highpoint with regard to these public relations models. Symmetry and two-way communication ceased to be a mere aspiration and became a veritable premise of digital communication. The Internet made this two-way symmetry much easier. The new technologies permitted ongoing contact between the organization and its target audiences [5]. Today the public can easily communicate with brands and institutions, and, in fact, on occasion even a peer-to-peer dialogue is established. We can observe this dialogue, for example, in the fact that any member of the public can post an opinion about a book, a restaurant, or a political initiative. On occasion, this dialogue can even turn into an open conversation—in the social media, for example—with the author of the book, the owner of the restaurant or the mayor of the town or city in question.

In 1995, when social media had yet to be developed, four communication theorists—Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger—published *The Cluetrain Manifesto*, a series of 95 statements that highlighted the changes that the Internet was introducing and that it would bring about at companies and all other organizations. The *Manifesto* began with an enlightening first sentence: “Markets are conversations” [6]. This was just another way of underlining how the field of public relations was going to be transformed by the Internet.

The benefits of this model are undeniable, and they have helped to democratize communication. They have also enabled many companies and institutions to gain a better understanding of their target audiences and, consequently, helped them to adapt to their tastes and satisfy their needs.

However, this access to the public dialogue has also had negative consequences in terms of the identity of institutions: this identity has become diluted with so much content generated by individuals who often have little idea about the characteristic features of a brand. Even the target audience can become disoriented in the face of this avalanche of information. In other words, the symmetrical two-way model must tackle the problem of a loss of authority, a process intimately connected with communication via the Internet [7].

In the face of this difficulty, some institutions and brands have turned once again to the asymmetrical two-way model or have sought to maintain a dialogue with their target audience while also searching for ways to continue leading the conversation.

2 Storytelling and Communication Leadership

In the 1980s, while authors such as Yoneji Masuda developed the concept of the *information society* and *knowledge society* to define globalized communities that had a hitherto-unseen degree of access to information and that featured a series of characteristics typical of this excessive abundance of information (exuberance, multilateralism, disorientation, etc.) [8], an American psychologist, who had a thorough knowledge of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Walter Fisher, proposed an alternative approach to replace the traditional rationalist paradigm. Fisher declared that human beings are, by nature, narrative beings, effectively understanding the world and communicating through stories. Fisher understands "narrative" in the widest sense of the term and defines it as any symbolic actions (words and/or deeds) that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, and interpret them [9].

Fisher highlighted the fact that narrative is based on elements such as emotion and persuasion, which make discourse more effective. Ultimately, a story can be much more convincing than a discourse. Furthermore, Fisher pointed out that, in the narrative paradigm, although a conversation exists with the target audience, somebody is always required to lead the story, since "there is no community in history in which a narrator has failed to exist—whether he is called God, legacy, decision or power—who backs the story" [9]. The one who tells the story needs an audience. But that party leads the communication with that audience.

Fisher's theories, which linked up with those of other authors such as Roland Barthes, could be directly linked to the storytelling boom in the early years of the twenty-first century. Both within the realms of political communication and brand communication, narrative messages began to be developed. These permitted the creators to establish a dialogue with their audiences while also leading the conversation at the same time.

3 Storytelling and the Fashion Industry: Fashion Films

As we have indicated, the loss of leadership in communication as a result of the democratization of the Internet was perceived as a risk by many companies, who sought to avoid overexposure of their brands on the Internet.

This phenomenon was especially striking in the case of fashion brands, especially those associated with a certain degree of exclusivity, such as *haute couture* brands, the large fashion houses, and those focused on the luxury segment. The communication between these brands and their audiences has traditionally been highly personal and highly physical. From the very beginning, these fashion brands have not only taken great care when producing communication materials (creating catalogues and advertisements of high quality) but have also ensured that the physical space where their products are sold, the stores, effectively convey the identity of the

brands, which tend to be associated with values such as beauty, exclusive appeal, elegance, etc.

For these brands, Internet democratization, delocalization, the multiplicity of channels and products, and the absolute absence of any kind of hierarchy represented a real problem, especially during the early years of the twenty-first century. The fact that the high-end glossy magazines looked askance at the Internet and the social media did not facilitate rapid adaptation either when it came to regarding the Internet as an ally rather than an enemy [10].

Whatever the case may be, the fashion industry, like other sectors that regarded the digitalization process somewhat warily, soon understood that the Internet would not only change the way in which we obtain information but would also change our ways of interacting, knowing, and consuming. Immersed as they were in the information and knowledge societies, brands could not remain inactive players or, even worse, players opposed to change.

In the case of fashion brands, these companies also understood that, in order to reach a younger audience that could become consumers of their products in a few years' time, it was essential to use the digital channels.

Ultimately, you could say that it was a question of maintaining the leadership of brand communication, preventing the dialogue of the digital audience from diluting the brand's intangible assets. Furthermore, it was a question of taking advantage of the Internet in order to communicate these intangible elements effectively while extending the communication to new audiences.

Fisher's narrative paradigm is highly appropriate for the fashion industry. Fashion brands, ever jealous of their intangible assets, have understood that many of these intangibles could be grasped better through storytelling, through stories.

The visual power of fashion would do the rest. If, from the very beginnings of advertising, fashion brands had stood out for the way in which they sold their products, it was simply a matter of going one step further. It was not a question of selling a product but of conveying an idea or a series of emotions that would connect the audience with the brand's intangible appeal.

If there was medium in the twentieth century that was able to connect with the audience and convey both emotions and ideas, that was cinema. Furthermore, throughout the twentieth century, a certain feedback had always existed between the realms of cinema and fashion. Fashion had used films to show many of its creations, and it had fed off the star system in order to conquer an audience that wanted to dress just like the Hollywood stars. Now it was a question of not only using actresses as an enticement or films as a showcase for its creations but of employing the language of cinema itself to communicate its messages: building stories based on the brand's intangible assets by using the narrative of film. This is how "fashion films" emerged, which could be defined as follows:

Audio-visual productions, in the form of short films, created to serve a brand, characterized by a communication style in which a sense of beauty predominates and considerable care is taken in terms of the aesthetic appeal of the message—an approach inherited from the world of fashion photography—regarding the product and/or brand itself. [11]

Many fashion brands have created such films as of the end of the twentieth century. There are two main aspects that set these stories apart from those of traditional advertisements:

- (a) A more developed narrative and storytelling dimension. In the majority of these fashion films, we come across the elements that make up the structure of a typical film script, be it in a highly schematic form: there is a story, there are a series of characters, and there is an audiovisual language that is used in order to drive the story forward and develop the characters.
- (b) The main purpose of these fashion films is not to promote a product but to communicate the brand's intangible values.

These creations were also conceived from the very beginning to be consumed via the Internet. Although they have been shown as various film competitions and festivals, the purpose of these productions was not to be projected on the big screen. Neither were they meant to be shown on television, unlike traditional advertisements. The brands' idea was that these fashion films would be consumed, first of all, via personal computer and, later on, via mobile phone. The aim was for these videos to go viral, reaching a very wide audience, an audience that might not yet be a consumer of luxury brands but that might become one in the future.

Furthermore, many of these fashion films have been planned as transmedia products [12]. Many have become series, or clips have been taken from the main film to be distributed via the social media, or carefully produced "making ofs" have been released, etc.

One factor that has helped these productions to go viral consists of the use of both famous actors and actresses to star in fashion films, while renowned directors have also been brought in to write the scripts and direct them. Among the actors and actresses who have starred in fashion films, we might mention Marion Cotillard, Nicole Kidman, Keira Knightley (Chanel), Helena Bonham Carter, and Ben Kingsley (Prada). Among the directors, we can mention Spike Jonze (Kenzo), Darren Aronofsky (Yves Saint Laurent), Joe Wright (Chanel), and Roman Polanski (Prada).

4 Fashion Films from Chanel N° 5

In order to demonstrate how fashion films can be a genre that facilitates the communication of intangible aspects within a symmetrical two-way model, we are going to analyze two fashion films made by Chanel.

There are various reasons why we have chosen these films: First, Chanel, as Kapferer has pointed out, is "the legendary brand *par excellence*" [13]. It is a brand that has always endeavored to maintain its identity and communicate its intangible appeal. Furthermore, during the long period in which the designer, Karl Lagerfeld, worked as creative director (1983–2019), a period that we could consider to have lasted up until the present day, Chanel has turned to fashion films on numerous

occasions in order to shape its communication strategy. Lagerfeld himself directed five fashion films, with which he explored the brand’s intangible dimension.

The two films we analyze here, namely, *The Film* (2004) and *The One That I Want* (2014), are based on the emblematic perfume, *Chanel N° 5*, and, in reality, the second is a remake of the first, directed a decade later by the same director, the Australian Baz Luhrmann, in order to show the changes that women have witnessed through the evolution of the two fashion films.

Many commentators regard *Chanel N° 5: The Film* as an indisputable landmark regarding the origins of fashion films. As M. Torregrosa and M. Noguera have pointed out [10], this film lasts longer than traditional spots, with the product itself hardly making an appearance and a direct link being established with the cinema. This is especially evident in the first film, which uses a script based on a film that had already been shot and released (*Moulin Rouge*) and features various actors and actresses who worked on the film.

Furthermore, since we are dealing with a fashion film and a remake one decade later, it is easier to analyze the intangible aspects that the brand is seeking to convey. In fact, Lagerfeld’s intention when commissioning Luhrmann to make the second fashion film was precisely that of reflecting the way the Chanel woman had evolved over the period of one decade.

Finally, we might state that, if there is one Chanel perfume that has managed to encapsulate all of the brand’s attributes and associate them with the world of cinema, that perfume is Chanel N° 5, especially from the moment Marilyn Monroe became an ambassador for this perfume. Since that time, Chanel has often turned to actresses to star in advertisements for this emblematic perfume, establishing a special relationship between the language of film and communication of the brand’s intangibles [14].

The table below shows the short films released by Chanel regarding its perfume Chanel N° 5, as compiled on the IMDB data base (the most complete film data base). As we can observe, except for the first two films and *Number 5!*, which were shot by photographers, the rest were made by film directors. In the majority of cases, they starred actresses (all women, except for the two-part short film directed by Joe Wright starring Brad Pitt), and in all of the films the main characters embody some of the brand’s values: elegance, determination, sensuality, etc.

| Year | Title | Director | Actors/ actresses | Duration | Link |
|------|---|---------------|----------------------|----------|---|
| 1973 | <i>Whispered</i> | Helmut Newton | Catherine Deneuve | 1' | https://n9.cl/csgfp |
| 1977 | <i>Mystery</i> | Helmut Newton | Catherine Deneuve | 1' | https://n9.cl/qeyar |
| 1979 | <i>The Swimming Pool</i> | Ridley Scott | | 1' | https://n9.cl/pn0dr |
| 1982 | <i>L'invitation au rêve/Le jardin (C)</i> | Ridley Scott | | | https://n9.cl/dqjhp |
| 1986 | <i>Monuments</i> | Ridley Scott | | 35" | |

(continued)

| Year | Title | Director | Actors/ actresses | Duration | Link |
|------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------|--|
| | | | Carole Bouquet | | https://n9.cl/ pop9 |
| 1990 | <i>La star</i> | Ridley Scott | Carole Bouquet | 35'' | https://n9.cl/ 1p30h |
| 1994 | <i>Chanel N° 5: Number5!</i> | Jean-Paul Goude | Carole Bouquet | 40'' | https://n9.cl/ mx9hm |
| 1998 | <i>Le loup</i> | Luc Besson | Estella Warren | 45'' | https://n9.cl/ kke2 |
| 2004 | <i>The Film</i> | Baz Luhmann | Nicole Kidman | 3' | https://n9.cl/ bsu71 |
| 2009 | <i>Train de Nuit</i> | Jean-Pierre Jeunet | Audrey Tatou | 2 | https://n9.cl/ y3n93 |
| 2012 | <i>There You Are</i> | Joe Wright | Brad Pitt | 1' | https://n9.cl/ 7z11 |
| 2012 | <i>Wherever I Go</i> | Joe Wright | Brad Pitt | | https://n9.cl/ wmlqx |
| 2014 | <i>The One That I Want</i> | Baz Luhmann | Gisele Bündchen | 3' | https://n9.cl/ 0m6zs |
| 2016 | <i>You Know Me and You Don't</i> | Johan Renck | Lily-rose Depp | 1' | https://n9.cl/ awj3i |
| 2020 | <i>Dancing on the Moon</i> | Johan Renck | Marion Cotillard | 1' | https://n9.cl/ roz8a |

Own elaboration

In the two fashion films we are going to analyze in somewhat greater detail, we can observe how the story is used by the brand to communicate its intangible appeal and establish a dialogue with its audience.

5 Analysis of the Fashion Films: *The Film* and *the One that I Want*

Before moving on to our specific analysis of the two fashion films, let us recall the three characteristics that Karl Lagerfeld highlighted in order to define the brand, Chanel. From the very beginning, communications from the Chanel fashion house have always been linked to the attributes of Coco Chanel herself. In a video dating from 2013, in which Karl Lagerfeld talked about the brand's founder, the designer summarized the character and attitude of Coco Chanel by citing three attributes:

1. Elegant
2. Modern
3. Extraordinary

These attributes break down into others that characterize the Chanel woman, such as beauty, self- confidence, pragmatism, openness, etc.

5.1 The Film (2004)

5.1.1 Synopsis

The synopsis of the short film is as follows: a famous actress escapes and pursues a brief and passionate romance with a young man who is completely bewitched by this fleeting liaison. The story takes place in Paris, and we recognize some of the scenes from the film, *Moulin Rouge*.

5.1.2 Film Connections

The connections between this fashion film and the musical film, directed by Baz Luhrmann himself that same year, are constant. In addition to using Nicole Kidman (the star of *Moulin Rouge*), Luhrmann also used the services of Craig Armstrong (the creator of the *Moulin Rouge* soundtrack). That is to say, the director consciously sought to create the same ambience as the film.

There are also some narrative connections. In one part, the star declares that she is a dancer (like the main character in *Moulin Rouge*). Throughout the entire mini-film, we can perceive the same sense of antagonism as in *Moulin Rouge*: a woman oppressed by the profession and a series of insincere relationships is liberated through a love affair. In the case of the film, we are dealing with a cabaret dancer who occasionally works as a prostitute under the orders of a pimp; in the case of the fashion film, we have an actress who suggests, in a brief scene, that she is subject to an abusive relationship.

The film alternates voice-overs, through which the main male character tells his story and describes the impression that the main female character has on him, with a series of more narrative passages in which we can hear the main character's voice.

5.1.3 Product Presence

There are two very clear references to the product, one visual and the other audio. The narrator of the short film, the young man with whom the actress conducts a fleeting affair, says at the end of the story that he will never be able to forget "her kisses, her smile, her perfume." Furthermore, one of the final scenes shows Nicole Kidman wearing a low-back dress and a pendant featuring the number 5.

5.1.4 Brand Values

The female star of the short film presents all of the three characteristics that Lagerfeld believed to be linked with the Chanel brand. She is an elegant, modern, and extraordinary woman. She is beautiful, sensual, and self-confident, and she is not

scared of taking the initiative, although she is also aware that she lives in a world made up of rules, which, to a certain extent, restricts her freedom. Both Santine and Coco Chanel, not to mention the star of *The Film*, are women who are passionate and attempt to pursue their dreams. And, above all, they are leading ladies. The male characters are always secondary, and they always play a role in which they adore the woman.

5.2 The One that I Want (2014)

5.2.1 Synopsis

This short film tells the story of a woman who enjoys being alone when she goes surfing on the beach where she owns a magnificent home. Her husband visits the house incognito and leaves her a written message in an envelope. When she returns from surfing, we see our star alongside her daughter, and she is working as a model. She has a concerned expression on her face. At the end of the day, after having read the contents of the envelope (a love letter), she crosses the city in order to meet her husband. She finds him in an elegant pub where the song that accompanies the story is playing: a version of *The One That I Want*, the legendary number from the film *Grease*. The story ends with a kiss between the couple, which we can infer to be a reconciliation.

5.2.2 Film Connections

For this film, Luhrmann used the same director of photography as in *The Film*, having also worked with him on films such as *Australia*. In this case, we can see a more complex photographic approach, given that the fashion film alternates scenes on the sea (the film kicks off with the star actually surfing), with interior scenes at night. In these scenes we can detect a link with the staging of the fashion film of 2004.

Furthermore, although the director did not use Craig Armstrong again, we can also observe a musical connection with *Moulin Rouge*. The theme of the fashion film, which also serves as a kind of voice-over because there is no dialogue, is a version of a legendary love song (the main theme in *Grease*), which is similar to what Luhrmann did in *Moulin Rouge* with the *Elephant Love Medley* (a potpourri of well-known romantic ballads).

5.2.3 Product Presence

The product features in a very similar manner to the first mini-film we analyzed. In this case, the perfume is not mentioned, although the famous number 5 appears on

three occasions. At the beginning of the film, the main character wears a wetsuit with the number 5 on the back. Halfway through the story, the model poses with a pair of earrings bearing the number 5. And at the end of the short film, our character wears a dress that is very similar to the low-back number worn by Nicole Kidman and a pendant that features the number 5.

5.2.4 Brand Values

Luhrmann has declared that, when considering how to produce a remake of the film, he asked himself what aspects had changed about the Chanel women over the previous 10 years, and, based on that idea, he chose the main character. "I chose Gisele Bündchen, a supermodel, mother and a woman who has a very strong love relationship, because I think she reflects the kind of women that Coco Chanel represents today: a woman who can enjoy being on her own, who enjoys motherhood, a brilliant job . . . but in the end, she chooses love. It's what makes her feel self-fulfilled." In the mini-film, Luhrmann underlines this idea with two phrases that appear in the note that the husband leaves for the main character. "I must be true to my heart. You are the only one that I want."

As in the previous film, we can observe the three attributes that Lagerfeld attributes to Coco Chanel and her brand. The main character is an elegant, modern, and extraordinary woman.

We can see an active and athletic woman. Throughout the entire first part of the mini-film, she wears sports clothing, which, according to Luhrmann, is one of Chanel's discoveries. Later on, she wears a series of imposing outfits, which constitutes the Chanel paradox, namely, a woman who is both sensual and pragmatic. We are introduced to a woman who is a mother, and it is interesting to observe the presence of maternity as a value, this being a process that the majority of women experience and which has become more popular today. Our main character balances this maternity with a professional job and a relationship with her partner. All of these elements are presented as key aspects of an individual's happiness.

As in the case of the fashion film of 2014, the main character is a woman who is self-confident and who takes the initiative in her profession and within the realm of love. Compared to the character played by Nicole Kidman, she seems rather more cerebral, less passionate, more mature, and more reflective. We could say that, as a woman, she is more real and more modern. In this respect, we might point out that, while Nicole Kidman's character was based on the character of Santine, Gisele Bündchen's character is based on that of the model herself. This makes the story more real and enhances its capacity to connect with the audience.

6 Conclusions

1. Within the context of an overabundance of information due to the popularity and proliferation of the Internet and the digital media, the symmetrical two-way model, in order to be effective, requires a series of tools that enable organizations or brands to lead the communication.
2. One effective tool consists of storytelling. In effect, stories enable organizations to connect with their target audience, not only at a rational level but also at an emotional level.
3. Fashion brands have used storytelling in an attractive and effective manner: fashion films, a genre that has enabled them to talk about the brands' intangible aspects.
4. Chanel has made a number of fashion films in order to make an impact within the digital media and communicate its intangibles through the language of cinema.
5. Fashion films about its emblematic perfume, Chanel N° 5, have become an effective means of communicating the brand's intangible aspects. If, in addition, as in the case of the two films we have studied, the mini-film is able to reflect the brand's development, it can also serve as a means of communicating with younger audiences, effectively linking the brand's tradition with a more modern appeal.

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Videos

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Interview with Baz Luhrmann: CHANEL N°5 Set: The Film Behind the Film https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yb35OPcpbOM&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=CHANEL Interview with Baz Luhrmann: Chanel n° 5 Set: The casting https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nN_db6cAtUA&feature=emb_logo&ab_channel=CHANEL

The Revival of Heritage Fashion Houses: Brand Identity in the Digital Era



Gemma Muñoz Domínguez  and Paloma Díaz Soloaga 

Abstract Through this research, we seek to know and analyze the way in which four emblematic fashion houses (Courrèges, Patou, Pertegaz, and Schiaparelli) have been rebranded and exposed on social media after decades of inactivity. This research aims to observe the online strategy of these brands in order to know and examine the way in which this heritage communication is engaging with a new audience. It also seeks to understand how this heritage transmission can be expressed effectively without damaging the identity of these brands.

Keywords Brand identity · Heritage · Rebranding · Storytelling · Social media · Engagement

1 Concept of Brand Identity and Brand Image

According to the American Marketing Association, a brand is “that name, term, sign, symbol or design, or that combination of the previous elements, whose purpose is to identify the goods or services of a seller or group of sellers and differentiate them from the competition.” Brand identity can be seen as a reflection of the personality of the brand or product and what people believe about a brand: their thoughts, feelings, expectations (AMA Dictionary). On the other hand, brand image refers to consumer perceptions and encompasses a set of beliefs that consumers have about the brand [1].

Achieving the right brand identity is important because “it involves creating brand salience with customers” [2] and how the brand wants to be identified and perceived by consumers [1]. The identity must help establish a relationship between the brand and the client by generating a value proposition that implies functional, emotional, or self-expressive benefits [3]. It is aspirational, since it describes how

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you would like to be perceived, and, therefore, its management is crucial for the creation of value [3]. The importance of intangible brand assets like brand identity and brand image is undeniable, but there are also other core aspects that can add value to companies like corporate social responsibility, organizational culture, communication, and reputation, which are identified these days as the key for institutions to their success and durability [4].

2 What Do We Mean When We Talk About Brand Heritage?

For Leigh [5], brand heritage refers to the credibility, reliability, and authenticity of brands. Urde, Greyser, and Balmer [6] defines it as “a dimension of a brand’s identity found in its track record, longevity, core values, use of symbols and particularly in an organizational belief that its history is important.” Recently, Pecot and De Barnier have characterized a brand’s legacy as a set of symbols and values that aim to strengthen the brand’s identity by expressing its anchoring to the past and its continuity throughout time [7]. So, a heritage brand is “one with a positioning and a value proposition based on its heritage” [6], but we must distinguish between a heritage brand and a brand with heritage [6] because “to make heritage part of a brand’s value proposition is a strategic decision” [6]. Urde, Greyser, and Balmer show five major elements (Fig. 1) that indicate the heritage quotient that may be present in a brand through their brand stewardship view.

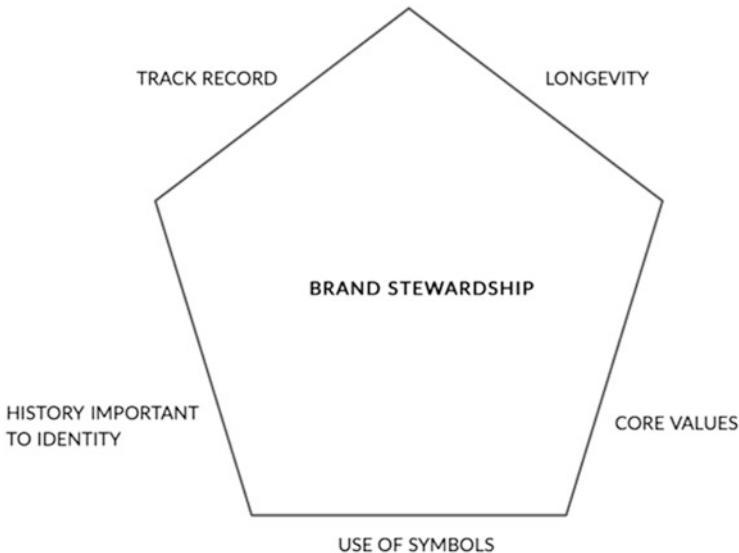


Fig. 1 Elements of brand heritage. Note. Adapted from *Elements of brand heritage in Corporate brands with heritage* by Urde et al. [6]

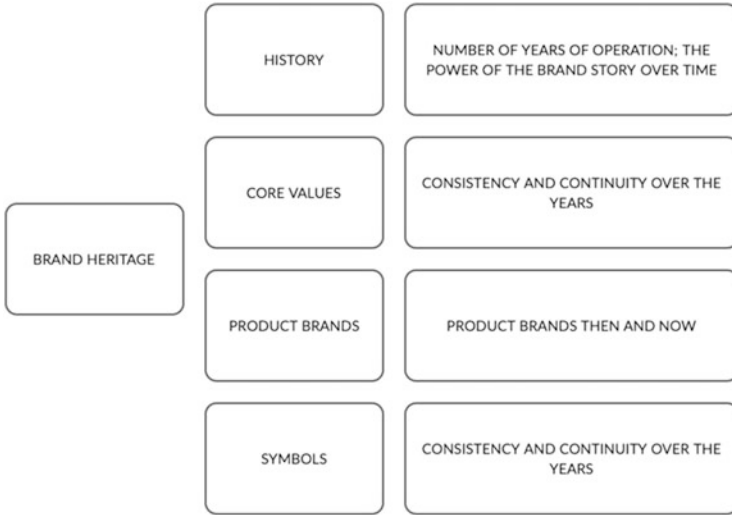


Fig. 2 Proposed operationalization of brand heritage. Note. Adapted from *The proposed operationalisation of brand heritage in Operationalising brand heritage and cultural heritage* by Hakala et al. [10]

Banerjee [8] identified brand history (1), brand image (2), brand expectancy (3), and brand equity (4) as the four pillars that shape brand heritage, facilitate the progression of the brand, and bring an advantage over the competition. Pecot and De Barnier consider longevity and stability as the two dimensions of brand heritage [7]. According to Kapferer and Bastien [9], heritage and authenticity are key drivers for fashion consumers, due to the fact that history aspects are essential for maintaining the symbolic appeal of luxury brands. Hakala, Lätti, and Sandberg [10] consider that operationalizing brand heritage (Fig. 2) “is complicated because product and company brand heritage tend to be intertwined. This is even more accentuated in companies/products with a long history” and “as indicated, in referring to the intangible and tangible past of a company and its products, brand heritage is not only in the past but is also a representation of it” [10].

Brand heritage seeks to create a sense of continuity for consumers by linking the past, present, and future [11], and brands seek to link its past core values, products, and visual symbols into the present [10]. For example, Chanel is a heritage brand with a long history that started in 1910. The brand has a strong DNA that continue over the years, iconic products like the jacket that has been reinvented over the years, and different symbols like the camellia that adds consistency to the brand and has continuity to its tradition. That is what Hakala et al. [10] state, that these “visible” elements (product brands and use of symbols) and the “invisible” elements (core values and history) through consistency and continuity produce and image of quality, enhanced trust, customer loyalty, stronger reputation, and stronger brand equity. Analyzing these perspectives, we consider fashion heritage as the visual, physical, and cognitive legacy of a brand. A legacy that acts as a value and

awareness driver, something that allows brands to achieve a better positioning and engagement than its competitors.

3 Storytelling: The Narrative of Legacy and Tradition

Storytelling is the main narrative technique used to build a heritage [12] and a necessity to familiarize consumers with previous unfamiliar brands [13]. Nowadays, storytelling is one key strategy in digital marketing to interact and engage with the audience, so it needs be in line with the values and behavior of a new generation, not so loyal as the ones they have previously known, while showing the strong DNA of these heritage brands. Video content is a very powerful tool in storytelling, considering that 80% of all luxury sales are influenced in some way by what customers see online [14]. Some successful storytelling examples are *The Tale of Thomas Burberry*, *Once Upon a Time*, directed by Karl Lagerfeld, or the controversial Loewe Oro Collection in 2012. Beauloye [14] also stresses the importance of giving content snacking by fragmenting stories in micro-moments, the adoption of vertical and live videos through mobile devices, the use ephemeral stories, giving voice to the audience as storytellers through social media and UGC, and using big data to create more personalized stories for them.

4 What Is Rebranding? What Is Its Purpose and Its Effects?

According to Muzellec, Doogan, and Lambkin [15], rebranding can be defined as “the practice of building anew a name representative of a differentiated position in the mind frame of stakeholders and a distinctive identity from competitors” and formed by four elements: renaming, redesign, repositioning, and relaunch [15]. According to the annual report on the most valuable and strongest luxury and premium brands, *Luxury and Premium 50 2020*, Gucci keeps the second position in the ranking followed by Louis Vuitton that climbs a position from the previous report. Chanel and Hermes keep the fifth and sixth position they already have in 2019, and Dior climbs from the tenth position to the ninth. Givenchy is the fastest growing brand with an 74% to 2.0-billion-dollar value. Taking this perspective, we can confirm that the most important motive for fashion brands to be rebranded is value. Other main drivers for a brand to be rebranded would be a change in ownership structure, in competitive position, in corporate strategy, or in the external environment [15].

Rebranding is sometimes the best formula to give fashion brands an opportunity for its future survival [16]. We have seen this before in brands with a strong history and heritage like Balenciaga, Burberry, or Loewe. When Hedi Slimane changed

Yves Saint Laurent's iconic logo designed by Cassandre, everybody thought it was a sacrilege [17], as well as the new logo of Celine without the *É* that led Phoebe Philo fans to wear T-shirts with the quote "Bring back Philo: 2008–2018" or "Respect the *É*: 2008–2018" [18]. People were so shocked about the rebranding made by Hedi Slimane that some Instagram profiles emerged claiming Phoebe Philo and the old Celine style back: @bringbackphilo [18], @oldceline, @oldcelinemarket, or @oldcelinearchive.

When a new creative director is hired by a fashion house, the style of the brand and the overall look change too. In 2001, Christopher Bailey turned Burberry from a heritage rainwear brand into a luxury fashion brand. Bailey created a new identity and introduced the digital transformation into the brand that resulted in a strong engaging experience not only on social media but through all its channels [19]. Other heritage fashion brands have also experimented a rebranding throughout the years each time a creative director substitutes another like Loewe. From Narciso Rodríguez to Jonathan Anderson, the brand has undergone a significant evolution in its visual identity and also in its collections, now more minimalistic than the ones of Jose Enrique Oña Selfa or Stuart Vevers. Customers can also see this progression in its logo, the anagram, in advertising, the perfume collections, in iconic pieces like the Amazona or the Flamenco bag, its architectural style in stores, and in its genderless collections. Balenciaga is also leading a change in fashion by presenting four gender-inclusive ready-to-wear collections a year, an annual haute couture collection, and a digital format to attend [20]. Gucci has also experienced a major change in knowledge, attitudes, structures, and practices surrounding corporate social responsibility issues [21].

Dion and Mazzalovo [22] explore strategies to revive what they call "sleeping beauty" brands, those that are no longer active on the market but maintain a brand equity that managers can revive by rearticulating the brand's heritage. These authors also identified three branding strategies to bring these brands back to the market: brand revitalization (focused on the present), brand copying (focused on the past), and retrobranding (relaunching a brand by associating it with the past). According to the elements of brand heritage we talked about before, we take the concept of "vicious nostalgia" coined by Merchant and Rose [23] to this research not only as an effect of brand heritage but also as a driver of engagement. Consumers perceive brands with heritage as more reliable, credible, and authentic [11, 24]. Brand heritage is a strategic value that provides a unique basis for superior brand performance [10]. Recent research has shown that heritage brands, by offering a value proposition, positively influence overall brand assessment and consumer attitudes and behaviors [11, 23–25]. For Rose et al. [25], brand heritage positively impacts purchase intention, inspires positive feelings toward the brand, and engenders trust, which facilitates brand attachment and commitment [25].

5 Methodology

This investigation aims to fulfill a research gap in fashion studies by elaborating an academic approach to fashion heritage brands that have been recently relaunched after decades of inactivity. Due to the lack of academic literature on the topic, we have analyzed the heritage brands as a contemporary phenomenon. The methodology deepens on the communication strategies they have used analyzing the elements of the operationalization brand heritage model proposed by Hakala, Lätti, and Sandberg [10] and adopting the branding strategies identified by Dion and Mazzalovo [22] through biography, media publications, their websites, and social media profiles as primary sources of investigation. Discourse analysis of these communication strategies has proven to be an optimal research method to analyze these heritage brands and their new context. Therefore, the aspects we have examined are:

- The construction the of the myth through concrete biography.
- The awakening of the brands and their digital transformation.

We have chosen four successful and renowned twentieth-century fashion brands that have been relaunched to regain their value after years or even decades of inactivity. Due to their legacy, the rebranding they have undergone during the last years, and the good acceptance this rebranding has had among its audience, we have examined Courrèges, Patou, Pertegaz, and Schiaparelli. By observing the aspects we have mentioned before during December 2020, we aim to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Brands heritage must combine old and new values to attract followers.

RQ2: Hashtags seems to be a specific tool to create and reinforce engagement.

RQ3: The use of storytelling can create narrative values to strength brand value and spread brand awareness.

5.1 *The Construction the of the Myth Through Concrete Biography*

Courrèges is the eponymous brand of André Courrèges founded in 1961. His minimalist style influenced by modernism and futurism made his mark in fashion through geometric shapes and new materials like vinyl or PVC. This style and his functional vision of clothing have led him to be compared with Le Corbusier in architectural terms. The “Fille de lune” collection in 1964 unveiled a look with PVC dresses, white sunglasses, and futurist footwear that revolutionized fashion and liberated women. The next year, André Courrèges showed his first haute couture collection and introduced the miniskirt. From 1967, Courrèges made a division among his lines: prototype (made to measure), couture future (luxury prêt-à-porter),

and hyperbole (sport line). He also introduced men's collections in 1973 and diversified the brand's production into perfumery, leather accessories, watches, furniture, luggage, and sports equipment. Regarding the financial aspects of the brand, back in 1965 part of the company was sold to L'Oréal, and in 1983 the Japanese group Itokin bought 65% of Courrèges shares from L'Oréal. In that decade, the designer moved away from the world of clothing to explore new areas. The firm continued and even collaborated with designers such as Jean-Charles de Castelbajac in the early 1990s. Thanks to the loyalty of the Japanese market, where the firm even had some of its 80 licenses, Courrèges was able to overcome the general poor sales figures that plagued the brand in the 1990s, but the brand was sold again to two advertising executives, Jacques Bungert and Frédéric Torloting, in 2011. Artémis entered the capital of Courrèges in 2015 and acquired full ownership in September 2018. From September 2020, Nicolas Di Felice is the new creative designer of Courrèges.

Jean Patou was a visionary designer who founded his own fashion house in 1914. He liberated the female figure designing dresses without corsets, shortening skirts length, launching a sports line to be worn in town and a monogram with his initials. Suzanne Lenglen, the tennis champion, was the muse that inspired him to design long dresses with low necklines on the back, pleated skirts to wear in the city, and jersey sets with geometric patterns. Jean Patou also created "Joy," the most expensive perfume in the world, to relaunch his brand after the 1929 crisis. After his passing in 1936, his sister and brother-in-law took over the reins of the house. Other designers like Marc Bohan, Karl Lagerfeld, and Michael Goma have taken over the artistic direction. Even Jean Paul Gaultier made his debut there, followed by Angelo Tarlazzi and Christian Lacroix. Jean Patou house ceased its activity in 1987, even though "Joy" kept the name alive. Procter & Gamble group marketed the perfume from 2001 to 2011, before the English group Designer Parfums took it over. Jean Patou was acquired in 2018 by the LVMH group, which signed a strategic agreement with Designer Parfums to take over the clothing division. Sidney Toledano appointed Guillaume Henry to the artistic direction, entrusting him with the task of relaunching his women's ready-to-wear lines.

Manuel Pertegaz is an iconic Spanish fashion house founded in 1942 by the eponymous designer. His style can be classified as elegant and sophisticated. Manuel Pertegaz conceived women as a fragile yet majestic swans. He knew how to create concepts capable of transcending the lines of time and turning a garment into a timeless. Throughout his career, he remained faithful to his style, introducing the changes demanded by the society of the time and adapting it to new tastes and also to the incursion of ready-to-wear fashion. In the 1950s he began to be known internationally, his clothes were exported to England, Switzerland, and Canada, and his collections were presented in Cairo, Venice, London, Santiago de Chile, and Copenhagen. After attending New York World's Fair in 1964, he creates his first perfume "Diagonal," in 1965. Manuel Pertegaz has received numerous awards and recognitions throughout his career. He also developed a menswear collection that was first introduced in 1997. In 2004, he received one of the most important orders of his career, designing the wedding dress for the future Queen Leticia. After the designer's

death in 2014, the brand is now owned by Jealfer and has been relaunched in 2018 with Jorge Vázquez as creative designer.

Schiaparelli is fashion house founded by Elsa Schiaparelli in 1927. Her designs have always been characterized by a creativity and avant-gardism that was infused by the close contact she had with artists of the time such as Jean Cocteau or Salvador Dalí. This constant desire to innovate gave rise to the trouser skirt and the use of zips as a decorative and functional element. Her designs were considered daring and surprising for the canons of her time, including extravagant elements such as shoe-shaped hats or lobster prints, derived from her surrealist influence and Dali's dreamlike iconography. She also created novelty-shaped perfumes and accessories with great success. The "shocking pink" color became a hallmark that remains to this day, as do the legends "lobster dress" and "tears dress." The brand, now owned by TOD'S CEO Diego Della Valle, has been inactive for decades until 2012, when it was relaunched. Since then, three creative directors have been appointed to Schiaparelli, being Daniel Roseberry the last one. He has revisited all the symbols that Elsa Schiaparelli created inspired by surrealism and Dadaism: the shoe hat, the lobster dress, or the skeleton dress. The "shocking pink" color used by Schiaparelli has also been rescued to be part of this new identity of the house as well as her original signature.

5.2 The Awakening of the Brands and Their Digital Transformation

Taking a look at Courrèges website, we can find a very minimalistic and neutral look influenced by the Op Art movement of the "Swinging Sixties" and a video presentation of the Rééditions collection based on iconic pieces of the fashion house, updated and relaunched for a new generation of customers. The classic vinyl jacket has a special section in the homepage that shows all the color options available. The remodeled flagship store of 40 rue François I^{er}, Paris, is also part of the storytelling of these new chapter of the brand. Regarding the brand's social media presence, Courrèges has Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter profiles and a YouTube. However, Instagram is the channel they use to communicate with their customers, where the brand has 128,000 followers. The profile was launched in September 2020, and that gave the brand the opportunity to show its legacy in the form of a digital museum. The first posts show the iconic pieces of the brand by color blocks and addressing the season and year of each piece. They also introduce André and Coqueline Courrèges, the identity and core values of the brand, the reworked AC logo, and the new creative designer, Nicolas Di Felice. Most of these publications have the distinctive hashtags #courreges and #courregesreeditions. Other social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook do not show a representative number of followers, perhaps in part due to the lack of content that is published regularly on Instagram.

Regarding Patou, heritage is something that the brand is handling strategically. Through its website, we can see an old picture of the atelier, while they clearly explain the transition from Jean Patou to Patou through the vision Guillaume Henry has of it. The motto of “The Story of the Maison” says “a young house with a century-old history,” which shows their intention to be known as the new generation of the iconic fashion house. In the “Maison” section, dedicated to the history and legacy of Jean Patou, they show his role as pioneer in sportswear fashion, some of the biggest names that have carried the brand’s creative direction after his death in 1936, the relaunch of the brand, and “The Patou Way,” an approach to a more sustainable, fair, and desirable fashion. Patou wants to increase a positive impact each year by reducing the environmental footprint of their activities, establishing a unique relationship with their manufacturers, offering an eco-friendly packaging in hangers, paper, bags, ribbons and boxes, adding a policy of transparency and traceability by using QR codes for customers to know who is making Patou clothes from the sketch to the manufacturing, including eco-friendly materials in their collections, and introducing an eco-friendly program in the headquarters and future sales areas. The brand is also present in social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube. The content is practically the same in all these platforms, but they put a special emphasis in their Instagram profile by using the hashtags #lesfillesenpatou and #thepatouway to connect with their new audience. Patou launched its Instagram profile in September 2018, reaching 51,100 followers in 2020, and Patou alternates content of this new chapter of the house with posts where they explain historical aspects like the JP signature monogram that they keep on using. Facebook and Twitter show similar content, but the number of followers and the periodicity of the publications decrease.

Pertega website dedicates a section to explain the story of Manuel Pertegaz and another to show the history of the fashion house decade by decade with a little review of the most important landmarks by year. Pertegaz social media activity is shown through its Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter profiles. Unlike the cases we have seen above, Facebook and Twitter register almost daily publication, even though the content is sometimes similar to the one they publish on Instagram but more focused on celebrities wearing Pertegaz. Instagram is again the platform that shows more activity with 20,700 followers since they started publishing in December 2014. The content combines past and present, old quotes by Manuel Pertegaz, black and white pictures, the 2017 exhibition, new designs, the last fall-winter collection designed by Jorge Vázquez, the revisited logo, and clothes labels with a pink background. The name Pertegaz is also embroidered in outerwear pieces like coats, and all the collection has a small label under Pertegaz label that shows that the product has been “Made in Spain.” The initial P, part of Manuel Pertegaz signature, is also used as part of the brand identity. The brand has a different Instagram profile for its menswear collection, first launched in 1997.

Elsa Schiaparelli’s biography is present in the website of the house as a way to tell the history and heritage of Elsa Schiaparelli under the section “21, Place Vendôme,” where the customer can find “The Story of the House,” “The Life of Elsa,” and “Schiaparelli & The Artists.” The news section shows the latest information about

the house and the celebrities that have worn Schiaparelli recently on red carpets and editorials, while “Ready-To-Wear” and “Haute Couture” show the last collections they have presented. One of Schiaparelli’s most famous symbols, the padlock, invites customers to sign in their accounts, and, through the handbag icon, they can add items to shop. Schiaparelli shows its social media presence through Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. In December 2020, when we have made this analysis, the Facebook page hasn’t registered any activity since July 2019 and its Twitter account since July 2016. The Instagram profile has 572,000 followers, and they publish new content almost daily since they opened the account in April 2019. The brand combines content explaining some revisited pieces of the new collection, the making off of the haute couture pieces, the ready-to-wear collection, the jewelry collection, videos, old pictures explained, and celebrities wearing Schiaparelli. All the pictures with historical content are tagged under the #espritschiap hashtag where customers can learn and see the transition and symbolism in clothes and jewels.

6 Findings

After analyzing the brand heritage elements of these brands and their digital transition, we can confirm they have undergone a retrobranding process. The brands have been relaunched by associating them to their past and harmonizing the past with the present. In this type of strategy, brand heritage is at the heart of the brand’s value proposition as we have seen, and Instagram is the platform they use to communicate it and interact with its followers. Given the dynamism that characterizes this social network, we have decided to update the findings in July 2021 (Fig. 3) to see its evolution over these months in comparison with the original ones, which are detailed below. Pertegaz was the first one that launched an Instagram profile in 2014, followed by Patou in 2018, Schiaparelli in 2019, and Courrèges in 2020.

When analyzing the number of followers, we must consider that Pertegaz has focused on the Spanish market in the last decades, and the number of followers is not as prominent as in Schiaparelli or Courrèges. Even though Patou also has less followers than Courrèges and Schiaparelli, the brand shows more activity on Instagram together with Schiaparelli than Courrèges and Pertegaz.

During December 2020, Courrèges and Pertegaz content is related to their latest collection, while Schiaparelli and Patou use to combine it, showing the current collection, celebrities wearing its clothes, videos of the making off of the collections, revisited pieces, and historical pictures. Examining in detail the type of content these brands post, we have found that Courrèges has 81 posts where they mention explicitly the legacy of the house. Patou has just 3 posts where they talk directly about its past, while Pertegaz has 46 posts and Schiaparelli has 20 posts. Each one has also their own hashtags apart from the name of brand itself. Courrèges uses #courreges and #courregesreeditions, Patou tags most of its publications with #esfillesenpatou or #thepatouway, Pertegaz uses #pertegaz and #pertegazarchives

Heritage Brands

| | COURRÈGES | PATOU | PERTEGAZ | SCHIAPARELLI |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| INSTAGRAM FOLLOWERS | 158K | 81.1K | 29.2K | 839K |
| FIRST POST | SEPT 10TH, 2020 | SEPT 24TH, 2018 | DEC 3RD, 2014 | APR 23RD, 2019 |
| HERITAGE POSTS | 85 POSTS | 5 POSTS | 87 POSTS | 30 POSTS |
| HASHTAG #1 | #COURREGES (40.5K POSTS) | #LESFILLESPATOU (561 POSTS) | #PERTEGAZ (12.8K POSTS) | #SCHIAPARELLI (81.21K POSTS) |
| HASHTAG #2 | #COURREGESREEDITONS (60 POSTS) | #THEPATOUWAY (22 POSTS) | #PERTEGAZARCHIVES (79 POSTS) | #ESPRITSCHIAP (41 POSTS) |

Fig. 3 Findings on Instagram. Note: The findings on Instagram have been updated in July 2021

for those posts that show his legacy, and Schiaparelli has #schiaparelli and #espritschiap in those posts that explain a revisited piece or an old picture of Elsa Schiaparelli, her atelier, or the store.

Analyzing the reach of these hashtags, #courreges has been tagged in 37,600 posts and #courregesreeditons in 40, #lesfillespatou in 227 and #thepatouway in 16, #pertegaaz hashtag has been written in 11,400 posts and #pertegaazarchives in 75 post, while #schiaparelli has been tagged in 69,100 publications and #espritschiap in 39. Courrèges doesn't have a specific hashtag to name his legacy; #courregesreeditons mentions a collection of revisited pieces but not the legacy itself. Patou uses #lesfillespatou to engage with a new generation of followers and #thepatouway to show their followers the way they produce, the sustainable approaches they are making, and the type of fabrics they are using. Although they don't have a hashtag to name their legacy, Patou is combining past and present by remarking what they are doing now and showing an avant-garde vision of how heritage brands should move forward by connecting with a new generation of customers through CSR practices and an updated digital discourse. Pertegaz do have a hashtag for naming his historical past with #pertegaazarchives that shows a better performance than the one used by Schiaparelli, #espritschiap.

In previous investigations, we provided a definition of hashtag, confirmed its importance encouraging customer's participation by using it when commenting or creating new content, and also stressed the necessity of using a concrete semantic to achieve a better brand identification and social media reach [26]. Through this research, we can add new aspects and widen that definition by adding that branded hashtags are those words or set of words preceded by a hash symbol and created

specifically by brands to reinforce a certain type of content and to their followers to interact and engage with it.

7 Conclusions

This article provides a new perspective for heritage fashion brands on how the combination past storytelling into the present can help them to be reintroduced and engage with potential and existent customers through memorabilia and digital communication strategies. The using of hashtags has also proven to be an excellent tool to highlight a specific type of content, differentiate it, and stimulate followers in engaging practices.

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Luxury Fashion Storytelling: Branding Performance on Instagram



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Abstract This paper addresses the state of art regarding digital fashion communication and branding performance, describing Instagram as a storytelling tool. For some years now, luxury fashion brands have experienced the need to develop a new way of communicating their identity due to two key factors: the emergence of new consumers on the luxury scene and the emergence of online channels. In this context, storytelling appears as an effective strategy since it is a universal technique capable of transmitting the same message to different audiences, facilitates the participation of producers, and performs well in the digital context. Among the new online communication channels, Instagram is better in responding to these new needs. It is an eminently visual channel, so it is natural for the luxury fashion sector as a universal language. This paper seeks to shed some light on fashion communication on Instagram based on storytelling strategy and explore the best practices among luxury fashion brands. In our conclusions, we formulate a decalogue of good practices that can guide developing communication for fashion brands through a storytelling strategy.

Keywords Luxury fashion industry · Communication · Instagram · Branding · Storytelling

1 Introduction

For some years now, luxury fashion brands (from now LFB) have been experiencing the need to develop a new way of communicating their identity due to two key factors: the emergence of new consumers on the luxury scene and the emergence of online channels. In this context, storytelling appears as an effective strategy since it is a universal technique capable of transmitting the same message to different

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audiences, facilitates the participation of producers, and performs well in the digital context.

Among the new online communication channels, Instagram is better in responding to these new needs. It is an eminently visual channel, so it is natural for the luxury fashion sector, and everyone can understand this universal language [1]. Likewise, its different functionalities make it a storytelling tool for brands and allow users to interact with them.

This paper seeks to shed some light on fashion communication on Instagram based on storytelling strategy and explore the best practices among luxury fashion brands. To this end, we have researched digital communication in luxury fashion brands on Instagram.

2 Storytelling: Branding in Action

Storytelling as a strategy addresses the core story, including the brand identity, and narration, telling a story while it continues to be built [2].

According to Herskovitz and Crystals [3], storytelling is an effective branding tool because a story can integrate all company's behaviors and consumer's experiences.

Today's consumers choose to enter the universe of those brands that provide meaning, a characteristic of the human being that constantly seeks stories and experiences that satisfy their desire to give meaning to life. Through storytelling, man creates meanings and makes sense of the world [4–6, 2]. Simultaneously, companies should communicate who they are and what their values are. "These two aspects of society and the current market present a natural link between branding and storytelling" [2].

Furthermore, Woodside et al. [6] affirm that the stories allow us to know consumer psychology in greater depth. For Gottschall [7], the human being is a storytelling creature since "the story touches almost every aspect of his life." Simultaneously, storytelling finds new technologies an ideal setting for creation and dissemination through users' interaction with the brand [8].

2.1 Storytelling in the Digital Era

What characterizes the communication process today is the multitude of platforms and channels through which brands can meet customers. For the transmission to be effective, integration is necessary, "omnichannel seeks to eliminate, until making them invisible to everyone, the relationship differences in the channels" [9]. It is about getting the customer involved in the brand's universe, telling the same story consistently through all channels. Jenkins [10] baptized this phenomenon as "transmedia storytelling," which he later defined as "a story developed through

multiple media platforms with the specific and valuable contribution of each new message” [11].

One of the main advantages of this phenomenon is that it allows one to get to know the customer better and promotes their participation by becoming a brand creator. In this way, the person begins experiencing a sense of proximity and even confident ownership of the brand. Töffler [12] called these users prosumers, a fusion of the producer (producer) and consumer (consumer) that, appropriating their favorite characters, expands their narrative universe. Some authors avoided using terms such as reader, spectators, and player and coined the multiple concept VUP (viewer-user-player) [13].

Complying with Ind, “this change presents branding as a social and organic process that involves both insiders and outsiders” [14]. In this new context, the brand becomes a transmedia cultural entity that is manifested and structured in the media through interactivity, collective identity, and daily experience [15].

3 Digital Storytelling and Fashion Brands

The success of this strategy is due to the effective response to the needs of the fashion market: an overabundance of messages, the need to stand out in a highly competitive market, to improve relations with the public, and above all, to offer experiences to deal with the boredom of users who go in search of experiences and adventures. According to Brieger, users look for meanings that catch their heart more than their brain, “they buy stories about products” [13].

Traditionally, fashion brands’ advertising channels have been fashion and lifestyle magazines, film, television, and outdoor media. For more than a decade, digital media and content sharing platforms such as YouTube and other social networks have joined. According to the study of the Zenith agency’s advertising investment, in 2021, the Internet is expected to occupy 52% of global investment. During the last quarter of 2020, spending on social media advertising grew 56.4%, mainly in video format [16]. The rise of online video is due to the current ability to generate high-quality content, improved mobile viewing experience, and fast connectivity. Brand content has become a critical tool for managing fashion brands [17, 18].

Within brand content, the concept of advertainment refers to deliver content for entertainment. Ramos-Serrano and Pineda [19] affirm that advertainment’s mission is to share brand values with the public attractively and entertainingly. In this way, brands use the formats of the entertainment industries to create their content.

In the fashion sector, we find fashion films. This specific format has been developed mainly in the field of fashion brands. Fashion films generate emotional connections through the empathy that results from the viewer’s immersion in the brands’ imaginary, as occurs in films [20].

Sometimes fashion brands hire cinematographers from the cinema industry to do this content rather than industry professionals and well-known actors and music stars to play role characters. For Del Pino, Castelló, and Ramos [21] the fashion film is “a

discipline integrated into all forms of communication” and that takes advantage of the power of stories to generate an “emotional thread” with the brand in the consumer. Recently, with the emergence of social networks, the brand has lost its absolute dominance in favor of its users, who have become content generators [22]. Recipients have gone from being passive audiences to active subjects who decide and modify the message’s content and form, becoming its creators.

In this context, it does not make much sense today to speak of communication in the standard terms of a sender sending a message to a receiver through a channel [23]. Today communication is circular and endless. According to Núñez:

Any message is much more organic, liquid, open and deformable than before, and the wall between senders and receivers has collapsed, softening the differences between their roles. [24]

In this age of the Internet and globalization, a common framework shared by all cultures is necessary. Consumers become creative story builders who do not register the world but create it by mixing cultural and individual expectations [25]. As the pioneer in management, Mary Parker Follett observed, “the essential characteristic of common thinking is not that it remains common, but that it has been produced in common” [14].

3.1 Fashion Storytelling on Instagram

As Alonso said [26], Instagram is the most puissant visual social network and a perfect communication tool for the fashion industry. According to a study conducted by Digimind in 2018, 93% of consumer engagement with luxury brands happens on Instagram [27]. In addition, according to Tennille Kopiasz, Senior Vice President of Marketing for Christian Dior perfumes, Instagram is the ideal platform for brands to develop the story:

The best way for luxury brands to inspire consumers has always been through storytelling. As Instagram is a visual storytelling platform, it is a relationship that fits naturally.¹

Maman Larraufie and Kourdoughli [28] also defend storytelling as a master strategy for fashion brands communicating in the online world. This technique has become a communication strategy for luxury brands that want to establish close relationships with their customers through the network [29]. Similarly, Mancuso and Stuth [30] propose Instagram as an exceptional platform for narratives based on images.

¹Instagram Business, 2018: <https://business.instagram.com/>

4 Luxury Fashion Brands Performance on Instagram

To develop efficient communication on Instagram oriented to building a brand story, it is necessary to know the channel's characteristics well and produce content according to its uniqueness. Otherwise, Instagram would become one more media where the contents produced for traditional media are adapted. This would mean using this service in a unidirectional sense in which the sender presents the information without seeking the receiver's interaction.

One of this research's objectives is to provide a series of recommendations for communicating fashion brands that transcend mere criticism. In the following pages, we will formulate a decalogue of good practices to guide developing communication for fashion brands through a storytelling strategy.

4.1 Methodology

As it is a subject rarely addressed in the academic literature, we have mainly reviewed studies prepared by agencies and consultancy firms to plan the study. The methodology used is based on the benchmarking technique, or comparative evaluation of the best, from analyzing the content of fashion brands' accounts on Instagram that obtained a higher score in Digital Index 2019 [31]. From them, we have obtained the best practices to follow. We show some examples that can serve as inspiration and reference.

4.2 Brand's Performance Analysis

Instagram allows the generation of visual stories, and the luxury fashion brand takes advantage of this potential to connect with its users and introduce them to its universe. One way to involve the user in the brand is by humanizing it. Brands create emotionally engaging content that reflects their personality, shows the team behind, or uses elements such as mascots that personify the brand.

In the account, LFB recreate its visual universe through publications. They establish the scenography, the aesthetic keys of the stage in which the story occurs, and the presented characters. Besides, the multiple tools that Instagram offers make it easy for both the brand and user to publish quality creative content. This ancient relationship between luxury and art takes on particular importance today, as it happens in many of Gucci's posts or some initiatives such "Les Rendezvous littéraires rue Cambon," Chanel's reading club, conducted by its ambassador Charlotte Casiraghi.

Instagram offers more excellent connectivity and more opportunities to build solid and lasting relationships between brands and their customers. Considering the

new generation's characteristics, Jimmy Choo developed a campaign inviting users to participate in a contest to design a shoe for a capsule collection using the hashtag #ChooSketch. More than 3300 persons participate and share their designs. Another example of that is the collaboration between The North Face and Gucci in the Pokemon Go app.

We can say that the LFB accounts on Instagram function as clubs or communities where the ticket price transfers the data itself. Being part of this community allows users to enjoy the runway and other streaming events many times. The LFB are aware of the importance of Instagram when it comes to sharing experiences, which is why they have started to design their events to be "instagramable."

Also, hashtags' excellent use facilitates communities' creation around actions carried out by the brand or movements that it leads. One of contemporary society's characteristics is its ability to connect with social problems to raise awareness about them and contribute to their solution. New activist movements are born to raise awareness about an issue, and social media are the best channels for its transmission. No one longer needs to be the owner of a media outlet; anyone can start a movement through networks and make it go viral. Luxury fashion brands have also wanted to serve as speakers for some of these movements by developing awareness campaigns or even providing solutions. We warned then that both LFB and Instagram are two valuable tools in the development of stories that, on the one hand, make people dream and, on the other, give hope for a better world such as Gucci and Dior campaigns among others, to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most of the brands analyzed coincide in introducing elements of the brand's history, such as images and objects from its archives. It is also common for them to show the creative and artisanal process of the products, introduce the founder or the company's creative director, use their hashtags, promote the relationship with influencers, or stimulate content creation.

4.3 Good Practice Collection

From the analysis, we obtained a series of good work examples. With the review of existing publications, we wanted to compile ten tips or good practices. Our proposal demonstrates that, in practice, fashion brands can make practical and creative use of Instagram to build their brands based on a storytelling strategy.

4.3.1 Visually Recreate the Identity of the Brand

On Instagram, both the bio and the brand's feed are essential to quickly transmit their identity to the user. The content must be of high quality and well selected because, in each element, users must perceive it as a luxury brand, which takes care of the details. In this sense, each publication's aesthetic design must be consistent with the

brand's visual code, through the color palette, use of the logo, the composition of the image, presentation of products, or weight toward a type of content other.

Lacoste—through unique and well-crafted content—demonstrates its commitment to high standards. The brand has also managed to develop a suitable formula to maintain its historical identity and communicate it in an attractive and current way thanks to its connection with sport.

4.3.2 Draw on the Origin and History of the Brand

As stated by Woodcock, narrative director of the Aesop agency, an ancient origin and a true story to tell are two coveted elements today.

Both Urde et al. [32] and Kapferer [18] coincide in defining the brand's heritage as a dimension of its identity, including its milestones, core values, symbolism, age, and history. Heritage should not be confused with history. History is rooted in the past, and legacy shows its relevance and implication both in the present and future [33].

Chanel often publishes content related to both the personal and professional life of its founder. Coco Chanel continues to be an inspiration source for all brand aspects, and this is reflected in its Instagram account.

4.3.3 Show the Workshop Work

Traditionally, the luxury sector has developed a storytelling plot based on craftsmanship, rarity, or uniqueness. Instagram makes it easy to post content about the process and develop a story about the techniques or stages of creation where users can regularly return.

Instagram is a crucial platform for transmitting the beauty of this type of work from careful visual content, with detailed plans and images full of light. Some brands like Chanel decide to tell the public through this platform, which encourages them to continue building their story.

Hermès regularly publishes content on the creation process for both leather goods and its famous silk scarves. In each of these publications, the brand shows this “savoir faire” differently.

4.3.4 Create Stories Around the Product

The client no longer buys products based on tangible values but bases his decision on expressing his ideal personality; that is why content that talks about values or tell a story is always better [34]. These stories could be audiovisual content but also other types of content.

Similarly, users' purpose is not to sell the company's products, but rather, by using their images, they share their love for the brand, and they also communicate

their own ideals. Many LFB create little stories where the product is the protagonist. A good example is the Prada campaign for the Nylon Black collection, where the protagonists are cyborg sheep whose hair, instead of being wool, is nylon.

4.3.5 Develop Collaborations with Artists

On Instagram, this union works very well, especially collaborations with contemporary artists. These can be done through participation in the design of the brand's products. Other times, the brand simply acts as a patron of the artist, who develops his work with clear identification. Brands can also collaborate with artists or music companies by designing their costumes.

Gucci is one of the luxury fashion brands that most collaborates with emerging artists with an aesthetic very close to those of the brand's creative director, Alessandro Michele. Ignasi Monreal and Coco Captain are some examples of this.

4.3.6 Appeal to Emotions

Emotion is the engine of engagement. When a brand shares images that appeal to emotions, it shows that it is more than just a business. For Millar [35], there are four types of emotionally engaging content, fun, functional, beautiful, and inspiring, which must be combined to offer a brand experience, a starting point to engage consumers [36].

An example of emotionally fun action is the joint content creation between Prada, Instagram, and Giphy. Together they launched a series of GIF stickers that were available during Milan Fashion Week. The brand decided to make the presentation through the account of the influencer Lil Miquela (@lilmiquela). The action generated much brand notoriety since many users and media used its stickers during the event mentioned above.

4.3.7 Consider Current Issues and Trends

If before, what was typical of the LFB was to move away from everyday realities to mark their superiority, today, that superiority is transformed into leadership to become aware of certain realities and cause change.

It is also advisable to touch on other current affairs, they may not have so much social significance, but they become an excellent opportunity to start a conversation with users. This kind of content enriches the conversations and humanizes them.

Under the title of "Equilibrium," Gucci has developed a campaign to address the problems of our time, trying to provide concrete solutions. The brand decided to spread it through Instagram with an aesthetic very in line with its image and follow a storytelling strategy.

4.3.8 Choose the Influencers Wisely

Influencers are still key characters for communicating the LFB, but it is essential to propose an appropriate strategy to achieve the objective. According to the L2 study on influencers, in general, people with the least number of followers are the ones who generate the most significant real influence since the relationship is much more accurate and closer. For this reason, although the LFB have usually had great celebrities for their advertising productions, today, it is common for them to also work with other more modest influencers.

They also must consider the coherence of style with the brand. If they broke unity, the brand moves away from its real audience and loses authenticity, which is one of the values most demanded by users.

Gigi Hadid has walked every fashion week and has collaborated on campaigns for various LFB. In 2018 she participated in a Valentino campaign; the post on the brand's account received 25,893 likes than the 682,923 likes on her own Instagram account.

4.3.9 Use Relevant Hashtags

Hashtags work well on Instagram to maximize the impact of a campaign or an influencer and encourage followers to create content.

Despite the potential of good hashtag management, fewer than half of brands with user-generated content still use tags today, missing out on a crucial opportunity.

Chanel has an account dedicated to her beauty products. Users generate their content through the publications they share under the hashtag #welovecoco. This account also serves as a tribute to its founder, Coco Chanel, whose mission was to democratize fashion. Inviting users to share their experience with beauty products—the brand's most affordable product category—is a way to continue and extend the legacy of its creator.

4.3.10 Humanize the Brand

One of the reasons for media success like Instagram is that they promote a two-way conversation with their customers. However, sometimes brands forget that their users want to talk to people and not to impersonal businesses. Therefore, they must show their human side. Users will perceive brands as more human because it has recognizable human traits, such as imagination, persistence, or courage, linked to a clear intention or purpose.

In some cases, the brand's personality can be identified using a real or fictional character that acts as a spokesperson or icon [3]. Some brands choose to show everyday situations in the company in which part of the team appears. However, it is more common to do it through stories. In the case of brands linked to their founder or

creative director, one way to make them more present is to publish images where they appear.

So far, these are some of the best practices that luxury fashion brands can use to build their brand on Instagram using a storytelling strategy. We trust that the good practices that we have presented will serve as support so that luxury fashion brands are also encouraged to build brand stories in a transmedia universe.

5 Considerations

Storytelling is an effective tool for building luxury fashion brands in our global world. The narrative is the oldest tool that we know to transmit wisdom, and in a certain sense, we can say it marks the beginning of civilization because it is through stories that society creates its own culture. That confirms that storytelling is a legitimate form to reach people from diverse cultures. Furthermore, traditionally luxury fashion brands have developed themselves in a narrative scenario creating an ideal universe where their clients are invited to enter.

Engagement data of luxury fashion brands allows us to prove that Instagram is the suitable social media to create tales to attract and involve luxury fashion clients. Visual characteristics fit perfectly with a luxury fashion client's requirements and narrative brand needs in the sector.

However, we have observed that luxury fashion brands have not yet maximized the Instagram storytelling potential. The remaining has an informative and commercial intention using Instagram simply as a product exhibition platform. In the same way, brands have followed the same dominant patterns in the use of resources to create content without taking They take pictures in similar spaces—mostly events and neutral environments—and their characters embrace the same kind of inexpressive archetypes. Similarly, results show that, as social media, Instagram potential has not been fully explored nor for community engagement or to encourage users to participate [37].

We conclude that the analyzed brands lose the potential that Instagram provides to develop the brand story and satisfy current market requirements. To transcend criticism practically and adequately, we present a collection of good practices from observing the leading fashion luxury brands' activity on Instagram.

The study also presents some limitations, such as choosing to analyze only the feed publications; thus, we have evaluated only part of the potential that Instagram offers as a communication tool for LFB. All of this leads us to recognize that, although the research results reflect an objective reality, a broader study would give us a complete view regarding the actual use that luxury fashion brands make of Instagram. Similarly, when analyzing the LFB communication on Instagram from the issuer's perspective, we can only assess a single address's communication. It would also be interesting to know how users perceive this communication. Throughout this work, we have wanted to emphasize the need for customer participation, a fundamental part of a brand's identity. To complete this study would have been good

to develop a complementary one on user reactions to the analyzed publications. For reasons of time—and because it fell outside the specific objectives that we were pursuing with this work—it was not possible to undertake an analysis of this magnitude here, but they suggest future lines of research.

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Fashion Stories in Rome: Place-Making Narratives Within Fashion Branded City Guides



Sandra Biondo

Abstract Studies on urban tourism have broadly considered the importance of travel guides in the construction of the imaginaries associated with cities. These promotional phenomena are fashioned both by urban marketing policies (emanating from local public authorities) and by tourist promoters or entrepreneurs (usually private actors). The aim of this essay is to investigate the way fashion houses narrate and promote cities through the production of tourist guides. The phenomenon is very recent and affects only a small percentage of fashion brands but still a good lens through which to study the involvement of these latter in touristification and aestheticization of urban areas. It highlights the relevance of “fashion branded” place-making narratives considered here as key factors contributing to spillover effects in urban reputation, tourism perception, and brand identity.

Keywords Tourism · Fashion houses · Travel guides · Place-marketing · Communication · Fashion cities · Tourist imaginaries

1 Introduction and Study Methods

Tourism practices and imaginaries are influenced by city boosters which promote the construction of nonexistent “fetish destinations” and fictional/imaginary landscapes [1] though specific mediation tools, such as travel books, brochures, postcards, etc. The study of these tools permits not only to understand the way in which a city is textualized and mapped in different discourses but also to analyze the complex mechanisms through which specific city actors produce the place-making narratives.

As a matter of fact, tourist guides are considered an expression of modern tourism [2]. A great deal of scholarly energy has been devoted to the study of those texts:

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historians tend to consider them as a trace—an evidence—of how urban space has been interpreted in the past [3, pp. 6–26]. Geographers interpret them as “empreintes du tourisme”/“tourism footprints” [4], a litmus test of how the society organizes and presents the territory for outsiders. Anthropologists insist in the role of guides in conveying information, producing local meanings, self-images, representations, and narratives [5, 6].

However, the analysis of the type of actors/city promoters designing and disseminating tourist guides should be further investigated: *Who are they? What interests do they advocate for? How do they participate in the process of place-making narratives? Through what tools?*

Our article is based on a specific research question: *how do fashion houses participate in the design and definition of a tourist destination and, more generally, in the touristification of urban areas? What are the leitmotifs (and the effects) associated with the dissemination of place-making narratives powered by fashion industries?*

Using the case study of a small but remarkable binomial of Rome’s branded travel guides, this paper analyses the way in which fashion houses—through their discourse and narratives—contribute to the city promotion. Even if recent, this phenomenon testifies the key role of fashion brands in the process of creating tourist destinations. Private marketing strategies of cultural and heritage tourism vividly illustrate the influence of fashion brands in determining the manner in which “the essence of place” is tailored and fashioned for tourists costumers.

The study is based on four main research hypotheses that follows a descending order (from the macro-hypotheses to the micro-hypotheses):

- Tourist guides appear to be a privileged product through which fashion houses increase their reputation thanks to specific place-based identity policies. The valorization of cities allows a strengthening of the link between the brand and the city, namely, by creating positives associations between products, places, and urban heritage assets.
- Representations of the city framed by fashion houses are widely shared: the latter create a sort of homogenization of the city/urban landscape(s). This phenomenon generates the development of a common tourist imaginary.
- Fashion houses rely on the notion of “authenticity” to reinforce the global-local nexus within fashion branded city guides.
- The mapping of urban areas highlighted in tourist guides is not representative of the entirety of the city: fashion houses implement selective policies of concealment of specific city districts.

Methodology is based on an in-depth study of travel guide contents through a spatial approach and a lexical method applied to selected textual devices (e.g., fashion tourist guides and digital apps). More precisely, the study refers to the Italian context. The image of contemporary Italy is deeply marked by the fashion industry [7, 8]. The Italian territory is relevant for several reasons: the country seems to have many historical factors of success (e.g., specialization of the expertise and diversified skills, flexibility in terms of implementation, innovation, and creativity). Italy also

appears to be a pioneer in the field of heritagization [9]. Within the Italian context, the perimeter of investigation—namely, the city of Rome—has been chosen according to three main criteria: the city's degree of compliance to the fashion system, the presence of heritage assets, and finally the level of urban attractiveness for tourists.

The first parameter relates to the labelling “fashion city” which has been progressively attributed to some Italian cities (cf. Milan, Rome, and Florence). These cities have historically had an extremely large economic capital for fashion, which has also had an impact on the logistical organization of the city: they systematically host (ed) fairs and events on a global scale (respectively, Milano Fashion Week, Roma Alta Moda, and Pitti Uomo events), capturing the majority of the resources specifically deployed by the fashion houses and hosting the headquarters of these firms in their midst. According to the data research company “The Global Language Monitor” (GLM) in the period between 2010 and 2019, Rome has been the most important fashion city in Italy and is therefore best suited to embody the urban “fashionized” context [10]. The second parameter concerns the heritage dimension: Rome is the only Italian fashion city to have been inserted in the UNESCO's World Heritage List [11]. Moreover, the city is the one that has benefited the most (during the last decade) from heritage preservation initiatives implemented by numerous luxury fashion houses (Valentino, Bulgari, Laura Biagiotti, Diego Della Valle, etc.). The third and last parameter involve tourism: the aim was to select an Italian fashion city considered highly attractive for tourists. According to data from the “Global Destination Cities Index,” the tourist attractiveness of Rome is relevant. Within the European ranking, it is the eighth most visited city in the world, while in the Italian ranking, it is the second one—just after Milan. Unlike this latter, however, in the Roman case there is a clear prevalence of leisure travel over business travel (69% for Milan and 85% for Rome) [12]. With an average of 7.5 million visitors each year, Rome essentially attracts international Anglo-American tourists (26%). The combination of these three assessment criteria allowed us to identify Rome as the most indicated Italian city to analyze the processes of place-making narratives sponsored by fashion houses.

The study is based on a comparative analysis of two fashion branded city guides produced, respectively, in 2015 and 2016 by Fendi and Louis Vuitton. The reasons related to the choice of these two brands are explained in the following paragraph. In order to ensure consistency in the way the information collected has been processed and to ensure comparable results, we have decided to restrict our scope of investigation to two fashion houses belonging to the same group, namely, the French multinational luxury corporation LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton (LVMH). LVMH brands pertain to an ecosystem of fashion maisons, which are independently managed but have similarities in terms of juridical status, business models, and governance. Those SAS (Sociétés par actions) have a reputation since they are automatically associated with luxury and “excellence” by customers [13]. Their business model is very flexible: it relies on an organization essentially based on decentralized operations. Each maison has its own artistic and executive direction and is autonomous regarding the allocation of resources. However, the market

system of the group is the same: based on an internalization of products distribution and sales, brand's products are ultimately merchandised only within LVMH boutiques [13] favoring a customer-led approach [14]. Even if the most profitable part of their businesses is related to the production and sale of fashion and leather goods, by the 1990s, LVMH fashion houses began to adopt strategies to diversify their business portfolios also by producing tourist-oriented products (e.g., travel books, city applications, brochures, postcards, etc.) and/or services (hotels, restaurants, cultural exhibitions, etc.). Within this article, we decided to identify the tourist-oriented printed and e-products (cf. travel guides) related to the city of Rome, which have been produced by LVMH fashion houses in the last decade (cf. the period between 2010 and 2020). The market analysis related to the different editorial and digital products launched by the latter allowed us to select two main brands, namely, Louis Vuitton and Fendi.

Concerning the examination techniques used to analyze the guides, we considered it useful to mobilize three complementary methods: a quantitative approach, a qualitative approach, and a spatial approach. In the first case we used lexicometry technique toward the corpus analysis for both selected branded touring products (through Hyperbase database). We classified the word types in terms of their frequency. This approach also enables us to highlight not only the main themes of texts (corpus) but also the presence of recurring stereotypes. The results of the analysis are presented in Sect. 2.1. Concerning the qualitative approach, we were particularly interested in the notion of glocalization and the way in which fashion tourist products and narratives—addressed to an international audience—provide hyper-mediatised advices and tips on local addresses supposed to be “secrets and intimates.” Section 2.2, qualitatively analyzes the way in which tour guides expose a particular lifestyle (considered Italian/Roman) by conveying folklore codes of conduct to imitate. Finally, the spatial approach allowed us to create a very precise cartography of central and/or peripheral urban areas sponsored within fashion guides (see paragraph 2.3 “The place to be: aestheticization and concealment of urban areas”). The results obtained can be used as a basis for further scientific comparative urban analysis connected to other fashion cities.

The paper is organized as follows. In the first section, we review the literature on the “fashion cities” to explain the way in which fashion industries actively participate in urban branding policies and in the construction of touring destinations, actively conditioning tourist imaginaries. Then we analyze the modalities adopted by fashion brands to penetrate the tourism market. Finally we examine the promotional strategies of the French multinational luxury corporation LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton (LVMH) within the framework of place-making policies. The research focuses in particular on tourist-oriented devices and products branded by two fashion houses belonging to the LVMH group, namely, Fendi and Louis Vuitton. In the second section, we study tourist and fashion representations of Rome: we discuss how fashion brands perpetuate fictitious and stereotypical glocal urban narratives by processes such as aestheticization, concealment, and commodification of urban areas.

1.1 Fashion Cities and Tourism Imaginaries: Toward Creative-Oriented Forms of Urban Branding Policies

Since the 1980s, with the emergence of a postindustrial economic model, cities have questioned their position and role in the global system. In this context, creativity acquired a significant role: the rethinking of urban policy agendas began to take into account the development of forms of “creative and cultural economy” [15, 16]. Many governments have seized upon the notion of “creativity” (understood here as a resource) to promote urban and culture-lead regeneration policies through strategic actions (e.g., creation of cultural districts, conversion of industrial sites, archistar projects, etc.) aimed at attracting human capital, investors, and tourists [17]. Creativity is considered to be fostered by the cultural and creative industries (CCIs): among these, the fashion industries, key actors of the cultural/creative economy [18], are often taken into account by policy makers in local development strategies that aim to promote cities as new centers of fashion culture [19].

Scholars have analyzed the importance of city branding and place branding processes and the impacts of fashion brands on them [20, 21]. In particular, the contemporary fashion industry seems to have a specific role in shaping cities’ identity and in creating successful associations between product images and places [22]. Scientific researches testify that the fashion industry implements promotional policies to attract tourists and investments through place-based marketing techniques and narratives [23, 24]. City branding policies are the result of a multi-stakeholder effort combining public authorities but also private actors—including fashion brands—within a framework of different social actors’ activities [19]. Despite critics and limitations related to place marketing and branding practices [25], the fashion industry still considers them as powerful instruments to reinforce the brand identity and to ensure extra value to their products: by adopting place-branding strategies, they characterize and differentiate the cities, namely, by highlighting their uniqueness and creativity but also their tourist representation and “mental” image. Besides hosting numerous fashion industries, fashion cities have specific urban characteristics such as the massive presence of infrastructures, commercial and financial services, cultural/leisure/creative entertainments, etc., all assets that can increase the attractiveness of the place for tourists.

A plethora of scientific articles also insist on the ways in which fashion industries affect tourism imaginaries. By sponsoring a certain idea of a city, based on fashion branded narratives and representations, these actors provide urban spaces with new features enabling tourists to eventually experience new practices and activities. Whether through the creation of new spaces of consumption, by “reinventing” an existing place or by shaping tourism imaginaries, fashion industries underpin both the setting of tourist site-specific destinations and the design of “commodified” urban scenarios.

1.2 *Fashion Industries as Cities Boosters: Addressing the Tourist Market Through Products and Services*

By the 1990s, fashion houses began to adopt strategies to diversify their business portfolios in order to be resilient in the case of a downturn affecting a particular market sector but also to further broaden their client base. In this context, tourism—considered as a consumeristic activity—has been regarded by fashion brands as a suitable market in which to invest. The introduction of specific products (travel books, city applications, brochures, postcards, etc.) and/or services (hotels, restaurants, cultural exhibitions, etc.) with the clear purpose of influencing tourist practices/activities/imaginaries clearly reflects this business trend. Within this framework, the implementation of urban branding policies by fashion houses can be understood as a strategy to attract new customers. On the other side, these brands confer an iconic verve to cities and consequently stimulate the touring market. We offer three perspectives on the methods through which fashion companies stimulate the tourism industry, which reflect some details of how brands function as tourist boosters. The first type of method is related to the holding of fashion events. The second one concerns the realization of major architectural projects that became tourist sites. Finally, a third method is specifically related to the sponsorship of material and immaterial devices which aim to promote the city as a tourist place.

Fashion Event Catwalk shows and fashion-related activities are key events in which fashion industries reach buyers and consumers [26, 27]. The geography of these promotional fashion events is concentrated in a limited number of cities (and places) and is organized within a cyclical systematic dynamic. Events are also considered as optimal place-marketing tools because of their attractive potential toward tourists and investors [28]. Fashion events can also have significant impacts in the reorganization of the territory, allowing, for example, the development/renewal of urban equipment and infrastructures.

Archistar Projects From ephemeral installations to monumental architectural projects, estate assets are crucial to the enhancement of fashion brands identities. Often used to symbolize the power of the houses or to reaffirm their exclusivity and authenticity, the strategic choices of constructing or rehabilitating urban/heritage properties are an integral part of the promotional policy of fashion industries. These latter use architecture (and archistars such as Frank Gehry, Rem Koolhaas, or Marco Costanzi) as a way to attract new potential customers and to reaffirm the brand value and image within a highly competitive marketplace. Building constructions are “spectacularized” for different audiences: whether it concerns extravagant sales-oriented boutiques (e.g., Herzog and de Meuron for Prada Aoyama boutique in Tokyo), museum exhibition spaces (e.g., Gucci Garden by Zumthor in Florence), or art foundations (e.g., Fondation Louis Vuitton by Gehry in Paris), fashion houses invest in architecture, enabling the creation of new touring poles of attraction within cities.

Material and Immaterial Touring Devices The phenomenon is recent and affects only a small percentage of fashion brands which explains why research on this topic remains limited. Since the mid-2000s, fashion houses have been investing in tourist-related products (such as city guides, apps, touring websites, etc.). Some brands, such as Dolce and Gabbana, enhance the assets of the city (cf. Palermo) or region (cf. Sicily) through intangible devices such as travel blogs or video reports. Others, like the Maison Valentino, have decided to develop virtual (but geographically connoted) places (as fashion museums) that can be visited online. Lastly, a few fashion brands opted to publish printed tourist guides. A benchmark analysis has allowed us to specifically identify three fashion houses that have been active in this third sector of the market, in the period between 2015 and 2020, namely, Louis Vuitton, Fendi, and Jacquemus. The first two cases will be explored in detail in the next paragraph. The third case, that of brand Jacquemus, is slightly different, but it is worthy of being mentioned since the vocation of the printed product remains the same. After publishing his first book “Marseille Je t’aime” in 2017, Simon Porte Jacquemus, CEO of the maison, launched in 2020 a new photo album called “Images” devoted to the promotion of the city of Marseille and intended for an external audience (tourists and small entrepreneurs).

1.3 The Case of LVMH: An Analysis of Fendi and Louis Vuitton Tourist Guides

By the 1990s, in conjunction with the adoption of strategies to diversify their business portfolios, fashion houses began to rely on merger and acquisition processes to strengthen their financial position. One of the first to encourage concentration on the luxury market was the French (multinational) luxury corporation LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton. The strategy of growth through acquisitions continues to date: in 2021, for example, LVMH completes the acquisition of Tiffany & Co.—an iconic brand—emblem of the global jewelry sector.

Nowadays the group strives to ensure the long-term development of each of its 75 houses, to preserve their identity, heritage, and “savoir-faire.” The group controls around 60 subsidiaries, which are managed independently, under the umbrellas of 6 market-segments: Fashion Group, Wines and Spirits, Perfumes and Cosmetics, Watches and Jewelry, Selective Distribution, and Other Activities. LVMH is particularly active in promoting place-marketing policies. With regard to the three perspectives on the methods through which fashion companies stimulate the tourism industry—explored in the previous paragraph—it is possible to observe how the group invest in activities and services that can attract tourists. The opening in 2014 of the Louis Vuitton Foundation in Paris or the launch in 2011 of the “Journées Particulières” which allow tourists and external visitors to discover fashion ateliers and caves of the houses testify the willingness of the group to open up to a new audience, especially the tourist one.

Concerning the production of material and immaterial touring devices, the mother fashion house of the group, Louis Vuitton, founded in 1854, was a pioneer in the publication of tourist guides. The brand began its venture into city guides in 1998 by spotlighting a limited printed collection centered around European cities. Since then, the brand has been updating the content annually and also has expanded both its selection (with an established catalogue of 30 cities), its geographic scope (adding many non-European cities), and its format (by offering digital versions of the guides). Louis Vuitton investments in this sector are consistent with the history and vocation of the signature: from its origin, thanks to the production of suitcases and travel bags, the brand is claimed to accompany travelers, tourists, and globe-trotters in their adventures. The purpose of the fashion house is to encapsulate in the City Guide the “essence” of the cities. The City Guide dedicated to Rome was presented in 2015: the product comes in three formats (the printed book, the app, or the special limited-edition box) allowing the customer to decide the level of information to be exposed to.

The investment of the Fendi house (created in 1925 and belonging to the LVMH group since 2002) in this market-segment is recent. In 2016, the brand published an exclusive travel guide entitled “Your 7 Ways to Rome” with the purpose to disseminate the knowledge of the city gathered in 100 years of commercial and charitable activities undertaken on the Roman territory. The narrative logic remains the same: the brand accompany tourists through the hidden and magical hotspots of the city allowing them to live an “authentic” Roman experience. On the digital front, in 2019 the brand created a virtual game called #FendiWaystoRome to let players discover and experience every corner of the city of Rome. However, since the business model underlying the Mini Games on WeChat is very different from that of printed city guides, this game has not been taken into consideration in the analysis of this article that instead studies only the paper and virtual guides of the city of Rome.

Besides maps, photos/images, and basic information (such as rates, prices, schedules, etc.), it is possible to identify a recurrence in the style, the narrative, and the structure of both guides. These include the division into thematic topics (such as hotels and restaurants, nightlife, arts and culture, etc.), the constant presence of anecdotes and personalized stories (with experiential feedbacks from influencers/famous personalities), and a curated list of selected places labelled by the fashion brand in addition to a sort of “etiquette booklet” which reviews the habits of Roman inhabitants and suggests “codes of conduct” to adopt.

2 Tourist and Fashion Representations of the Eternal City: Perpetuating Fabulous Narratives of Rome

In the postwar period, the city of Rome—pillar of the Italian cinema industry—underwent a sort of rebirth [29] becoming one of the most desirable and attractive places to visit. In this context, the fashion industry (combined with that of the

cinema) had a great influence in constructing and redesigning a glamorous and artistic image of Rome. In fact, the movie industry and the presence of the Cinecittà studios allowed the acknowledgment of Rome as a glamorous/fashion city. Also, the national recognition of roman fashion couturiers such as Fendi, the Fontana Sisters, Simonetta Colonna di Cesaro, Alberto Fabiani, and afterwards Valentino and Laura Biagiotti further strengthened the legitimacy of the city's label. The presence of Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana (National Chamber of Italian Fashion) on Roman territory has conditioned the institutional reinforcement of the city, while the holding of internationally renowned fashion events like Altaroma have increased its tourist attractiveness. Media culture and the policies of textualization of the city also contributed to support the image of Rome as a fashion capital. During the years of the economic boom (1950–1960), within a highly competitive urban context, Rome managed to obtain the “monopoly rent” [30] and to establish itself as a fashion city by creating an urban brand which differed from its competitors (cf. Milan “city of industry and ready-to-wear” and Florence “hotspot of craftsmanship and high culture”). On the contrary, Rome is seen (and wants to be seen) as the city of Alta Moda (haute couture) and luxurious lifestyle (“dolce vita”). However, Rome's specificity was also determined by pivotal elements such as the presence of pontifical authority—which legitimized a Eurocentric/Christian vision of the world, the imperial historical past—that has allowed Rome to be qualified as the repository of universal history, or the cinema star system, which transformed the city into a “Hollywood” (on the Tiber). All these elements have contributed to reinforce and spread the image of Rome as the eternal city. Eternal both spiritually and historically as well as practically: the city in fact has been eternally captured in the film celluloid by eminent movie directors (e.g., Federico Fellini or Michelangelo Antonioni).

Therefore, the tourist imaginaries inherent to the city of Rome are directly anchored to the notion of eternity. These spatial imaginaries refer to the mental images that confer significance to a place (understood here as a tourist destination) [31]. That fashion has an important impact on tourist locations and on tourism in general has undoubtedly been recognized in literature: the fashion industry acts as a booster for the tourist industry, namely, by encouraging fashion-induced tourism. However, the way in which fashion industries capitalize on preexisting powerful city imaginaries to create and (re)shape tourism imaginaries needs to be further explored: *How do fashion brands participate in the cultural construction/narration of imaginative city spaces? What are the recurring speeches and images that fashion houses upcycle?* This article highlights the additive role of those brands, whose place-making narratives processes are integrated with long-term national narratives, enriching (and sometimes warping) them, but never totally supplanting them. They contribute thus, in fact, to the perpetuation of tourism imaginaries in which the city remains eternally fabulous, safe, and most of all legendary.

Both fashion houses analyzed—Fendi and Louis Vuitton—feature place-based identity policies. In other words, the value of these brands lies partly in their ability to persuade consumers that products (and firms themselves) are infused with the “feel” and the “essence” of the city. As argued by Hauge, labels of origin such as “Fendi ROMA” or LV “made in France” are commonly used as strategic tools in the

fashion industry [20]. However, it would be reductive to consider place-making narratives only as brand-oriented marketing strategies: in fact, fashion has concrete effects on the city assets, as well as on tourist practices. The examples of de-fascistization/requalification of Roman monuments [32] rather than the construction of international tourist poles (e.g., Fondation Louis Vuitton in Paris) demonstrate the importance of fashion houses in the context of urban heritage. The involvement of these latter in touristification and aestheticization of urban areas can be specifically measured and studied through the analysis of fashion branded city guides. Understanding the way the city is narrated by these private actors, identifying the urban portions that are valued rather than excluded, enables to gauge the complex mechanisms that produce the tropes and discourses by which Rome is textualized and transcribed in tourist-oriented maps. Moreover, this type of analysis provides an insight into the substantial differences between the urban branding practices adopted by public authorities and those implemented by fashion houses. In the first case, it is mainly a matter of attracting tourists and investors and, in the second, of persuading particular audiences “to see the city” in specific manners. As a consequence, fashion houses introduce themselves as “insiders,” more precisely as long-time “friends” ready to make the visitor discover the hidden marvels of the city, on a multifaceted exploration including fashion, art, or sophisticated cuisine.

From the analysis of the chosen texts, graphic and linguistic differences emerge. Fendi seems to privilege minimalist drawings and straightforward messages with a strongly descriptive style. Louis Vuitton, on the other hand, shows a selection of artist’s photos in color (and black and white), highlighting the emotional sphere over the argumentative aspect. Except for these divergent elements, the commonalities between the two tour guides are manifold and reiterated: in both cases, city guides focus not only on material aspects such as hotels, restaurants, etc., but also on traditions, culture, emotions, and other sources of stimulus for tourist imageries. Furthermore, in both cases one detects a clear organization of the informative material as well as the occurrence of certain subcategories (e.g., hotels and restaurants, nightlife, arts, and culture, etc.). Similarities can also be seen in the lexical and syntactic aspects: in particular, the predominance of positive adjectives, exclamation statements, or even proper nouns to allow the readers to epitomize and “embody” the place. Moreover, the use of impersonal forms is very common especially for practical texts (advices and suggestions). Finally, regardless of the brand type, both guides appear to have a threefold purpose: (1) provide a strong and a clear understanding of the city (most of the time associated with stereotypes or preconceptions); (2) give the visitor the feeling of enjoying an authentic, local, and folkloric experience; and (3) make a rigorous selection of the areas of the city that must be seen (and where one needs to be seen).

2.1 *Get the Roman Look: Setting the Scene*

One of the most typical associations with Rome is the notion of “eternity”: Rome is considered to be the eternal city mastered by (sacred and profane) love and featured by glamour and luxury. Through the production of guidebooks, fashion houses can provide strong associations and a clear understanding of Rome as a center of fashion, spirituality, love, and dreams. The qualitative analysis carried out revealed that, regardless of the fashion brand, there is an important use of stereotypes and clichés that foster a specific image of the city. Stereotypes contribute to the construction of social representations [33]. To avoid any heuristic issues, we decided to identify stereotypes within the guides by considering as “stereotypes” only those elements qualified as such by the authors. This led to a list of recurring stereotypes: Rome is considered as a historical, green, and fashionable city. Historical because of its abundance of churches and national monuments: an authentic urban museum “en plein air.” Green because of the large number of urban parks and gardens: pine trees, roman villas, and rose gardens are regularly mentioned in the texts. Finally, fashionable because of the large amount of both events and fashion boutiques it hosts. Stereotypes about Roman “look” essentially rely on style and elegance. The city offers ample opportunity for shopping while visiting the historic center: in Rome (as in Milan), the major luxury firms pursue a city cluster pattern. Fashion houses set up in privileged districts, called “quadrilatero della moda” (*fashion quadrilaterals*), are usually located in the heart of the city. The “quadrilaterals of fashion” are so defined because they are bounded by four streets (Piazza di Spagna, Via del Corso, Via della Croce, Via della Vite) that border the fashion district of Rome. These streets have gradually turned into important tourist poles, generating a kind of tourism mainly oriented toward the consumption of places and products considered fashionable.

What lessons can be drawn from this inventory of prototypes? Aside from the focus on vintage boutiques (which are still very marginal in the city’s commercial panorama), these representations of the city are widely shared, as if there was an intercultural *doxa* on Rome. As a matter of fact, one can conclude that place-making narratives processes implemented by fashion brands are integrated with long-term national narratives. Brands enrich (and sometimes warp) them but never totally supplant them. The construction of the tourist scene operated by the fashion houses is also structured through the valorization of determined centers of sociability: the city guidebooks stimulate a tourist imaginary linked to the “dolce vita” a sort of chilly, emotional, genuine, and collective Italian lifestyle. The tourist representation of the city and its people finally refers to the location of strategic urban hubs which are characterized as assets of intense sociability. The many welcoming cafes, piazze, or ville/giardini (coffees, places, or gardens) play an important role within the construction of tourist imaginaries since they allow external visitors to have a unique insight into the roman lifestyle. In fact, these public spaces are conceived and presented as extensions of the inhabitants’ private space: cafes serve, for example, as “topical places to read the newspaper and get informed, but also as ‘chit-chat and

rumors' spaces, where Romans meet their colleagues and friends" (Louis Vuitton, Rome's City Guide, App). These hotspots represent the rediscovery of slowness and are always associated with authentic travel experiences: the tourists are invited to follow the "tempo" of the locals. Having a coffee "in piedi" (cf. standing up) or an aperitivo is not only an occasion to try tactile, olfactory, and tasting experiences but also a way to understand from the inside the habits and customs of Rome's citizens.

2.2 *Local Experience Promo: Reproducing City's Lifestyle*

Branded city guidebooks analysis demonstrates that fashion houses adopt marketing strategies proper of cultural and heritage tourism through the promotion of "authentic" touring experiences. In other words, brands adapt global products to particular circumstances: through micro-marketing techniques they customize local places/urban heritages assets to serve different audiences (namely, international visitors with disparate preferences). This aspect is particularly important because it provides the opportunity to examine the global-local nexus: while the product (tourist guide) is intended for a target of international tourists, the content (images and descriptions) is oriented to the enhancement of micro-local products and services. In this context, the theoretical framework of "glocalization" is helpful to understand the processes and outcomes of urban-heritage/fashion-oriented tourism. We argue that the global and the local are intimately intertwined through a process of marketing "glocalization" implemented by fashion houses which are the ultimate boosters of glocalized tourism. They entirely participate in global popular culture and use printed or digital guides to spread it: as a result, the reader/tourist is guided in an exclusive experience toward the discovery of urban places perceived as intimate and secret but advertised on a global scale.

Also, both travel guides suggest a selection of places and locations which are considered trendy and fashionable in order to build a luxurious and glamorous image of Rome. As a consequence, the city is inserted into a luxury urban ecosystem: five-star hotels, Michelin restaurants, quality spa centers, the tourist circuit is designed to highlight products and services that are not actually used/consumed by locals but which are common in other fashion cities (Paris, New York, Milan, etc.). *How do fashion brands manage to promote "authentic" travel experiences while preserving Rome's luxury status?* The examination of the two analyzed texts has led to the identification of two communication strategies that are used by fashion houses in a complementary way. These are, respectively, (1) the definition of thematic and personalized city touring roadmaps and (2) the sharing of useful tips to enact the roman lifestyle to foster social integration among local's community members. Therefore, fashion brands strengthen tourist imaginaries and are directly involved in the creation of a *modus vivendi* reflecting a specific way of experiencing the city. Not only do they contribute to the understanding of the habits and customs of the inhabitants, but they also anticipate them, to allow tourists to conform to them.

Retracing Customer Journey: Define Thematic and Personalized Roadmaps Both tour guides encourage visitors to explore urban pathways made famous by historical or popular figures: Fendi, for example, gives the reader the opportunity to retrace the life of eminent Roman women (such as Christina of Sweden or Olimpia Pamphilj) through the visit of the palaces where they lived. For its part, Louis Vuitton invites tourists to visit all the urban spots from which the famous film director Pasolini drew inspiration for his movies (cafes, squares, streets, monuments, etc.). Through the definition of thematic and personalized roadmaps, fashion houses manage to personify urban routes providing them with a particular historical and emotional value. As if it were a commercial venture, these brands use the technique of “customer journey map(s)” to illustrate the relationship tourists/customers should have with the city over a period of time. We argue that the place-making narratives from the guides has been specifically conceived by brands for external visitors; as a consequence, they provide insight into the total experience the fashion tourist/customer is supposed to have within the urban context. As an example, we can cite the parts of the guides that concern means of transport: in both cases it is strongly recommended using the “Vespa” scooter, a useful means to avoid Rome’s traffic jam but also an iconic element of Italian cinema which refers to a particular lifestyle. The cult of the Vespa—mythicalised by *Vacanze Romane* produced by William Wyler, as well as *Caro diario* by Nanni Moretti—reinforces the construction of a tourist imaginary personified (or reified) deeply tied to the city of Rome.

Sharing Tips to Bridge the Cultural Gap: Delineate the Etiquette, Galateo, and “Codes of Conduct” Fashion travel guides also aim to enable tourists to have a complete and “glocalized” travel experience. Consequently, a series of practical tips related to codes of behavior and etiquette are explicitly proposed in the texts in order to ensure the integration of visitors within the Roman social context. As “authentic” experiences continue to gather momentum, the contact between tourists and inhabitants is not only praised but also strongly encouraged. To succeed internationally to avoid “fake” travel experiences but also to preserve Rome’s luxury status, fashion brands attempt to break the barriers of culture, language, and set patterns of conduct. Tips and advices are based on real-life daily situations: readers can find out how to communicate with style, how and when to tip, things that should never be done, but, most importantly, how to dress for any occasion. Packed with concrete cases, fashion branded guides particularly insist on the need to stimulate the cultural awareness and, most of all, to bridge the cultural gap.

2.3 *The Place to Be: Aestheticization and Concealment of Urban Areas*

Fashion takes an important role in “spatializing the world”: it selects and hierarchize cities according to their “fashionability.” Fashion houses actively contribute to the spread of place-making narratives and to strength the identity of a given city, adding this latter to the list of desirable places to be in. Brands contribute to strongly mediatize the city, increasing therefore the creative-led value that comes in addition to the historical, cultural, and heritage one. However, the city’s promotion is grounded on highly selective criteria. Indeed, the reasoning, valid for both products and territories, is simple and based on a business approach: the choice of locations represented must be cost-effective or at least must showcase the brand. These operations are based on a process of aestheticization of urban spaces. Brands are intended both to highlight certain parts of the city (such as historical centers) and to enhance the cultural relevance of heritage properties (namely, insisting on monuments subject to patronage initiatives sponsored by the brand, e.g., Trevi Fountains or Palazzo della Civiltà italiana). On the contrary, fashion houses “erase” the poorest districts (e.g., Pietralata, Prenestino, Tuscolana districts, etc.) from the place-making narrative(s) processes: within the framework of these fashion urban branding practices, there are noticeable policies of exclusion of the underprivileged populations. As a consequence, there is a real risk of progressive standardization of Rome’s image and identity which is the main limitation of this kind of urban policies.

In fact, the city’s publicized spaces are almost exclusively restricted to the historical center: narrow and poetic streets, large and friendly squares, iconic historical monuments, and impressive fountains—safe, photogenic, and highly “Instagrammable” locations. The dialectics of inclusion and exclusion is characterized by carefully selected recurrent elements: the aim of which is to convey the idea of fashionable atmospheres and glamorous neighborhoods. All advertised urban places are exclusive and peculiar but ultimately not so disjointed from those of other fashion capitals/metropolises. In fact, to understand Rome as a fashion city, one need to think of it as a “hybrid space constituted through connections with other places” [25, p. 8].

Fashion city branding is not only highly selective but also deliberately exclusionary: branded city guides adopt concrete strategies of concealment of urban areas,—namely, the southeastern part of Rome (between Municipio V and VII). Ironically, a large number of districts belonging to those zone urbanistiche (cf. tiny urban areas that constitute the municipality) have been the setting for great historical movies. Pigneto neighborhood, for example, has been a notable backdrop for neorealist cinema in the postwar period (e.g., “Roma città aperta” by Roberto Rossellini or “Accattone” by Pier Paolo Pasolini). Moreover, the entire district of Don Bosco (equipped with an exclusive museum of cinema) is clearly excluded from the recommended tourist circuits. While the first one is a working-class neighborhood, which has recently experienced gentrification processes [34], the second one has a remarkable cultural value as it hosts the famous Cinecittà studios.

Paradoxically, although (as mentioned in the opening paragraph of the article) the fashion industry and the film industry are closely related and participate in a joint way to the city promotion, some of the key places of Roman cinematography are deliberately not covered by fashion city guides.

The paper suggests three explanatory factors to justify this strategic selection of urban places by brands: the geographical scope, the security discourses, as well as the competitive framework. In the first case, it is mainly a business issue: it's all about meeting the needs of a tourist audience that has little time and a very tight schedule. The offer concentrates all activities in neighboring places so as to ensure a cumulative range of experiences. As a result, the most distant, peripheral, and inaccessible districts are not even addressed in travel guides. In the second case, it is essentially a matter of preserving the homogeneity and coherence of the proposed narrative: Rome is presented as a fashionable, glamorous, wealthy, and above all safe city. Consequently, there is an intentional concealment of certain neighborhoods that combine urban difficulties (e.g., drug dealing, noise pollution, lack of services and infrastructures, needles in the streets, ineffective policing, etc.). Finally, the exclusion of certain Roman suburbs allows to analyze "from the inside" the dynamics of interdistrict competitiveness. In fact, both guides give a great emphasis to the EUR district (located in the south of Rome) and more specifically to the Fendi fashion museum inside the Palazzo della Civiltà italiana. As a matter of fact, the LVMH group, having invested important capitals and funds in the district area, has an economic interest in promoting and enhancing this latter. Considering that the cost of entry to integrate a suburban district into a tourist circuit is very high (due to the slowness of the transportation system and the lack of logistical infrastructures), fashion brands are inclined to value exclusively certain marginal areas which are finally considered as important territorial assets for the development both of city tourism and brand reputation.

3 Conclusion

Through the analysis of the tourist guides produced by selected fashion houses (cf. Fendi and Louis Vuitton), we studied the methods of construction and narration of the Roman territory for the tourist audience. We showed how these modalities are underpinned by preexisting urban imaginaries and linked to a perception of Rome as a glamorous, fashionable, and eternally fabulous city. Brands reinforce these stereotypes and capitalize on territorial assets by producing a standardized narrative. Fashion houses choose to reconnect with the touring storytelling to emphasize their points of view and their connection to the territory, namely, by invoking the notions of "authentic" and "glocal" experience. The representation of the territory through the mediation of branded guides would thus be the product of the willingness to enhance either the brand's place identity or the label "fashion city" that can catalyze the tourist attractiveness of a place.

The analysis also revealed the main commonalities and differences in approach between two important fashion houses belonging to the same group (cf. LVMH). The article illustrates how the same type of text (tourist guide) can produce different narrative forms that contribute significantly to the construction of tourist imagery. The impacts of those urban narratives on the city are manifold: aestheticization, touristification, and commodification of precisely selected urban areas. In conclusion, it can be argued that the processes of place-making narratives conducted by fashion houses are not representative of the urban territory in its wholeness but still contribute to conveying an exclusive image of the latter, reinforcing its tourist potential.

In regard to research limitations, we argue that other comparative studies are necessary to comprehend the geographical scope of the phenomenon (*is it proper to the city of Rome or is it common to all fashion cities?*) as well as the specificity of the actors involved (*are there other creative industries that have adopted the same kind of territorial narratives?*). Further researches are also needed to study the deep underlying factors for which the fashion industries act as tourism entrepreneurs by fostering city-making narratives. Additional investigations would provide insight to the evaluation of the benefits (in terms of financial and economic aspects) associated with this place-making policy.

Our study is essentially framed in the academic debate related to the “place branding” analysis (Robert Govers & Franck Go). The contribution of this article to the field of fashion communication is twofold. The selected case study is useful to depict the convergences between fashion and tourism from an urban perspective but also to analyze, spatially and temporally, the relevance of “fashion branded” place-making narratives considered here as key factors contributing to spillover effects in urban reputation, tourism perception, and brand identity. Moreover, the study offers new insights into the analysis of fashion branded city guides.

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